

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In its report last week, the International Joint Commission said that toxic substances were too dangerous to human health to allow continued dumping of even the minutest quantities in the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence.

Does the minister agree with the Joint Commission and will he insist that the parties concerned prohibit altogether the production and disposal in these waters of substances that are so dangerous to the health of Canadians?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Health and Welfare is working on this problem with the Department of the Environment, which has major responsibilities in this area, and with my colleague at Industry, Science and Technology. My department is, of course, monitoring very closely all the implications for the health of Canadians as a result of this problem, and it is taking action accordingly, but always, I repeat, in a spirit of co-operation with the policies of the Department of the Environment. In fact, the Minister of the Environment has said several times in the House that the problem is being given serious consideration and that measures to deal with it are being taken by his department and the Department of National Health and Welfare.

[English]

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister. Given the fact that the Minister of the Environment has done very little in this area, I would suggest to the minister that he involve himself personally.

Let me quote from last week's report of the International Joint Commission on toxic discharges into the Great Lakes. "Are humans in danger now? Are future generations in danger? The answer to both questions is yes". The report then goes on to say that the govern-

ment's current approach to the problem "cannot protect human health".

The commission calls for the elimination of the manufacture, the use, the transport and the disposal of the substances in question. That calls for a program that must include, and I quote again from the report, "a target date".

The question in this instance is: what is the government's target date to begin protecting human health?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I said before that the Department of National Health and Welfare is working very closely with other departments in the way that we apply regulations related to the environment.

Obviously I would disagree that the Minister of the Environment has not given the House and Canadians, periodically, different announcements and measures dealing with the green plan or any other decision by his department to deal with the problem.

I take exception when he says that the Department of National Health and Welfare does not look after the health of Canadians. That is what the Health Protection Branch does. We have different sectors in the department that do that all the time. We continue to do it.

I agree that changes in the environment have given different challenges to the health department and all people dealing with the health of Canadians. It is what we do, what we will continue to do and, I believe progressively, as we do in the environment itself.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

The International Joint Commission said in its report on water quality that in human beings it is the infants who are exposed to toxins, not the parents themselves, who are being damaged.

Surely the minister will admit that when it is the next generation that is being harmed the time for action is now.

Why will the government not take the urgent advice of the IJC and set deadlines now for eliminating the use of all these toxic substances?