

*Adjournment Debate*ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—UNITED STATES SULPHUR
EMISSIONS—CHEMICAL POLLUTION OF NIAGARA RIVER

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, in raising this matter today, and it was touched upon in November in this House in Question Period, I would like to preface my remarks by saying that we have already seen a Government which has failed to convince the United States' administration at the Quebec City Meeting that there is an urgent need to act on smokestack industries, and that we should jointly proceed with the U.S. in a clean-up operation. As you know, at this stage an increasing number of nations are recognizing the importance of reducing smokestack emissions, and increasingly the U.S. finds itself isolated in denying a policy which would allow it to reduce emissions which, as you know, amount to some 26 million tons a year. We are downwind of these emissions. This policy does not permit us to proceed jointly in the clean-up operation which we set on its way so well by policies initiated a number of years ago.

Today I would like to bring to your attention the question of attempting to convince the U.S. administration that there is an urgent need to halt the flow of toxic chemicals into the Niagara River from leaking dumpsites, industrial emissions, and from municipalities. Here again we may be facing a similar failure. It should be noted by way of background that the report released this month by the federal water policy inquiry during the public hearings which were held across Canada indicated that probably the single most widespread anxiety Canadians have about their water resource is the deterioration of its quality. The report stated that pollution, if we define the term broadly to include toxic contamination, disruption of fish and wildlife habitat, acidification and sewage discharge, attracted more testimony at the hearings than any other issue. That, I submit, should be enough to convince the Canadian Government that urgent action is required to remedy the Niagara River problem.

Again, as I did in November, I would like to ask the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Blais-Grenier) when she will pursue the recommendations contained in this October, 1984 report published by the Niagara River Toxic Committee.

Let me briefly outline some of the recommendations to refresh everyone's memory: For example, that the Niagara Falls waste water treatment plant be made operative as originally designed and as early as possible. Of course, to obtain that we have to exert pressure on our American friends and neighbours. Secondly, it recommended that the clean-up of the problem dumpsites should be undertaken by the fastest means available and not allowed to be entangled in litigation in the court system south of the border. Techniques should be developed such as recycling, or phasing out the use of many toxic substances and the development of less toxic substitutes, and incineration or chemical fixation to deal with existing and future waste. Finally, the control of persistent toxic substances should be implemented as called for by the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1978.

These are key recommendations. But I would like to refer the Minister to two specific recommendations, Nos. 23 and 24,

on which the United States members of the committee took a different position, a fact which we all must regret very much. Although the U.S. position is in agreement with the need for bi-national management of toxic input into the Lake Ontario basin, they believe that the first step in the implementation of such a plan is the review of all sources of toxic substances in Lake Ontario. The review is a delaying tactic against the knowledge that the presence of toxic substances is now on the increase, rather than the decrease as claimed by the U.S. members of the commission.

● (1800)

I would like to ask the Minister whether she is aware of this position. Has she met with the International Joint Commission to discuss the U.S. position? Has she taken a position on these two particular U.S. recommendations? It seems to me that the Minister must move on the information already obtained and on the content of the report of last October.

Has the Minister met with the EPA to work out a joint Canada-U.S. plan of action for cleaning up the Niagara River? What were the results of the meeting. I ask these questions because the Niagara River is an urgent priority. The communities on that peninsula are extremely worried. We know from the Niagara River Toxic Committee report that there are 61 sites on the U.S. side and five on the Canadian side that have been designated as having significant potential for contaminant migration into the Niagara River.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we know that these sites have been identified. Most of the recommendations have been agreed upon, but two are outstanding and they are very serious in their long-term implications. Urgent action is needed. If we wait, the cost of cleaning up the problem will continue to rise for both Canada and the United States. More importantly, we stand to jeopardize the quality of water in Lake Ontario for decades to come. Hence, the urgency of this issue, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) will recall that it was anticipated that there would be a meeting with Mr. Ruckelshaus within a week of his asking that question last fall. In fact Mr. Ruckelshaus resigned one week after the question was asked. Following that, even though a meeting had been arranged between the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Blais-Grenier) and Mr. Ruckelshaus, it was necessary to delay that meeting.

Since the appointment of the new EPA administrator, Mr. Lee Thomas, there has already been one meeting and there will be another meeting in the very near future, on May 9 I believe.

The questions which were posed originally by the Member centered around two issues; one was the toxic substances in the Niagara River and the Great Lakes, and the second was acid rain. I noticed that the Member did not spend much time on the acid rain issue, although I think he would be quite amenable to the idea that it continues to be an important part