

Supply

There must be a way in which the public itself can call to account policies, programs and those ministers who are responsible so that there can be an ongoing dialogue. Certainly, there is nothing static about this process of trying to have an environmentally sound approach. There is a great deal we have yet to develop and to learn in this process.

I believe the steps that are incorporated both in Bill C-78 and along with it are great steps forward, ones which are virtually unprecedented both in Canada and even outside our country. We do not hide the fact that neither we nor any other country in the world have all the techniques fully developed for environment, economy integration and policies. We are still at the early days in developing these approaches, but we are sincerely committed to doing as well as can be done and, in some cases, to taking the lead in the situation.

Leadership almost always requires breaking new ground and having the strength and resolve to do it. A second, vitally important element of this reform package is a consistent and predictable program of financial assistance to participants and public reviews that will be required under the process set out in Bill C-78 and, for that matter, any public reviews that may be undertaken under the present regime until Bill C-78 is able to be implemented. This is going to be introduced immediately the funds are approved by Treasury Board. We have learned over the years that whenever financial assistance is provided to review participants, the issues will certainly be more cogently debated and the results achieved much more satisfying to all concerned.

It is not just that we ensure that all necessary points of view are fairly represented in front of this environmental review process. It is that the best information becomes available. That point is sometimes missed. The funding is usually directed as a matter of priority to communities and individuals most directly affected by the proposed development.

This enables them to study and understand the issues thoroughly, and to prepare well considered submissions to the review panels. It minimizes antagonistic rhetoric, and encourages and promotes useful dialogue.

For each public review, the funds for this purpose will be allocated according to strict criteria and on the basis of applications submitted. Allocation decisions will be taken by special committees established for each review

made up of credible individuals largely from outside government to ensure the independence of the process.

Again, this I would say is virtually unprecedented. The only government that I am aware of that has attempted this is The Netherlands. It is the only other country that we know of that has such a public review participant funding program. I think we should not lose sight of the fact that once again we are attempting to break new ground in this very important area.

I hope that this will build partnerships among decision makers and those affected by these decisions. Mr. Speaker, as you can see, even though we know that Bill C-78 is a strong, comprehensive piece of environmental assessment legislation, we are not letting the matter rest there.

Just a few minutes ago, the minister indicated that he certainly welcomes any improvements to the present package of Bill C-78, which members will have a chance to address tomorrow.

The additional initiatives that I have added this afternoon clearly demonstrate to the Canadian people that this government is strongly and irrevocably committed to making all its decisions based on sound environmental criteria and to ensuring that the affected public has a fair, reasonable and open opportunity to ensure that the best decisions are taken.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I listened with amazement to the hon. member's speech, speaking in such laudatory terms of a government that I know he supports, but he must do so with qualms and great nervousness on an issue such as this where the government has clearly failed in its obligations.

I listened in vain for words that might indicate his position and the position of the party of which he is a member, the Conservative Party, on the motion that is before the House.

I thought perhaps he was making a speech on Bill C-78. I know there is a rumour that it may be called by the government for discussion tomorrow. Whether it is or not today we are not discussing Bill C-78. We are discussing a very specific project and we are discussing in fact a very specific motion which states:

That this House urge the Minister of the Environment to revoke the Rafferty-Alameda project licence and use all federal authority to prevent Saskatchewan from proceeding with project construction until