

Health and the Environment

ever, as to the over-all implementation of the recommendations of the water basin study we have heard very little.

I realize that an implementation task force was established early in the year. It was made up of one member of the provincial government and one member of the federal government, with the manager of the Okanagan water basin board sitting in as an observer. What also bothers me is that none of their findings or recommendations has been made public. It appears to me that very little is known by the people in the Okanagan about the work of this task force.

It appears to me that this subject is too important for only two people appointed by two levels of government to look into. Certainly, local people should sit on this committee, as they could report back on what has been going on and on what is being decided by the committee. I understand that it has produced papers or recommendations, but these are marked "secret". I also understand that meetings are taking place between the two governments, even at the deputy minister level; but, again, no local representatives who can help and advise are involved. They could tell the people of the area what is happening.

I hope that this task force will not act like a secret body which is to report back to the two levels of government so that they are the only ones who will know what should be done. I hope the people will not be left in the dark; will not be denied information about what is happening. The people of the Okanagan Valley are too concerned to tolerate that type of thing. Perhaps because of the costs involved, governments do not want to tell the people what is happening. Perhaps they are not telling the people for fear they might have to become involved in this matter.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government has a responsibility to become far more involved in this whole situation than it has so far. This is a unique situation in that our valley and lakes and the way they are situated cannot be duplicated anywhere else in Canada. We need a high degree of prevention as well as some clean-up to take care of pollution which has resulted from the population increase of the last few years. Because people realize what a wonderful climate we have and what a nice place our area is to live in, the population is increasing steadily and something has to happen quickly.

For these reasons, on November 25 I sent a letter to the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé) and explained to her some of the things I know about the water basin report. I said that I had been reluctant to play politics with this subject, contrary to what many people have done in the past. I will not indulge in such activity, because this subject is far too important to me. I also asked the minister to visit the Okanagan Valley and look over the situation first-hand, because I believe what she will find will be unique in Canada. I am sure the people of the Okanagan will give her a warm welcome and see that she receives a comprehensive insight into the problems of the area. I will be happy to assist in the arrangements, and assure the minister that no politics will be played on my part.

The minister, in her speech on November 30, referred to pollution in the Mississippi area. I suggest that it will not be long before she will be able to refer to the Okanagan

[Mr. Whittaker.]

area in the same way: she will not need to refer to the Mississippi area. In her speech the minister said that this piece of legislation is also proof of the modern ideas of this government, and that it will not let economic development and environmental concerns develop on parallel lines. I suggest that the government must play a larger part than that involved in proposing legislation. We realize that existing legislation deals with direct contamination of air and water and contaminants coming from industrial sewers and plant chimneys, but we also realize that such laws do not consider what happens when large concentrations of people live in an area like the Okanagan Valley.

I read with interest the minister's apparently light-hearted speech made during the White Owl conservation award presentation in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, Montreal, on December 6. I suggest to the minister that a much firmer stand must be taken on the question of contaminants in the environment, pollution in the environment and on the environment itself in the next few years if we are to survive in this world. I note that the United States government grants municipalities 75 per cent of the funds needed for clean-up and pollution prevention.

The environment of Canada is delicate. We are fast approaching the maximum population which this delicate environment can tolerate. Already we have gone a long way in polluting it. We must take a much stronger stand. Let us look at oil. In 50 years we have almost depleted this supply of energy. It was because of the discovery of oil and the use of oil as energy that we were able to take advantage of the increased standard of living we have achieved in the past 50 years. Let us look at the next ten years. In the next ten years, we have been told that we will have almost depleted this supply of energy and will be going downhill. So let us look at what has happened in 60 years. In 60 years the people of the world have effectively used up most of this energy which enabled us to make great advances in our standard of living.

● (2140)

What is going to happen after we deplete this supply, if we are not able to find more supplies of oil? What will happen next? How long will it take us to deplete our next form of energy? I suggest that when we use the next form of energy, be it nuclear energy or whatever science finds for us, we will have a great many contaminants from it, maybe even more than we have already. It almost scares me, Mr. Speaker, to think that we could deplete the next form of energy in half the 60 years it has taken to deplete our oil resources. We could find the net tightening faster around ourselves, contaminating the environment at faster rates and in fact shortening the time that we can use scientific discoveries which give us the energy to live in the way in which we have become accustomed.

It is for this reason I endorse my party's stand that this bill does not go far enough or fast enough in finding out about contaminants that could pollute our environment. I endorse the remarks which were made by the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) on this bill in the interests of the prevention of which we will need a great deal in the years to come.

Mr. Bob Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to see so many members from Brit-