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This oil spill along the western coast of Vancouver Island may not be one of the great marine disasters of this decade, but it has, however, already done considerable environmental damage. Thousands of sea birds have died because some of the oil is sinking. Wildlife that feeds off the bottom such as whales will be in danger. The area's entire bald eagle colony and the colony of sea lions are in danger.

The livelihood of the inhabitants of the area is being affected. The federal Fisheries Department has banned shellfish harvesting. Groundfish, herring and other seafood could also be at risk. A booming tourist business in the area is threatened by the spill; 80 to 85 per cent of the economic base is from tourism and the fishing industry.

The instant the locals saw the first oil globs on their beaches, they mobilized. The federal Government took several days to react. The volunteer dispatch centre sends out teams each morning to areas that have been identified as having had more oil washed in by the tides during the evening. These people work all day collecting the oil in garbage bags and leaving them at drop-off centres where they are picked up by helicopters. These bags are being stored while a decision is being made as to what to do with them.

Most of the supplies, including garbage bags, rubber gloves, rubber boots, overalls, food and the use of telephones, et cetera, has been provided by the local residents.

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The work was physically demanding and emotionally draining. Although I worked only one day, it was exhausting and depressing. My boots, gloves and clothes were quickly covered with oil. There was no equipment on this beach for clean-up, just volunteers with garbage bags. Where was the federal Government? It was frustrating, Mr. Speaker. These volunteers were doing their best but they needed money, equipment and manpower. More important, they needed support from this Government.

That was four months ago. We are now hearing the same pleas from the residents in Alaska. They want action. Canadians want action. This particular spill, the experts tell us, is not likely to reach Canadian shores. However, they do caution us that there is a possibility, if only a slim one, that the Canadian coast could be tarnished by this spill.

There are yet unanswered questions about the Vancouver oil spill. According to coastal residents to whom I spoke today, oil was still washing ashore 10 days ago. Our federal Departments of Fisheries and Environment are still doing studies to try to learn what the long-term effects there will be on our natural resources. Our salmon supply, the food stock of many residents of Vancouver Island and the source of many jobs, may be threatened.

Has the Government learned from the Vancouver experience? Has it learned from this Alaskan experience? If the worst happens and our shores are affected by this new spill, for the Government not to be ready is not acceptable. The consequences are too great. We have people trained to fight floods and forest fires. The equipment is also available to fight these disasters. What do we have in place to fight oil spills? Where is this equipment? Where are the experts? Who is responsible? How long will it take Government to mobilize assistance next time? Is there a telephone number Canadians can call in case of another oil spill to get immediate action? How many fish beds have to be destroyed? How many small towns have to be economically devastated?

How many Canadian families will lose their livelihood before the Government takes necessary action?

Mr. Albert Cooper (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It appears the debate will go on for some time. Maybe we in the House could dismiss the Pages so they could go home and get ready for their classes tomorrow.

Mr. Fulton: I think that is appropriate, Mr. Speaker. I think if we need coffee or anything else we can arrange it ourselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Therefore, the Pages are dismissed. The Hon. Member for Fredericton (Mr. Bird).

Mr. J. W. Bud Bird (Fredericton): Mr. Speaker, I am not on duty here tonight. It is not my duty day. I was home watching television this evening when the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) made his opening address in this debate. I said to my wife that «This really looks worth while. I must say that I commend the Hon. Member for Skeena for the initiative he has taken in introducing the debate and for the thoughtful, knowledgeable and well intentioned manner in which I certainly perceived his opening address. I must say that his was one of the last well-intentioned because once I got here and listened to the other side, I became dismayed how such a noble effort by the Hon. Member for Skeena in such an important context could be diminished in the