

Adjournment Debate

but on occasion the erosion of farmlands on the north shore of Lake Erie has been drawn to the attention of the federal minister of public works and the provincial government. To date, no assistance has been forthcoming for the farmers.

The cause of the present situation is aggravated out of all proportion by the abnormally high levels of water in all the Great Lakes. In Lake Erie, the water level is 42 inches above normal and is 27 inches above average for this time of year. With severe wind storms, the raging fury of the waves has destroyed farmlands on a scale never before witnessed. The waves have destroyed cottages, marinas and have even damaged public docks and piers.

Let me deal more specifically with the magnitude and extent of the damage along the north shore of Lake Erie. This area extends through the length of my riding and through the ridings of Elgin, Kent-Essex and Lambton-Kent. Incidentally, the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. Holmes) has a number of questions on the order paper, directed to the Minister of Public Works, seeking assistance similar to that about which I am speaking. The hon. member for Huron (Mr. McKinley) has also witnessed and experienced the same type of damage along the shores of Lake Huron. Even the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) the hon. member for Essex-Windsor, knows about this situation.

In my riding, in the township of Houghton the damage has been as severe as that elsewhere. The island of Long Point, a sand spit which stretches out 25 miles, almost halfway across Lake Erie, has suffered severe damage. Places such as Port Ryerse, Port Dover, Nanticoke and Peacock Point have also suffered extensive damage. In the township of Houghton, a farm owned by Mr. John Balthes on the clay and sand bluffs, according to actual survey has lost 50 acres of high-producing farmland in 20 years. This land was worth \$2,000 an acre, making a total loss of \$100,000. It was good tobacco and orchard land.

The cottagers on Long Point have borne the brunt of the damage. The cottages there number 900, with an average value of \$12,000, making a total value of \$10,800,000. Marinas and highway construction in the area have also suffered damage. That means a considerable assessment on the local municipality. Some 50 of these cottages are in imminent danger. I have received letters from cottage owners outlining the plight in which they find themselves. The pier at Port Dover, which is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works, has also been damaged. I should point out Mr. Speaker, that the minister's engineers are on the spot, looking after the damage and repairing what they can at Port Dover harbour.

Dealing with solutions to this problem, I suggest that in the short term there should be some form of compensation to those people who have suffered maximum loss, perhaps on a cost-sharing basis with the province. This would cover a proportion of the disaster area at Long Point. I also suggest the erection of a breakwater at some of the more vulnerable spots. The province of Ontario is already dropping stone into Lake Erie to protect Highway 59. The government should also consider subsidizing the cottage owners to assist them in moving their cottages farther from the shores of the lake.

[Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand).]

In the long run, Mr. Speaker, I think the level of the waters in the Great Lakes should come under the purview of the International Joint Commission. To that end I suggest that the minister should discuss this matter with the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp), and our members on the International Joint Commission should be directed to co-operate with the American corps of army engineers who have made a serious and detailed study of the cyclical water levels in the Great Lakes. At present there are sluice-gates on Lake Superior which let the water run out of that lake. There is some control available at that point. There is an outlet from Lake Michigan through the Chicago drainage canal, entering the Mississippi River, which might be used to regulate in a minor way the level of water of our lakes.

• (2200)

Above all, Mr. Speaker, I think the minister might help to bring this matter into proper perspective if he could state the facts of the case from an authoritative point of view. Many of these people are being subjected to wild rumours of what can and what cannot be done. The minister would be rendering a service not only to the people concerned but to the Canadian people as a whole if he could state exactly what the situation is and what can or what cannot be done.

With all the sincerity I have at my command, I ask the minister to seriously consider this very, very serious damage at Long Point and see if some help cannot be brought to these people.

Hon. Jean-Eudes Dubé (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles) perhaps it should be stated, first, that there is at present no act of parliament which specifically provides assistance for the type of problem he has raised, namely, the rising of the water level of Lake Erie.

Problems of this nature and the measures to be taken for their rectification are the responsibility of the concerned departments of the provincial government. However, in certain cases the federal government can act on a specific request from a province. A decision to so act would have to be a cabinet decision. If, after any request, a decision to act were made, it would be by way of a joint interdepartmental committee. Aid in such case would be of two kinds; the first would be physical aid which is generally provided by the Emergency Measures Organization, and the second, financial assistance, is generally administered by the Department of Finance.

If funds were provided, that would be done on the basis of a formula which is derived from the physical capacity of the given province to cope with the problem. This formula is based both on population and total cost. Where the cost exceeds \$1 per person, the federal government may assume the cost of such things as certain public works which can be identified, for example schools, and also certain losses for private property which were not insurable.

My advice to the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand is that he contact the provincial authorities and have them, as they see fit, approach us for whatever assistance they seek. Of course, our own engineers of the Department of