

Canada Safe Drinking Water Act

Politicians no longer refuse to recognize environmental change because of its expected negative impact on the economy. We now realize that we need to maintain a quality of life in industrialized countries and cities in order to expand into the sunrise industries. This Bill and other measures which can draw attention to the lack of commitment to this area by the Conservative Government are welcomed by our members and our Party. We are now entering 1985.

[Translation]

We are entering 1985. We are giving one last chance.

[English]

We will give the Government a last chance to tell the Canadian people that it will reverse its direction with respect to the environment. We will ask the Minister of the Environment not only to fully reinstate the herring-gull program but to reinstate and increase the Government's financial commitment and its international political commitment to the issues that face us with respect to the environment.

If the Government is not prepared to do this and to introduce measures that will force provincial Governments across the country to respect the demands about the environment being directed to them by our citizens, then the election of September 4 was a fraud. I must confess that the election of September 4 has been a fraud, perpetrated on the Canadian people by a Government that promised to clean up the environment, that promised to deal with acid rain and that promised to talk tough with the Americans. Instead, its promises have totally collapsed as a result of the pandering and kowtowing the likes to which have never been seen before in the country of Canada.

● (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Joncas (Matapédia-Matane): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note the interest and concern shown by the Hon. Member for Beaches (Mr. Young) in tabling Bill C-212, an Act to protect and enhance the quality of drinking water in Canada.

The public is very concerned about what is happening to fresh water supplies destined for human consumption, especially when there is any suspicion of chemical contamination of drinking water taken from surface or ground water sources. This contamination may be caused by a number of factors, including leaching of toxic waste discharges, pesticide contained in water drained from agricultural land, pesticide percolating through farm wells, the presence of nitrates as a result of using fertilizer, the presence of arsenic and uranium in areas where there has been mining activity, waste evacuation and leakage from holding ponds and discharges.

Public concern about the quality of drinking water has led to a phenomenal boom in the sales of equipment for treating the household water supply. A number of equipment types are a matter of some concern to public health authorities because of the bacteriological problems they create. In fact, there is no

legislation that provides for adequate control over this equipment. Some people have opted for bottled water, a decision that is a burden on the consumer's pocketbook, while the quality of the bottled water may be inferior to the water it is supposed to replace. A source of safe drinking water is essential to survival. Drinking water is usually defined as safe if it is devoid of contaminants while containing enough minerals to make it pleasant to the taste.

Bill C-212 raises a number of questions that concern both the federal and the provincial governments and will require further discussion with the provinces. The House is of course aware that matters relating to the quality of drinking water which come under the jurisdiction of this Parliament are the responsibility of the Hon. Jake Epp, Minister of National Health and Welfare. In line with his mandate and his responsibility with respect to the quality of drinking water, the Minister of National Health and Welfare has started talks with the provincial governments with a view to formulating proposals and tabling in the House a Bill concerning the quality of drinking water in Canada. The purpose of that Bill will be to set objectives for ensuring the quality of drinking water. The Bill will also provide for quality control of chemical products and substances used in water treatment and of equipment designed for this purpose. My Department supports without reservation the work being done by the Department of National Health and Welfare. The quality of drinking water depends on the quality of the water supply. Environment Canada is concerned with this matter and works in close co-operation with the provinces on the evaluation and protection of lakes, waterways and ground water reserves in Canada. Whenever possible, preventing contamination of drinking water before the water reaches the treatment plants is preferable to building costly treatment plants for the purpose of eliminating the contaminants. Consequently, my Department complements the activities of Health and Welfare Canada in this area. More specifically, it identifies and evaluates the main sources of drinking water, prepares federal-provincial guidelines for water quality and develops guidelines for the discharge of effluents as well as pollution control plans to promote better procedures for waste discharge.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the existence of an important committee that is concerned with these matters at the federal level, and which is chaired by my Department. Created in 1968, the Interdepartmental Committee on Water is responsible for coordinating federal programs concerning water resources and for advising the Government on such programs. Since the committee was formed, it has been busy meeting the requirements of its mandate and has held 53 meetings. A total of 21 departments and agencies concerned with water issues are represented on the committee, which has 27 members. Sub-committees and task forces are formed as needed. At the present time, five sub-committees are examining respectively the agreement on