

Supply

The government did not talk about the protection of the environment. It did not talk about things we put at risk. It did not talk about the new rules in Canada. It did not approach the environment in the way that has been talked about elsewhere. It just talked about how they could swing this one through because no one would pay attention. There are jobs at stake. There are people who make technical investments. They make large investments in trucks and yet, the government will not tell the whole story. There is a lot of bitterness created in small communities across Canada when these environmental conflicts come up. It is our responsibility in the House to tell both sides of the story, to make sure people do not get hurt, and to help people understand that their environment is as important as other people's environment and that we have to work together.

• (1600)

It does not matter whether we are talking about a small farming community. I originally come from a small city, the city of Sudbury, and I know what it was like to have thousands of jobs put at stake by people saying: "Oh, if you don't do it this way, we are sorry about the environment but you know all your jobs are going to be lost."

We cannot hold people's careers, their individual families, and their investments hostage because they are afraid they will lose everything if a certain project does not go ahead. It is up to us to set the standard in the public sector so that we can protect the environment and protect communities at the same time. We cannot use scare techniques. We cannot try to hide our mistakes in a small corner of the country saying this is so small that no one else will notice. We have an obligation through federal regulations and federal legislation to make sure that every part of this country is protected at every point of the way.

I will end my remarks by reminding the House just how severe this travesty is. We have asked the government time and time again: "Are you sure you have a deal with the provincial Government of Saskatchewan that will hold? Are you sure that we can rest safely and that this environment will be protected?"

Each time one minister after another—and goodness knows there have been enough ministers of the environment trying to help them out over there—has said: "Don't worry, you people are just raising all sorts of fears", and we find out once again that our fears are minimal compared to the damage to be done to the environment.

Mr. Len Gustafson (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege for me to speak on this subject that has had so much attention.

I represent the area in which the Rafferty-Alameda dam is located and have had the privilege of doing so for 11 years. I want to set the record straight for the people of Canada, and especially for opposition members in this House, about what we are dealing with. Unfortunately I see they are leaving, but I think we need to hear this in terms of sustainable development for our country and a set of guidelines that will lead us into the future.

The area that I serve and that the Rafferty-Alameda dam is in is a very dry area. I happened to be the chairman of the task force on drought during the most severe drought period that hit our country, with the exception of probably the 1930s. We are a semi-arid desert area in western Canada and particularly in southern Saskatchewan. If there is any place on earth that needs water, it is southern Saskatchewan. Our rainfall is approximately 12 inches a year and when we have drought years, 5 and 6 inches a year.

There is something very significant about what has happened in dams in Saskatchewan. First of all when the Gardner dam was built there were those who were against it. When the Diefenbaker dam was built there were those who were against it. Those dams turned out to be very profitable for Saskatchewan; just ask the people that live near them.

In terms of what has happened in the history of Rafferty-Alameda dam, Alvin Hamilton tells me that it has been studied since the early 1900s. This issue has been studied to death.

The hon. member from Winnipeg mentioned the Manitoba area. I want to suggest that when the Minister of the Environment came out to view the project—and I want to commend him for doing that—many towns, villages, and municipalities from Manitoba were represented. There was not a municipality, a town or a village in the area from Saskatchewan that was not represented. People on all sides of the political spectrum support the