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EASTERN CANADA FACES WATER SHORTAGES

The following statement was made by Mr. John N. Turner, Member of Parliament, on June 30, at the inauguration of a seminar on water levels sponsored by the Montreal Port Council:

...Water remains Canada's most important natural resource. It is a resource which has always seemed plentiful and to which we Canadians have devoted altogether too little attention, except at times of crises - flood or drought. Water serves many needs. We Canadians have failed to think of water in its widest terms - water as water. We have traditionally thought of water as a great source of energy - a source of hydro-electric power. But, increasingly today, water is becoming important for its consumptive uses - important for industrial purposes, for irrigation, for pollution control, processed steam and so on. These other needs are becoming more valuable, and more competitive with water as a source of power or as a means of navigation.

Not only are the uses for water changing in character, but the needs for water are becoming paramount in ever-widening areas of the country. Water used to be a regional problem, isolated in small areas. The need is now reaching the proportions of river basins and entire lake systems... Water has become national in importance and will become - sooner than we think - our concern on a continental basis. River basins will no longer be considered as isolated one from the other; water diversions will be made from one system to another in order to relieve shortage. We may even look forward to a continental system of diversions linking water-surplus areas to those areas in short supply.

WATER-MANAGEMENT PRIORITY

It must now be clear to all of us that the development of a national water-management policy is a priority which must occupy us for the next generation. I want to say to you at the outset that Canada has had such a policy for many years but that, to my mind, it must be revised and sharpened... There are no immediate, dramatic solutions. We are dealing with natural phenomena that yield to man only slowly. No one can wave a magic wand or pull a lever and raise the water-level at Montreal by a flick of the wrist. This is no time to succumb to the temptation of political manoeuvre or of harsh, impatient words.

PROBLEM OF TWOFOLD CO-ORDINATION

When any commodity enters into short supply, that is to say when it is insufficient to satisfy all the demands for it, then necessary conflicts develop. This is the situation with respect to water in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River system. There is already a conflict respecting the optimum use of the water as between Great Lakes ports and communities and the river communities of the St. Lawrence. We must recognize, therefore, that for Montreal to insist on a minimum water-level at the port may conflict with the legitimate needs of other ports farther up the river and on the Great Lakes. Conflicts are also developing outside the realm of navigation, as between the various uses of water - hydro-electric power, anti-pollution, irrigation, industrial consumption and so on. Water is a multi-use resource and navigation is only one use of that resource, albeit a crucial one for Montreal. In addition, we have

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