

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, there are two rivers within the confines of my riding, the Rideau river which crosses the riding and the Ottawa river which flows along the northern limit.

Mr. Speaker, we are regularly witness to the serious and sometimes disastrous consequences of spilling all sorts of products—including extremely toxic substances—into the two rivers, and to the environmental damage that may ensue. When the beaches of those rivers are closed in early summer because of high coliform counts, polluting bacteria and chemical products we have every right to ask whether governments—municipal, regional, provincial and federal alike—are doing something to prevent these practices which we all condemn, namely the discharge of toxic materials into our rivers.

A few years ago, Mr. Speaker, here in the House in Ottawa I put a question to find out why the federal government did allow departments—Public works, among others—to award painting or cleaning contracts to companies that ended up dumping their waste products into the Ottawa or Rideau river. Mr. Speaker, I was told it came under provincial jurisdiction. That is precisely where the problem lies! The various government levels are not on the same wavelength and they have a hard time understanding one another.

[*English*]

A few years ago, as I said, pollution of the Ottawa and Rideau rivers was very worrisome but things have not changed very much. They still close the beaches. They still tell us not to go swimming because the water is polluted. They still tell us that there are chemicals, heavy metals, pollutants being emptied into the rivers. It is time that we here at the federal level took this matter very seriously.

Some of those materials being dumped are serious and highly toxic and include the PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyls, which as you know, Mr. Speaker, can cause cancer. What provision does Bill C-78 make for an environmental assessment of the existing practices of federal departments, agencies, Crown corporations and their employees? I did not find it in the bill. I would hope that they will look at that attentively.

I agree with the former Minister of the Environment who made a statement here in Ottawa on June 9, 1987, saying that unless we take better care of our rivers, and I quote former Minister Tom McMillan, “unless our

attitudes and practices change, what we pass on to the next generation will not be shining rivers but open sewers”.

I am sure all members would agree that the Ottawa River and all other Canadian rivers, for that matter, must be cleaned up and protected from further pollution.

Every region and community in Canada has its own environmental concerns and we should carefully study this bill to be aware of its lost potential.

I would like to point out briefly some of the serious flaws in this bill.

[*Translation*]

First, nowhere in the bill can you see the telling expression “sustainable development”.

[*English*]

Instead, we have some vague statements in the preamble, including one about ensuring, and I quote the preamble:

—ensuring that economic development is compatible with the high value Canadians place on environmental quality.

If the government is really committed to the concept of sustainable development, which it says it is, why will it not put the actual term into the preamble? Just put “sustainable development” somewhere in the preamble. If the government wants to place the environment first among its concerns, and in partnership with the economy and all Canadians, why not put the concept of sustainable development and what it requires into the preamble? Why not be crystal clear about our intent?

Clause 4(a) of that bill should be strengthened in my view and changed from requiring that the environmental effects of projects be given, as the bill states, careful consideration, to something more forceful and also more useful, which would be fully reviewed and scrutinized.

One of my greatest concerns with this legislation, as I mentioned, is the lack of guarantees and its ample provisions for exclusions. Two Federal Court decisions handed down earlier this year regarding the Oldman River project in Alberta and the Rafferty-Alameda Dam project in Saskatchewan ordered Ottawa to make mandatory the current EARP guidelines, the environmental assessment review process guidelines. Until now, these guidelines were discretionary. Bill C-78 with all its exclusions would, in effect, undo these court decisions which were encouraging and steps in the right direction for greater environmental protection by making environ-