

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, June 2, 1972

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

[Translation]

LABOUR, MANPOWER AND IMMIGRATION

Fourth report of Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration—Mr. Portelance.

HEALTH, WELFARE AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Third report of Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs—Mr. Forget.

[Editor's Note: For text of above reports, see today's Votes and Proceedings.]

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[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT ON POSITION TO BE TAKEN BY CANADA AT UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, next week the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment is convening in Stockholm. I would like, briefly, to outline the position which Canada will be taking at this important gathering.

Canadians have already had a large input. We are responsible in large measure for the resolution within the draft Declaration on the Human Environment which states, in effect, that no nation should pollute the environment of its neighbour or contaminate the world's oceans or the atmosphere.

Our proposal met some resistance at the outset. But most U.N. member countries now agree that this principle is fundamental to the development of a body of international law which can deal with pollution on a global scale.

We have a big stake in international arrangements of this kind. As a nation with a vast territory, with the largest continental shelf and one of the longest coastlines in the world, we have much to gain from the enunciation

of a universal good neighbour policy—a global environmental ethic—by the United Nations.

Mr. Stanfield: What about governmental pollution.

Mr. Davis: There are those who argue that international standards are undesirable. We do not agree. We say that nature's laws, themselves, are universal. They are all-embracing. Man breaks them at his peril. He breaks them and succeeding generations are the poorer for his lack of foresight, his lack of sensitivity, his lack of discipline on the biological front.

Biology, as a science, is still in its infancy. But we already know enough about nature to lay down certain tests. These tests involve life itself. We must not kill fish, destroy vegetation or wipe out wildlife. The preservation of a healthy environment for wild living things, in other words, is a prior condition to a high quality of life for us all. These simple biological tests, these simple standards, should not be confined to any one country. They are valid everywhere. They should be applied the world over, not in Canada, or in Canada and the United States, alone.

There will be frequent reference at the Stockholm conference, I expect, to economic growth and the impact which it is likely to have on all living things. I believe we can have both economic growth and a clean environment too. But having both calls for economic statesmanship of the highest order. We have to look ahead—a long way ahead. We have to operate our forest industries and our fisheries on a sustained yield basis. We will have to plan our cities better, arrange for industry to recycle its wastes, use the right kinds of energy, and so on.

There are many facets to the question of environmental control. We will be touching on at least 30 of them at Stockholm. Here are a few commitments which we are prepared to make now: Construct three out of ten of the world's base line stations for determining the quality of the atmosphere; improve the quality of our rivers discharging into the sea; sponsor a world-wide conference on the conservation of the living resources of the sea in Vancouver in February of next year; oppose ocean dumping of pollutants; propose that big tankers be confined to routes which avoid ecologically sensitive areas not only along our own coasts but the world over; and step up our research in the field of marine science.

• (1110)

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that one of the steps the minister would announce as being taken within Canada would be the reduction of pollution by the government of Canada.

There is no question that this conference is important. I agree with the minister it is important that we try to achieve international standards and an international