

Oral Questions

Will the minister now admit to this House that he has no real industrial strategy and, again as my colleagues have said before, will he resign, taking his government interference with him?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): As I said in the House on July 6, Madam Speaker, the duty remission program sought by Volkswagen meant a contribution from taxpayers all over Ontario and all over Canada in the millions of dollars. In fact, now that we have announced the actual program, it is clear that the additional contribution from taxpayers amounts to some \$10 million a year on top of the existing duty remission from the existing program, of \$15 million. I say that under those circumstances it is the duty of the government to make sure that all suitable sites were looked at before a final decision was made to grant this duty remission program, certainly in terms of suitable sites in areas suffering high unemployment and slow growth. If we had not been willing to do that then we would not have carried out our responsibility to the taxpayers and to all the people of Canada.

● (1440)

It so happens that without the decision we made for this duty remission program, that plant would not have been located anywhere in Canada and all of Canada would have lost its substantial economic benefit. It is our efforts that brought this to Canada, not the dithering of my hon. friend.

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THE ENVIRONMENT**DIOXIN POLLUTION OF LAKE ONTARIO**

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of the Environment. Last week the minister confirmed that higher levels of dioxin had been found in Lake Ontario. The minister must recognize by now that dioxin presents a serious health hazard when it is consumed. The minister also indicated that he would be meeting with his counterparts from the government of Ontario to discuss joint strategy in an attempt to solve this problem. Has the minister done that, and when can Canadians expect to receive some concrete action from the minister?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of the Environment and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Madam Speaker, the hon. member's question would elicit a complicated answer. There has already been a considerable degree of action. The dioxin problem is certainly not a new one. We have acted in co-operation with a variety of groups, particularly in relation to possible legal settlements in relation to the Hooker chemical plant, a site which we believe may be the cause of the entry of dioxin into the Niagara River system. We have supported those groups both with information, with expertise with witnesses, and in some ways with financial assistance. It is not by any means a new concern. It is a concern on which we have already acted.

It is not entirely clear whether dioxin levels are increasing. The sophistication of our detection techniques has increased to the extent that we are now able to detect traces of chemicals and poisons that we would not have been able to trace in the past. The evidence we have so far is that dioxin levels are diminishing.

As a result of new information we have, we feel there is a new situation which requires the co-operation of the province of Ontario with the Government of Canada in making representations to the United States and also in setting new levels and new standards in relation to the Niagara River. We have already begun that process by meeting with private and public action groups, those who are most concerned, and in a few days we will be meeting with officials of the government of Ontario.

REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF ALL-PARTY COMMITTEE

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is also for the Minister of the Environment. I would be the first one to agree that it is a serious problem, but the minister does not seem to be taking the problem as seriously as most people are. In light of that, would the minister agree to setting up an all-party committee of this House to investigate the dioxin problem, which can report back to the House so that we can deal with the matter effectively?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of the Environment and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Madam Speaker, I really cannot comprehend the misinformation in the hon. member's mind when he says that we have not been taking this very seriously.

Mr. Young: That is in *Hansard*. You made the statement last week.

Mr. Roberts: If the hon. member would look back at the record, he will discover that over the past 18 months we have been in the lead in undertaking research in the Great Lakes waters in relation to this matter. It was a result of the actions of the Department of the Environment that the dioxin levels, which had escaped detection in the past were detected. It was a result of our scientific work that this problem was first brought to the public's attention. And it is a result of the efforts we have taken over the past 18 months that we have been able to bring together the various groups and governments in a concerted approach to the American government. The hon. member is simply talking through his hat when he says we have not been active in relation to this problem.

Mr. Young: You are the one. You do not know.

Mr. Roberts: The hon. member should know the facts better than that.