

Oral Questions

The federal government had numerous reports warning of high methane levels at the foord seam. The federal government's own agreement with Curragh Resources and the Bank of Nova Scotia authorizes it to carry out inspections of these mines. The federal government is on the hook by this agreement for up to \$85 million.

How can the minister justify to the taxpayers of Canada, not to mention the families of the 26 dead miners, the failure of his government to carry out inspections to ensure that this mine and the government's investment was secure?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, the logic of the hon. member is that if there are some challenges that have to be inspected by the province that he does not think the province can do, the federal government should take it over. We received a report a couple of months ago from the Economic Council of Canada saying that education needs to be revamped and improved in Canada. Following the member's logic, the federal government should move in and take over all the schools. That is really the logic of what he is saying.

It may be a good idea. Essentially, he is suggesting that we not abide by provincial jurisdiction. This we did. They inspected on a very regular basis and we received monthly certifications that they were doing so.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Of the 2,000 pages of information released today on the Westray mine, there is a document apparently provided to cabinet entitled *Westray Coal Inc., Pictou County Coal Project, Technical Review*. This report stressed serious safety concerns about operating the mine. I will quote the section quoted formerly by a member about the mine ventilation section. In this report it says, and I quote: "does not give one confidence".

The report also mentions inadequate time and inadequate documentation. Again I quote from the report that says: "No attempts have been made to assess pillar stresses, roof response, floor response and the like in the report. The time available and limitations in the documentation preclude such attention to detail".

My question to the Prime Minister is what was the rush on this project? Why could there not be sufficient

time given for the approval to provide attention to detail? That detail might have prevented a tragedy.

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Leader of the New Democratic Party that all of us would have liked to have seen the tragedy prevented, but her chronology is terribly flawed.

First of all this CANMET report was done a number of years before the mine opened. In fact the mine was just beginning commercial production. Between the CANMET report and when the mine opened, there were all sorts of engineering adaptations to make sure it could be safe, to make sure that it could technically comply with all provincial regulations.

This is what the member has to understand. CANMET made some suggestions and they were dealt with in the engineers' drawings and work following the recommendations of CANMET. Also, the CANMET report does not just say, and this is very important, that there is a high danger of methane.

I would ask the House to listen carefully. What the report does is summarize all previous technical reports. Some technical reports, most of them in fact, say there are very low levels of methane. Some say it is moderate. There are a few that express concern. There is a whole spectrum of concern expressed from moderate concern, to very little to some methane. Therefore, the engineers and all of those who put the mine together tried to accommodate that in the years following the CANMET report.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): A supplementary for the Prime Minister. The premier of Nova Scotia had made it quite clear in a number of interviews that he felt "federal bureaucrats were interfering with the process of approval for this mine". According to the minister, that work was done after the CANMET report which I just quoted from.

In these 2,000 pages of documents that have been filed, there is no example of correspondence between officials of government departments or, indeed, between government ministers. I would like to ask the Prime Minister if work was done after this CANMET report, if he can tell this House what information he was privy to that reassured him that these steps had been taken and is that material about to be tabled with this House as well? If not, why did the premier of Nova Scotia feel that it was "government bureaucrats" who were holding this up?