

The Address

[Translation]

More and more Canadians take the environment into account in their daily decisions.

[English]

I draw confidence and hope from the positive changes that I have seen in my own community. Hamilton harbour is now a place where children can swim.

[Translation]

I will repeat it. Hamilton harbour was one of the worst places, but it is now a place where children can swim. I invite everyone to come and visit my riding in the spring to see for themselves how sustainable development can work.

[English]

People and wildlife are the beneficiaries. Canadians want to see co-operation between levels of government and political parties. We want to avoid possible overlap and duplication but we also want Parliament and the Government of Canada to start taking sustainable development seriously. It is an opportunity we can seize. We must keep the faith of Canadians. We can and we must make sustainable development not simply a concept but a way of life starting right here in Parliament so that we can show Canadians that as we speak so we do.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Minister of the Environment and Deputy Prime Minister because she began her speech by saying that we need women. I do not know her personally, but I think that she is a woman of action. We need women like that. She is in authority; she is now the Prime Minister's right arm. Right now, she is probably the most influential woman in Canada.

I also listened closely to her speech. She mentioned a country with values of justice and fairness and so on. However, like me, she must admit that even though we have very good intentions, right now, unfortunately, the country is not fair and just.

• (1155)

The Deputy Prime Minister must know that at least one family in five in Canada lives below the poverty line. I am now on the first subject that I want to raise, which is also the poverty of Indians living on reserves and in the far north; in their case, not one in five but one in two families in the far north and on Indian reserves lives in poverty. These are very disturbing statistics. We must deal firmly with these issues. There is a lot of discrimination in Canada and I think that is an example. Shortly, I will be asking her to say just how her government intends to proceed on these matters.

I also come back to the environment because I know that it is a subject which particularly interests her. With respect to the

environment, we also know that the food chain in the far north is deteriorating, and I think that is one of the few places where an environment which was protected by the very nature of things is deteriorating. My first question is this: can she state what her thinking is on how to deal with this poverty, out of concern for justice and equity, for Indians on reserves and in the far north?

Second, does she with her government intend to put forward specific issues and ways to deal with the deterioration of the food chain in the far north as such?

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I will first answer the second question. The member for Saint-Jean is absolutely right about the serious problem of the food chain degradation in the far north.

I personally had the opportunity to visit part of the Arctic circle where mothers have an unacceptably high level of PCBs in their milk. These women were wondering if they ought to breast feed their infants or instead buy milk at \$7 a litre. The latter option is not a very good one for people who already live in poverty. This situation reflects the importance of the work we are doing right now in co-operation with the Government of Quebec and all the other governments across Canada in order to improve air quality. A committee was set up to harmonize our regulations regarding CFCs and all other pollutants released into the atmosphere by industries and others.

In March, my counterparts, the provincial ministers of Environment, and I will try to find a way to harmonize some laws related to the environment. For example, the release of CFCs comes under provincial jurisdiction. Yet, if a problem occurs in Toronto, it ultimately will affect the air people breathe in Montreal and even above the Arctic circle. Therefore, we must work in co-operation with the provincial governments to develop a national policy which will garner the support of all the stakeholders.

I am very pleased that the member raised the issue of poverty, especially among aboriginal people, because the government has already announced, in the speech from the throne, its intention to be directly involved in a program called Head Start. This school program was first conceived by the Americans in the sixties and was targeted to the poor of a certain age group. It is our intention to implement this program which will serve as a model for aboriginal people. In fact, my colleague, the Minister of Health, is presently monitoring the development of that program.

[English]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I wish to applaud the transparent nature of the minister in assigning or trying to determine which Canadian city is going to get this much coveted NAFTA environmental secretariat.