

Garrison Diversion

State for External Affairs suggested and let the House of Commons contribute a little input to the message which our Prime Minister will carry to President Carter.

On the subject of the waters of western Canada and the western plains, I hope somebody carries the message to the Secretary of State for External Affairs that Mexico has the same problem. I understand that two years ago the Americans and the Mexicans were discussing putting a dam on the Colorado so that the saline waters which come from all the irrigation upstream could be held back in the United States. I suggest to the Prime Minister that if he drew attention to this similar problem which arose between the Mexicans and the Americans, and drew a parallel with the Souris River in Manitoba, it would be helpful to us while at the same time being helpful to the Americans.

The second point I wish to make is this: our Prime Minister should explain to the President that we have plans ready in western Canada to put dams on the Souris River to divert waters in the Canadian section of that river right into Manitoba directly and not have to go through the United States to pollute their area. If these two points could be brought to the attention of the delegation which is going with the Prime Minister, when he expresses the feelings of Canadians with regard to the developments on the American side in connection with the Garrison project particularly he would have positive and constructive proposals to put forward which would make it easier for President Carter to reach a solution to this matter.

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I find myself one of the final speakers in this debate because the Garrison diversion project, if and when it goes ahead and has an adverse effect on Manitoba waters, will probably affect my constituency, which is located right on the American border, as much as any other in Manitoba.

I suppose that the Postmaster General in his remarks was actually consuming more time than the debate would take. The topic we are discussing now is certainly one of the most important we could be considering at this time, in view of the fact that we face a situation in which the Prime Minister will soon be discussing the matter with the President of the United States.

I should like to sketch very briefly the happenings which led to the motion being put forward today, and refer to the requests made by various members of parliament, certainly by members of the opposition, and the reasons for them. On January 25 the hon. member for Selkirk who, along with the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and myself has been putting as much pressure as possible on the government to act, asked the hon. member for St. Boniface, the minister responsible for Manitoba, if he would assure the House that the Prime Minister would raise the Garrison issue with the President of the United States as a matter of priority and urgency.

In response, we heard the hon. member for St. Boniface make the flippant, offhand remark, "Ask the Prime Minister." A remark of that kind does not instil confidence in the people of Manitoba. It does not lead them to think that something is

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain).]

to be done. It was interesting to note this morning that the hon. member for St. Boniface was virtually breaking his arm off by patting himself on the back for everything that has happened up to this point.

The whole question arose on February 7 when I asked the Prime Minister if he would make sure that the Garrison diversion project was high among the priorities as far as his talks with President Carter were concerned. The answer given to me was very unclear and uncertain: there was nothing positive about it. On February 17 positive action was taken, once again by the hon. member for Selkirk. I believe the House will congratulate him on his efforts on behalf of those concerned about the Garrison issue. What the hon. member for Selkirk did was write to the President of the United States urging him to place this matter high on the agenda of the discussions. It is interesting to note that within a few hours the Prime Minister corresponded with the Liberal leader in Manitoba and also, I gather, with the President of the United States, indicating that he was now prepared to put the Garrison diversion project on the agenda.

That action by my hon. friend, coming as it did at a crucial time, will assure the Garrison diversion project and the whole circumstances of construction as far as the Lonetree reservoir is concerned being talked about by the two North American leaders. The appalling thing, though, is that when the announcement was made, after members of the opposition in this House had tried, unsuccessfully, over a long period to get an assurance from the government, it was made in Manitoba through the leader of the Manitoba Liberals. It was a cheap political trick to try to maximize on something which was, in effect, forced upon them primarily by the hon. member for Selkirk.

● (1230)

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): This is a non-partisan matter.

Mr. Murta: It certainly should be non-partisan, as the hon. member says. What we in Manitoba hope, and certainly what the members of the House of Commons should hope, is that the past stance of the President of the United States on environmental matters will carry itself through and that the President will, in effect, intervene in the Garrison study, and by intervening will hold up construction on Garrison projects, specifically the Lonetree reservoir which will affect Canadian waters, until the International Joint Commission's report has been issued. I think all members on this side of the House, and certainly most people in Manitoba, are willing to wait until the International Joint Commission's report has been brought down. We hope that President Carter, in his wisdom, will recommend a halt until that report is brought down.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: I should repeat my warning, to be technically correct, that when the hon. member for Winnipeg North