

*Private Members' Business*

At that time I was parliamentary secretary for the urban affairs minister and I can tell you that the program was very well received. It also created jobs here in Canada and made an important contribution to municipalities by helping them meet their needs for drinking water.

In my opinion, the allegations made by the President of the Treasury Board, and even by the Deputy Prime Minister, to the effect that the federal government does not have to get involved in municipal infrastructure is false. The federal government has been involved in the past and it must again face its responsibilities.

The municipal governments alone are not responsible for water resources and roads; these are a social responsibility of all levels of government. If a municipality does not have the funds needed to set up sewage treatment plants, it will dump its waste water into our lakes and rivers, as many municipalities now do. In fact, only two thirds of Canadians are connected to sewage treatment facilities. Who suffers? Everyone, the surrounding cities, towns and villages, the provinces, the federal government that tries to clean up our rivers. Ironically, Mr. Speaker, our cities, towns and villages still allow sewage to go untreated into our rivers. We suffer and future generations will suffer as a result.

Can we continue to neglect such a precious resource as pure drinking water? The provinces, municipalities, environmentalists, economists—everyone agrees that a municipal infrastructure program is essential. Not only would it help improve the quality of life for Canadians and clean up the environment for future generations but we trust that it would give hope to the 1.4 million unemployed Canadians, according to the statistics for February 1992, and perhaps provide work as well for the 2.3 million on welfare. According to figures I obtained, in March 1991, 2.3 million people collected welfare benefits.

So, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely must have a national program to help municipalities set up water purification systems to preserve water quality. The sewage infrastructure may be invisible in many cases, but the results are not. However, in many municipalities, the infrastructure is a hundred years old and needs to be restored.

In a debate not long ago here in this House, I said that even in Ottawa, there were still wooden sewer pipes. Imagine! They won't last long, Mr. Speaker. We must act.

At a time when the environment dominates Canadians' thinking and influences their everyday action, how can we afford not to have more efficient infrastructure for a healthier environment?

As with any other environmental problem, the solution lies at the bottom of the problem. Let us therefore start at the grass roots and give cities, towns and villages adequate municipal infrastructure for a healthier, cleaner environment. Many municipalities have outdated infrastructure that does not even meet government standards. For lack of financial resources and government programs, they cannot make the required improvements.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, a recognized leader in the movement to solve the very serious crisis that we are going through, said in 1988 that over \$15 billion would have to be invested in Canada's sewers and roads. Three years later, the total is now \$20 billion and will keep on growing if the problem is not solved as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, that is why it is important to act now. The motion that I present to you gives the government an opportunity to act. I therefore call on the government to follow through on this proposal and give Canada an appropriate municipal infrastructure for water and sewage treatment so that we can leave our children a healthy, beautiful, clean country.

[English]

**Ms. Barbara Greene (Don Valley North):** Mr. Speaker, this motion urges the establishment of a national waste water treatment and storm water program, purportedly to ensure a more secure and healthy environment for Canadians. It reflects the concern of many Canadians about the quality of their drinking water, the health of our rivers and lakes, and the state of disrepair of the infrastructure in some of our cities and towns. Indeed, some Canadian municipalities are now facing an \$8 billion to \$10 billion bill to shore up crumbling water and sewer treatment and delivery systems.

However, is a national program the answer to this dilemma? Absolutely not. I think such a program would be fiscally irresponsible. It would not encourage municipal accountability to their taxpayers. It would not reward municipalities that have practised prudent management of their infrastructure and it would not encourage conservation and careful treatment of one of our most valuable natural resources.