

Adjournment Debate

all of our 137 recommendations at the earliest possible moment.

● (1820)

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—NIAGARA RIVER POLLUTION—
UNITED STATES CLEAN-UP PLAN. (B) CONTENTS OF PLAN

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, you may recall that last October the Niagara River Toxic Committee filed its report with the Canadian and American Governments. The Canadian Government has not yet responded to the findings of that committee which contained some alarming results. For example, some 3,000 pounds of priority pollutants, that is, acids, metals, PCBs, pesticides, et cetera, end up in the Niagara River daily. Over the winter Environment Canada carried out further studies and raised that estimate to some 19,800 pounds. Yet the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) still does not respond to the earlier report or the new data.

The Minister met with the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington in May and returned to Canada saying, as recorded in Hansard on p. 4765:

—that planning for the Niagara River clean-up is being accelerated.

Remember the word “clean-up”.

On October 17 a plan was presented by the EPA to the Minister of the Environment here in Ottawa. Canadians have not seen that plan. In fact, the Minister told the press that he did not know if we could get to see it at all. That is rather curious considering that the EPA in Washington considers this plan to be a public working document. Therefore, the question arises, why will the Minister not come clean with Canadians and tell us what is in the plan? Why should we order a copy from the EPA south of the border? Why is the matter shrouded as a big secret?

There are important questions on the minds of everyone concerned with this matter. The health and drinking water of some 6 million people, 4.5 million of them Canadians, is at stake. Does the plan set stiff controls on the polluting industries when they discharge toxic substances? How much money, if any, does the plan provide for the excavation and incineration of the toxic chemicals buried in the sites? Are funds envisaged by the EPA for municipalities on the U.S. side to catch the toxic pollutants as they enter the sewage plants? What is the timetable for implementation so that municipalities will know how long they can rely on present water supplies and whether they will have to turn to alternatives? It is also important to know the agreed upon toxic substances which should be brought under control other than phosphorus.

These are the reasons why we call on the Minister to make this plan known. It is hard to understand why the plan is public south of the border and not north of the border. Canadians have the right to know. It is important that this matter be managed properly and so far the Minister has not done his homework. He has contradicted himself in and outside this House on the matter of the plan. He is urging the Opposition to study the plan before making statements, but

then outside the House he says to the press that he does not know whether he will release the plan. He has mismanaged this very serious issue.

● (1825)

I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will answer these questions, and perhaps do the job that the Minister has not done so far by coming clean with Canadians and providing knowledge on these major points. To facilitate his task I will summarize the points for him. They are: a timetable, the money attached to it by the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, and the details as to whether they will proceed with the excavation and incineration at the land-fill sites. There are, as you know, 61 sites on the U.S. side of the river.

Time does not permit me to go over the names of the companies and municipalities that are the most significant contributors of priority pollutants, but among them are the Buffalo Sewer Authority Waterworks Treatment Plant, the Niagara Falls New York Waterworks Treatment Plant, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation in New York, Atlas Steels in Ontario, Olin Corporation in New York, Spaulding Fibre Company in New York State, the Town of Tonawanda Waterworks Treatment Plant in New York, the Town of Amherst Waterworks Treatment Plant in New York, and the Donner-Hanna Coke Joint Venture, also in the State of New York.

We want to have answers because, as I mentioned, this is becoming a very serious health matter in the long term. It can still be managed, but it needs prompt action on the part of the Government. The report I am referring to came out in October, 1984. One year has gone by. Why does the Government not reply to the content of this report? Why is it now taking an open stance to let Canadians, provincial Governments, and municipalities know where the matter stands at the present time?

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, in response to the questions posed and the clarification asked for by the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), I want to agree entirely with him about the serious nature of this problem and to indicate that the Government is fully aware, as are many Canadians, of the serious threat that this situation poses to millions of Canadians and Americans. In fact, it has been a progressive threat over the last number of years and it is high time that constructive action is undertaken and completed by governments on both sides of the border.

The facts, some of which have been elucidated by the Member for Davenport, are well known, they are established. We know that there are 61 dump sites on the American side and 5 on the Canadian side. Eighty-nine per cent of the contribution to the waste in the river is by the Americans and 11 per cent is by Canadians. Those things are established and we have no argument with that.

The Member has asked several specific questions and I would like to respond to those as well as I can in the time I