medias and the Departments of Health of the provinces and territories.

[*English*]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—ST. CLAIR RIVER—CONTROL OF INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION. (B) PROVINCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY FUND

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, you will recall that on November 18 I asked a couple of questions of the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) concerning pollution in the St. Clair River which, as we all know, is of enormous concern to the people all the way down to Windsor who take their water from that river. It is also of enormous concern to my colleague from Windsor West.

Tonight I seek from the Government some assurance that it will not pursue a policy of believing that pollution can be resolved by diluting or dissolving the substances in our rivers and lakes, but that it will take a position which will go to the root of the problem for the sake of millions of Canadians and Americans whose health depends on the quality of water.

● (1845)

For too long, Mr. Speaker, we have depended on the hope that nature would somehow take care of the substances we are discharging into our waterways and that dissolution would be the answer. For decades we have relied on that principle only to discover, in recent years, that it does not work. In fact, substances find their way into rivers and beds of rivers and lakes, and eventually through evaporation of water bodies or other processes the chemical substances find their way into our food chain and endanger our health.

In the case of the St. Clair River we have heard abou the spill at Dow Chemicals. I want to ensure that the Government knows that that is not the only company operating along that river. There are some 15 plants located adjacent to the river including companies like Suncor, Esso and Petrosar. It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that some of these companies have direct sewer discharges into the St. Clair River. That means there is no intermittent discharging location such as a pond or other controlled area where the waters which are discharged by the plants can be analyzed before they are finally discharged into the river. Therefore, there is potential for pollution of the river which must be corrected.

In Sarnia and other places we must put into place preventive measures which will ensure that whatever is discharged into the river, whether or not by way of accident, is not toxic to the health of humans and the habitat. In order to do that we must improve our treatment and pretreatment of substances that are to be discharged. We are presently doing that only partially and only on certain sites where the industry is very modern and of recent construction.

I would feel much better, as I am sure every individual in Canada would, if we were to adopt a practice of anticipation and prevention of damage by ensuring that what is discharged into our waters and the air have no toxic or negative effects on our health. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the time has come to change our attitude toward the environment. The experience in Sarnia is one which teaches us that we must make this change in our way of thinking. The fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that the toxic substances which we discharge do not disappear into water and air. They become part of the habitat and have long-term effects which we may regret a generation later.

Tonight I seek from the Government an assurance that rather than continuing to search for answers in the nature of curing and reacting to the damage after the fact, it will, jointly with industries and the communities affected, put into place measures which will anticipate and prevent spills of this nature from happening in the future for the protection of the health of large numbers of people whose water quality depends on that of the Great Lakes. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary is in a position to give us this reassurance.

● (1850)

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the recent spill of perchloroethylene into the St. Clair River and the subsequent public attention it has engendered on the pollution of that river underscores the importance that citizens place on environmental protection. It is that same public concern which stimulated governments to sign the 1972 and 1978 Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreements. Under those agreements successive administrations of federal and provincial governments have striven to strenghten pollution control measures with measureable results.

But it is recognized that much remains to be done, especially with regard to the control of toxic substances. In recognition of this need, governments around the Great Lakes are focussing attention on the "hot spots"; those problem areas in which environmental quality is degraded and requires special remedial action. Currently the International Joint Commission has identified 21 such areas in the United States; 12 in Canada, in addition to the 5 interconnecting channels including the St. Clair River.

In 1983 Canada and Ontario decided to join the U.S. agencies in undertaking a detailed study of the Detroit, St. Clair and St. Marys Rivers. The intent of the massive interagency study is to detail environmental conditions and pollution sources, to provide the scientific and technical basis for the development of specific remedial action plans for these areas. These plans are to be submitted to the International Joint Commission for review and the Commission will monitor the rate and effectiveness of the measures implemented under the plan. This action is currently under way at a total cost of some $8 million and will continue and be accelerated as required.

In addition to this major initiative, on November 1, the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) directed Environment Canada to undertake a short-term investigation to detail the extent and probable sources of the tarry substance, which is the current focus of public concern. That investigation is also underway and its results will be announced shortly, probably in mid-December. To the extent that further immedi-