

Supply

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Rex Crawford (Kent): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity today to speak about an issue of major and grave importance to my riding and to Canada. It is the environment.

This Government's lack of concern in funding of the environment hits very close to home. The northern parts of my riding receive their water from one of Canada's pollution hot spots, the St. Clair River. Communities downstream from Chemical Valley were looking to complete a pipeline from Lake Huron. It would ensure a clean source of drinking water. It would ensure that residents were not drinking water filled with spilled chemicals, filled with toxic material, filled with blobs of unknown origin. It would ensure that residents in Wallaceburg, Dresden, Walpole Island Indian Reserve and the surrounding townships were not held hostage to the constant threat of spills and the worry about the quality of their drinking water.

The Lake Huron pipeline project was announced in 1986 with 79 per cent funding from the Ontario Government. The federal Government had a role to play in this project. The St. Clair River is an international waterway, and the Conservatives have said that environment is their priority, that it is at the top of their agenda. The new Minister has made many statements about keeping the environment safe for our children and grandchildren.

The Lake Huron pipeline project is a symbol of this Government's inaction and incompetence in terms of the environment. Last week the Minister stated that his Government would have no involvement whatever in the project. It was a shameful and careless response. In our time of need, this Government has abandoned its responsibilities and has rejected a leading role on this issue of environment. The Tories have said to communities downstream from Chemical Valley: "It's not our problem". To those communities which have coped with over 300 chemical spills in the last three years into an international waterway, this Government says: "It's not our problem".

For a Government which spent a lot of political capital during the last election on trumpeting its revival on the environment, on saying in speech after speech that this was a Government that would not only say it was concerned about the environment but would actually do something about it, we were led down the garden path. Talk is cheap but whisky costs money. This Government

and the new Environment Minister could have shown leadership by contributing to the Lake Huron pipeline but no, they said: "It's not our problem".

This Government said no to funding because it called it municipal infrastructure. That was a cop-out. We know that the Government does not have the resolve to help our municipalities with their roads, bridges and sewers. It is a bad policy that should be changed.

Both the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party have recognized that Canada in a few short years could start crumbling beneath our feet without federal involvement for infrastructure. The Conservatives have a bad policy and we disagree with it, but the issue in Kent County is not municipal infrastructure; it is the environment. The towns of Wallaceburg, Dresden and Walpole Island First Nation have no problem with their bridges. Their roads are fine. Their sewers are working well.

However what is not fine and what is not working well is the constant worry of residents that it would take just one major spill to shut them down. Their water intake plants have been shut down several times just in 1989 alone. The worst occurred on March 22 when a spill of 13 tonnes of polyethylene glycol poured into the St. Clair River. Officials downstream were not informed until 10 hours later. The chemical had already got into the towns' infrastructure. For the first time in history, residents were told not to drink their water. No coffee in the morning, no water for the children and no water for cooling in the factories.

Residents in Wallaceburg were shocked and humiliated when they had to line up like refugees to get water. They had to line up at a shopping mall with jugs, jars and bottles just to get enough water for one day. Factories told their workers to go home. Wallaceburg is an industrial town with many tool and dye shops and auto parts makers who need water for cooling. Seniors and shut-ins had water trucked into their homes. School children drank bottled water. Sydenham District Hospital had water trucked in so as to treat the ill and the dying.

I brought all of this directly to the Minister's attention. He showed concern. He said that he was sincere about the environment. We set up a meeting with a local delegation to discuss the matter. The Minister met with me, the Mayor of Wallaceburg, the Mayor of Dresden and the Chief of Walpole Island. We tried to show him that this was a unique problem. It was a problem with the environment, not municipal infrastructure, but the Government said last week: "It's not our problem".