

Government Orders

Mr. Waddell: The warming is chilling. I do not intend to make a pun or make fun of that. This is a deadly serious matter.

What may lie ahead for us is a very different world than what we were used to. That is why I say the environment is the most important issue.

I look, as do all of us, at the letters I get from my riding. We now get faxes and telephone calls. They are very interesting, at least in my case. I note when environmental matters come up that they are inevitably from young people. When we talk to young people in their schools they ask us about the environment. I remember talking to students in the Coquitlam and Port Moody schools in my riding, a suburb of Vancouver with excellent schools and students who are very motivated in environmental concerns. Inevitably the question is the environment.

I was thinking today about the upcoming election. Someone mentioned that it may be within a year. I remember an all-party debate at Centennial High School in Coquitlam, British Columbia, during the last election. The teachers did a bit of a poll as to which party's candidate was winning. I must say that I was somewhat shocked because I was in third place in that poll as we went in.

I remember we only had a short period of time, a few minutes, and I chose to comment on the environment. When I came out of the debate I was quite far ahead in the poll because clearly I had chosen an issue the students were really interested in. They wanted to vote for someone who would champion such issues.

I took part in the study of the previous bill on the environment in the last Parliament. I was on the legislative committee. Having had that experience, I want to congratulate the members who took part in this legislative committee, especially the member for The Battlefords—Meadowlake. When he goes back to speak to the high school students in his riding in Saskatchewan I hope he will say: "I took part in the process that led to Bill C-13" because it is really important.

I say to the hon. member who is behind me in the House that I took part earlier this year in a bill on gun control. It took a long time and a lot of effort. I remember thinking at the time: You do not get a lot of credit for this; you do not get your name in the headlines on this. There is a lot of work behind the scenes. It is a heck of a lot of work and I want to congratulate him.

The world may not know what he is doing, but young people will know and are concerned about what he is doing. As a matter of fact, I noticed that the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake has spoken on this issue a number of times. I was just trying to find copies of his speech. I just want to quote the hon. member when he said: "Our children are inheriting a country which is sick and diseased compared to the state of our country a generation ago. Our ozone layer has been destroyed to the extent where the federal Minister of the Environment has warned that our children should not expose themselves to the sun. Many of our lakes and rivers are dead and dying. Our forests are sold off in unimaginably large tracts to pulp and paper companies. We continue to encourage global warming and our children have been robbed of the opportunity to share our environment with many species of animals, plants, fish and birds now extinct through bad choices we have made as individuals and through our government. We can change the future".

I hope this bill will go some way to changing that future because the environment is our future. Canada must have the best environment in the world, and that is what we should be committed to as politicians. I hope this bill will go some way to doing that.

I just want to go over a couple of parts in the bill and make some comments on them. The bill, as I understand it, sets out to trigger the set-off of environmental assessment. We have seen a number of projects such as the Rafferty-Alameda project in Saskatchewan, the James Bay project in Quebec, the Oldman Dam project in Alberta and the Kemano project in British Columbia. The bill triggers these environment assessments. The intensity of the assessment from a simple screening to a full panel or mediation is dealt with; what sort of projects, activities or undertakings are to be assessed; the factors to be assessed are taken into account; who is to do the assessing; the role of the public; and the responsibility and authority of the minister.

• (1300)

Now it is very important that these assessments be clear and we set out a procedure. We in the New Democratic Party would like to see a better environmental assessment procedure. We believe the assessment should be done by an independent agency free from political pressure or influence peddling and the decision should be final and binding.