

Adjournment Debate

over many years of both intentional and accidental releases from the reservation.

I might add that the reservation is home to some 63 per cent of all the high level nuclear waste produced in the United States and has, under the sands of Hanford, hundreds of millions of litres of high level waste and radioactive sludge that is stored in underground tanks.

At Hanford at this point, at least the reactors which were used in the weapons production during the cold war are now mothballed. However, during its actual years of operation the Hanford plant emitted into the atmosphere over 500,000 curies of iodine 131, and other radioactive contaminants.

It is the cumulative effect of these atmospheric releases over the many years during the time that Hanford was a weapons production facility that is concerning U.S. scientists that are now undertaking extensive investigations as to the extent of the radioactive contamination and the possibility of long-term health effects to those areas of the population exposed to that contamination.

• (1820)

My question at that time was whether or not the Minister of the Environment or the minister of energy would in fact recognize the need for Canada to send a Canadian delegation of scientists to Hanford to co-ordinate efforts that are now ongoing with U.S. scientists involved in the Hanford dose reconstruction project in order to better determine whether or not there was in fact significant atmospheric contamination of Canadian populations across British Columbia and possibly Alberta borders.

I also asked at the time whether or not the minister was prepared to initiate studies similar to the epidemiological studies now being undertaken throughout the greater Washington area and the Pacific northwest to determine whether or not there are long-term health effects as a result of those radioactive releases going back as far as the late 1940s.

I might add that the children exposed to the Hanford releases years ago would now be in their thirties and forties. Many of those children in the community surrounding Hanford are now in fact demonstrating clinical symptoms of thyroid disease which are consistent with evidence of radiological damage. Health studies have shown an alarmingly high incidence of thyroid cancer

and thyroid disease in those communities surrounding the Hanford reservation.

I think it is a real legitimate concern that we also investigate whether or not there has been any long-term health effect to those population centres in Canada, in British Columbia, that may have received any significant level of that radioactive contamination.

I have made the argument that the federal government should involve itself in these ongoing U.S. studies. We should seek to determine the cumulative level of exposure to B.C. residents from the years of Hanford releases.

I have been pressing for the government to implement a co-ordinated emergency response plan in the event of a more current danger and that is the possibility of explosion of some of the underground storage tanks at the reservation itself.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again inform the member opposite that the Canadian government is aware of the concerns with the Hanford nuclear site and has brought these concerns to the attention of the U.S. Department of Energy.

In 1988 the Department of External Affairs raised concerns about the impact of past releases of radioactive material from Hanford, Washington. An investigation was made by the Atomic Energy Control Board to provide a preliminary assessment of the issue. Their investigation included estimating the radiation doses possibly received by Canadians from historic and current atmospheric releases from this and other American facilities.

I would like to state very clearly that based on the history of atmospheric releases from the U.S. nuclear facilities under study, the AECB estimated that the maximum radiation dose to an individual at the border between the United States and Canada would not have been higher than one fifth of 1 per cent of the AECB's annual dose limit for members of the public.

In other words, as you have been informed previously, based on preliminary analysis, the historic and current atmospheric releases of radioactive contaminants from the Hanford nuclear facility are unlikely to pose any negative impact to Canada.