

Government Orders

projects, we must make sure that they undergo the strictest assessment possible.

Of course, the whole question of the Kemano project on the Nechako River comes immediately to mind and how this government has done everything it can to thwart the rules of the land when it relates to that particular project. To the committee, I say: Please hear some witnesses on that. Hearing from those witnesses would really add to some of the debate on the bill. They may have some excellent advice to give all members of this House.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's remarks carefully. I too, share many of his concerns and also his constructive amendments to this bill. I want to ask him something philosophical.

I have always believed that the environment is the one area where, if we had a national standard, that would allow us to develop a national will which would assist in this process of galvanization that we need so badly in this country right now when things are so fragile.

It seems to me that when we are putting so many different environmental bills through the House of Commons right now that we are getting reaction from different legislatures. We are getting different types of reaction. Some are supportive of our Bill C-13; others are not as supportive.

This is one area where the general public does not need a mixed signal. I believe the general public wants a clear understanding that it is the national government which really sets the standard and leads the way when it comes to the environmental standards in this country.

My question to the member is this: What does he think of the idea of having a national referendum on the environment? I am not the expert on referendums here. Of course, the expert is the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore whom I do not think we utilize as much as we should in this House with his expertise and all the work he has done. So I do not know how it would be structured.

• (1150)

The idea behind this referendum would be to hear from Canadians whether or not they want their municipality to speak on the environment, their province to

speak on the environment or if they want Canada to be the ultimate voice of direction and authority when it comes to this issue.

I was wondering if the member could give me some remarks on that.

Mr. Gardiner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member for Broadview—Greenwood. First I have a couple of comments and then I would be pleased to address his question.

My experience and view from the little travelling I have done across the country is that in their own way I think the member is right that Canadians do look to Ottawa and to the national government as the last stop gap in terms of degradation of our environment. Even regardless of party and office, there is a sense among Canadians that maybe Ottawa is the last bulwark of attempting to solve some of these problems.

If we think of political science courses, the argument from some instructors is that we will vote one way provincially and another way federally basically to try to balance the different levels of government. Maybe it is part of that. It is my sense that that is what Canadians feel.

I would strongly endorse the view on national standards. I think we have been relatively lucky in Canada so far and that we have not had a situation where one province plays off the other by saying: "You're a big polluting company, come to our province and we won't tax you or we will build all the roads for you". I do not get the sense that we have done that quite as much as say, in the southern United States where a great deal of that is heard of.

Certainly, in Canada there is the unfortunate part where we have done it in terms of labour legislation. I think of the Michelin bill in Nova Scotia, negative and bad labour legislation so that companies think they can then have a free hand in that area.

That is not to say that there have not been problems in the environment as well. I think of the former government in British Columbia and the then minister's appearance before the committee here where he was expressing some concerns about this bill. Actually, the environment minister from Alberta comes to mind as being particularly backward in his thinking, as I recall, on this legislation.