

Supply

We know that there are more than 800 toxic chemicals present in the Great Lakes waterway alone; what we do not know, as I have pointed out in the House and elsewhere, is what affect most of those chemicals have upon the environment, including upon human health. However, we do know enough to be alarmed and to act.

Although my hon. friend's motion does not mention the fact, the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement is one of the great success stories of North American environmentalism. The facts tell us why: the total phosphorus loadings to Lake Erie—and I use it only as an example—once listed as “dead”, have been reduced by almost half. The rotting algae that made it largely unusable have virtually disappeared. Restrictions in the use and disposal of organochlorine in the Great Lakes basin was a major factor in the ten-fold decrease in the presence of 2,3,7,8-TCDD, one of the most deadly forms of dioxin in herring gull eggs in Lake Ontario between 1960 and 1980. In 1983, the mean annual concentration of DDE, DDT, HCB, mirex and total PCBs from two herring gull colonies on the Lake were lower than at any time since monitoring began in 1974. The decreases range from 55 per cent to 98 per cent.

● (1420)

Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, our ability to clean up the havoc we have created in the Great Lakes has been outstripped by our skill at dumping more junk into them. We have to go beyond the present agreement to address the current problems in the Great Lakes and to prepare ourselves for the future. That is why it is fortunate that the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement is up for renewal this very year. It, along with the International Joint Commission, has been a very effective instrument for co-operative action by Canada and the United States.

We must recognize though that the situation in the Great Lakes waterway has a different meaning for Americans than it does for Canadians. Ironically, although the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes provide drinking water for about 20 million Americans in all and about nine million Canadians—and here I am treating the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence system as one because they should be viewed as such—only 8 per cent of Americans derive drinking water from that system compared to one-third of all Canadians. When there is a problem in the Lakes, as there is, it constitutes merely a local or a regional concern to Americans and their federal Government, albeit a serious one.

In Canada, by contrast, the situation is a major national issue by virtue of the proportion of the total population affected by the pollution. For example, while we are appalled at the leakage of toxic waste dump sites along the Niagara River, Love Canal, 102nd Street, S-Site, Hyde Park and so on, Lee Thomas, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has to deal with similar problems all over the United States, not just along the Niagara River.

Mr. Caccia: They are not covered in the agreement.

Mr. McMillan: In that sense, his deep concern, and I don't doubt it, must be spread among more sites than is the case in Canada, where the effects of “hot spots” are concentrated largely in one part of the country. That is why, in discussing a new Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Canadians and Americans approach the bargaining table with different perspectives and a different sense of urgency, not because, I stress, Canadians are somehow purer and more environmentally sensitive than Americans, but, rather, because American problems are more widespread in a more populated, more evenly industrialized country. It would be well to remember that essential fact before we start sanctimoniously lecturing the United States on the conduct of its environmental affairs in particular cases, because our record as Canadians is pretty checkered too.

Ninety per cent of all the toxins that offend the Niagara River originate in the United States. Only 10 per cent do so in Canada. Partly as a result of the work done by previous Canadian Governments and previous Ministers, among whom I include the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), and perhaps partly out of personal interest, Lee Thomas has become particularly determined to find a solution to the Niagara. Given that the United States has, unlike Canada, numerous Niagara type environmental dump site time bombs ticking away in all parts of the country, Mr. Thomas' focus on the Niagara *per se* should be welcomed by all Canadians.

This week, he and I discussed the Niagara River Toxics Management Plan, a four party framework that will coordinate the individual action plans of the U.S. and Canadian governments, New York State and the Province of Ontario. The Management Plan is designed to define clean-up action and to schedule substantial reductions in toxic chemical loadings to the river.

Let me make two points, Mr. Speaker, about the plan. First, the largest share of the work is obviously going to be carried out by the Americans since the problem is overwhelmingly American in origin. Second, the American component of the plan, as originally presented to me by Lee Thomas, the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in Ottawa on October 17, 1985, did not meet our expectations or objectives, and I told him that.

Since then, after extensive meetings among officials and scientists of all four jurisdictions, after many direct personal representations by myself to Lee Thomas, to his agency and, through his agency, to the Government of the United States, significant improvements have been made to the original plan. In other words, the United States has been steadily more accommodating and co-operative in dealing with the problems of the Niagara River with each passing week in the last year. That is a fact. Although we are not being given, and I would not accept, empty gestures devoid of any real chance of progress, it would be unrealistic to act—certainly it would be ludicrous in the extreme if I, as Minister, were to act as though I could dictate the terms of the U.S. Government's own action plan for this purpose, however much I would like to do so.