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Questions and Answers

Q & A

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Questions and Answers

WILLIAM KELLY: My name is William Kelly from Columbus, Ohio. What is the position of your government with respect to the Douglas Costle letter which you referred to in January with respect to instituting provisions under Section 115 of the Clean Air Act?

MR. ROBERTS: Our review is that the finding of damage has taken place. It has been accepted by the U.S. government because the U.S. scientists as well as the Canadian scientists working together in groups have established that it is serious and urgent. Since there has been a recognition of it we will be pressing the United States to fulfill its obligations under Section 115 to respond. After I leave you today I am going to Boston where I am speaking to the Sierra Club about these problems and I will be in Washington on Monday to meet with Secretary of the Interior Watt. You can be assured that the kind of concern that you have just touched on is going to form a strong part of our conversation.

BOB TROSSEL, CBS News: Does the Canadian government support the proliferation of nuclear power plants in order to help reduce the amount of coal burning power plants?

MR. ROBERTS: The situation in the United States is clearly a matter for the U.S. government and people to concern itself with. In Canada, particularly in Ontario, we do use nuclear generation for a very significant part of our electricity supply.

We believe we have a very superior process technologically for doing that and we have no intention of abandoning it. We are continuing our research in a variety of nuclear ways, such as long term fusion research. Canada is an energy rich country. We have a variety of alternative sources which look promising. We have a surplus of natural gas. We have the potential for using bio-mass but we are not foreclosing nuclear options, nor are we particularly advocating it.

ROBERT FAY, Cleveland: Four or five year ago I happened to visit Sudbury, Canada and I was amazed that the vegetation was at such a low level. You do speak of promptness in looking at your acid rain problem. Why didn't you attack the INCO Sudbury problem years ago?

MR. ROBERTS: You are quite right. The effect is very dramatic upon arriving at Sudbury. Suddenly the vegetation stopped and you hit bare rock. You could see the smoke stacks and fumes in the distance, and finally you arrived at the town itself. It was such a strong problem they decided to attack it. They built taller stacks and the vegetation returned to Sudbury. It was done with the best will in the world. We then found out in tackling the problem that we had, in fact, added in some ways a much more difficult and graver problem so that the Sudbury emissions were no longer contaminating the local area. Instead they are contaminat-

ing lakes throughout Northern Ontario and Quebec. Ironically, this is one of the dangers we now face as a result of the well-motivated efforts in the past. I would still say that there are problems in the INCO area, or I should say the Sudbury area. It's not just INCO, it's also Falconbridge. We have over the passage of time done research to actually have the province of Ontario impose more rigorous controls. That has been done. We are still studying how we can reduce it further. There were attempts in the past and they turned out to be misguided.

JEFF FRISCHKORN, Painesville Telegraph: You alluded to stack height and the possibility of increasing the distribution of acid rain. According to utilities in the publication *Acid Precipitation*, the Edison Electric Institute referred to stack height regulations this way:

As discussed previously in this paper power plant stack height has not been established as a significant contributor to acid precipitation. The tall stacks may play some role in subsequent acid deposition. The Clean Air Act stack height provides a strong incentive to limit the height of future power plant stacks to good engineering practice. Thus even if one were to assume that excessive stack height contributed to acid precipitation, that contribution should decrease in the future as facilities with shorter stacks were to replace existing units, and they based this on the fact they say that long range transport shows that only a few times a year and for just a few days at a time is transported beyond 150 to 200 miles recognizable.

How do you respond to that?

MR. ROBERTS: First, I refer you to the first report of the Joint Canadian-U.S. working task force. There are actually four or five reports which are summarized in the fifth, I guess, where there is I think clear evidence that tall stacks contribute to the problem. Of course, it depends on what you are putting through the tall stacks. It's a question of what you are putting in to the stack and dispersing more widely as a result.

The second response I would make is that we haven't much time. The studies that we have done in Ontario show our lakes are flipping over now. They have reached a sufficient level of loading and they are at the tipping point. I think the scientists here are aware that if we do not get to the point of reducing emissions within the next five years, basically our lake system in very large areas of Quebec and Ontario will have become dead, for effective purposes. The impact on the salmon streams is probably going to be equally as disastrous. Comments like, "do more research" and "maybe the problem isn't as grave as we think, things are going to get better," miss that sense of urgency which both our governments have accepted and which scientists of both countries have affirmed. It is not only serious, it is urgent. We can't afford to delay.

DON LEHADDEN, Detroit: Do you really have any hope that the Reagan administration will honor the Douglas Costle letter?

MR. ROBERTS: I was going to be frivolous, but I'd better say that

liberal politicians in Canada necessarily must be optimistic. It's hard for us to survive otherwise. I would say that we are clearly concerned. If we were not concerned, if we were not a bit apprehensive, we would not have made this the keystone of discussions with the President and his officials when he visited Ottawa.

The President has affirmed his intention to maintain the commitments which the United States has made to us internationally and to continue on the timetable to negotiate the new international court which we are seeking. The Memorandum of Intent which we signed last August is an international understanding between our two countries.

The President has affirmed his desire to respect his international obligations. That is an international obligation of the United States and I'm not going to prejudge the American President's performance in relation to that. I am certainly not going to say that I don't believe him when he has made that commitment to us. I believe that the President of the United States is a man of integrity and he will fulfill the words he has given to us.

BOB HATHAWAY, Akron: In the context of significant SO₂ reductions already accomplished in this country, could you briefly summarize what Canada has already done excluding Sudbury?

MR. ROBERTS: In terms of reduction emissions, Ontario Hydro has now entered a controlled plan to reduce air emission between 40 and 50 percent.

MR. HATHAWAY: The 40 percent has been accomplished?

MR. ROBERTS: No. The control order has been established to reduce them by between 40 and 50, I think 43 percent is the exact figure, between now and the end of the decade in spite of the increased demands placed on the system.

In terms of our conversion to coal, which is an important factor in the Atlantic provinces, we have accepted and built in the principle as far as that conversion takes place. It will only occur if technology is used to ensure that there is no significant increase in the loadings of sulphur dioxide.

MR. HATHAWAY: You say excluding INCO, but INCO is an originator of one-quarter of the sulphur dioxide emissions in Canada, by far the significant contributor to it.

MR. ROBERTS: We have the Falconbridge situation under control and I expect proposals will be forthcoming. The other significant one is the Miranda site in Quebec.

Thank you very much.