

Private Members' Business

It is against this vacuum that the member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake comes forward with his proposal, a novel idea which urges the government to do something about the situation.

When it comes to substance in an initiative of this kind, I find it very regrettable that the government, instead of being supportive and co-operative, finds it necessary to defend itself on record and use arguments which really do not stand up to close scrutiny.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Côté (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the mover of the motion, the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, and to the Liberal member for Davenport, who both invited us to support a motion which I find most interesting, and which reads as follows: That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider amending the Constitution Act to recognize the right of every person in Canada to a safe and healthy environment. One could only wish that this would apply every day and every second, especially when we consider the damage suffered by the environment and this planet throughout our history.

This motion deals with an issue that concerns us as Canadians. It also refers to a commitment we made, as a government, to help protect and preserve our natural environment, for ourselves and for our children. It is a responsibility that our government takes seriously, and I will give a few examples later on.

I believe that our current constitutional debate and our commitment to protect the environment reflect a concern to leave our children a country and a planet where they can lead a good life. I believe that through co-operation and dialogue, we will be able to meet the challenges facing us, both on the Constitution and the environment, as we are about to enter the 21st century.

I admit I support the lofty principles in this motion. And who would not? However, I must say it is not the best time in the world nor the best attitude one could take in the circumstances. What I mean is, Mr. Speaker, that adopting immediately a motion that urges us to enshrine this right in the Constitution would be putting the cart before the horse. After all, we have a constitutional committee that is about to suggest what to do and how to do it in the circumstances, among other things. I think we would do better to wait for the committee's

report before we commit ourselves. In fact, I would prefer to mention the successful action taken by governments at various levels and by agencies and private citizens, who will make certain actions part of their daily lives. I am not sure this motion should be adopted, in the circumstances. Once again, I would prefer us to concentrate on concrete action such as government legislation.

So, I suggest that the best guarantee the Canadian people can be given as regards a clean and healthy environment is to direct our efforts toward sustainable development. The idea is to take into account the environmental considerations relating to each of our decisions and to account fully to the public for each of our actions.

Economic growth entails some environmental hazards—no one can deny it—because it draws heavily upon all our natural resources. On the other hand, we know that the growth of the economy depends on wise environmental decisions. As mentioned in the green plan, the environmental aspects have to be considered on a day-to-day basis and not in retrospect.

On December 11, 1990, we released our environmental action plan, namely the green plan in which we reiterated unhesitatingly our commitment to sustainable development because we firmly believe that a healthy environment is our surest guarantee for a strong economy. After all, we tend to manage our resources wisely in times when our economy is thriving. Economic growth also enables us to protect the quality of our environment by investing in the required pollution control and prevention infrastructures and technologies.

The green plan therefore challenges all Canadians—men and women, individuals and governments, First Nations and NGOs—to work together toward achieving our environmental goals.

This reminds me of the collective effort the green plan calls for, as illustrated by the following example. The finest of names can appear on the door of a restaurant or a business or on a sign, but however enticing the name, it does not tell much about what you will find inside. Personally I prefer going in and checking for myself what the food is like without paying too much attention to the sign. However great the merits exhibited and the wishes formulated in public, so long as we do not suit the action