

*Oral Questions*

I therefore want to ask the minister what action the government intends to take to give due consideration to the concerns of Ontario and Quebec and protect the public interest?

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, the government wants its policy to be balanced. We have the producers who own the resources, Mr. Speaker, and who want to sell them. We also have the general concern of Canadians about two priority areas, namely, protecting the environment and protecting security of supply. The government and its agency look at both aspects.

I believe the laws of the market will achieve a balance between supply and demand, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

**Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. The National Energy Board's decision marks a radical departure from its position a little more than two years ago when it introduced the cost-benefit test. Yesterday, the board scrapped the test, the most important tool it had, to measure public interest of an energy export.

I want to know what the government's position is on this decision, and what is it willing to do to ensure that the public interest is protected?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to an economy that is based on free markets, free enterprise and free entrepreneurship. The result is that the economic situation in our country is improving and that responsible producers who own their resources are able to sell them, while two priorities of Canadians are also protected: the environment and security of supply. That is the thrust of the regulatory agency's policy, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

**Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque):** Mr. Speaker, in submissions to the National Energy Board, this cost benefit analysis was called the most important tool to protect the public interest.

Yesterday's decision to drop this test was made in the context of the government's trade deal with the United States. I want to ask the minister if he will admit that the

free trade agreement is really to blame for the loss of this very important public tool.

[Translation]

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, with or without the Canada—U.S. Free Trade Agreement, this government is committed to an economic system based on the laws of the market, on an economic system that allows us to move our goods. The Liberal Party is committed to reintroducing in Western Canada a national energy policy that was a disaster, both for western provinces and central Canada, and which cost the people of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia billions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, we will not turn the clock back.

[English]

**Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to put my question to the same minister on the same subject. Once we cut through the gobbledegook of yesterday's decision, what we find is that four huge export contracts of natural gas will be permitted to go to the United States at costs which are much lower than the costs that consumers in Canada will have to pay in the future to replace those exports.

In 1988, the NEB itself stated: "Canada's current gas supply is from conventionally producible resources. Over time the nation will become increasingly dependent on higher cost resources".

Will this government finally stand up for Canada's interests, for Canadian consumers, and tell the National Energy Board to defend the public interest as it should be doing?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, NEB officials follow current policies and set prices in accordance with the market. Intervention on the part of the regulatory agency is justified because they have concluded that the market is not operating efficiently and that public interest is not properly served.

[English]

What happened yesterday with the National Energy Board is very good news for people living in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. They do not want this government, pushed by the Liberal party or the NDP, to return to the national energy policy. We think