

afford relief. In its view any improvement can only be achieved by long-term changes such as are already being studied by the commission's international Great Lakes' levels board. In discussions with officials of the International Joint Commission I found that the tendency is to attribute the present high level of water to natural causes. While this may be the explanation, there are many people who feel otherwise. We have recently had brought to our attention a letter directed by 34 members of the United States House of Representatives to the President of the United States calling for action which would involve Canada as well as that country.

• (1720)

I have been in touch with Representative James O'Hara, one of the leading members of the group, and it seems to me that it is very important that we Canadians consider the proposals made by this group of American legislators, especially the suspicion which is implied in their views that the problem is, at least in part, man-made.

The three steps which these American legislators suggest to remedy the problem are as follows: first, significantly decreasing the amount of water flowing into the Great Lakes system from the Hudson Bay watershed. The water from two Canadian inland lakes has for years been diverted into Lake Superior for navigation and power purposes. They say they have been informed that the agreement under which this was done was a verbal one between United States and Canadian officials, and take the position that an arrangement as informal as this one should be readily susceptible to modification and certainly should not be allowed to continue to the detriment of the Great Lakes and the bordering communities.

Second, the Lake Superior board of control, an arm of the International Joint Commission, should agree to impound water in Lake Superior up to the limits currently permitted in the rules of regulation. By reducing the flow of water from Lake Superior into the rest of the Great Lakes system, the levels of these other lakes would be lowered and the threat of further flooding and flood-related damage would be eased. Third, the court case limiting the amount of water which the Chicago sanitary district can divert from Lake Michigan should be reopened, so that increased water can be drawn off through the Chicago ship canal, further lowering the level of the lakes in question.

The American Congressmen suggest that they were informed by an officer of the American Corps of Engineers in testimony before the Conference of Great Lakes Congressmen that these three steps, taken in concert, would result in lowering the levels of Lakes Michigan and Huron by eight inches in a year's time, with comparable but smaller reductions in the levels of Lakes St. Clair and Erie.

I am not competent to judge whether these proposals would in fact have the effect which the Congressmen wish them to have. There is a great deal of confusion on this subject and I think it is very important that the causes of and solutions to the present levels of the Great Lakes should be thoroughly and publicly investigated in Canada as well as in the United States. I believe that a committee of the provincial government is looking into this matter

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The Address—Mr. MacGuigan

and I think that some federal body should be conducting a similar investigation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacGuigan: In addition to the question of the levels of the lakes themselves, Mr. Speaker, the damage which resulted from the mid-November floods showed us a number of the other aspects of the problem. For example, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), the latter through his responsibility for the RCMP, are involved with respect to alleged speeding by commercial vessels in the Great Lakes system. At a time of high water this speeding is especially detrimental to the shoreline because of the great waves which are sent crashing against either the structures which are there to protect it or in some cases the unprotected shoreline.

The Department of National Defence may be involved because of the insufficient number of sandbags for the protection of areas which are in the process of being flooded and the insufficient number of pumps for removing water once it has gained the land. The Department of Manpower and Immigration may be involved with respect to winter capital works projects. I have informed the three municipalities in my district, the city of Windsor, the town of Tecumseh and the village of St. Clair Beach, that they would be eligible for federal winter works projects, but I do not believe that any of them have submitted applications, although I think that the town of Tecumseh has asked the provincial government for some winter works assistance in this respect.

I suggest that the Department of Urban Affairs is also involved, Mr. Speaker. In the United States, in 1968 the federal government, through the department of housing and urban affairs, set up an emergency flood insurance program. It is difficult, if not impossible, for home owners to obtain commercial insurance which will protect them against the risk of flooding along the Great Lakes. Insurance companies do not look upon this as a very good risk for them. There is a serious need for a government program of insurance against flood damage in Canada just as there is in the United States.

The Department of Public Works is also involved because of the question of erosion. The Minister of Public Works has taken the position in regard to the waters of Lake St. Clair that because the distance to the navigation channel from the shoreline varies from 6,000 feet at Peach Island, which is the beginning of Lake St. Clair, to over 20,000 feet at Pike Creek east of St. Clair Beach, any erosion damage which occurs on shore is not sufficiently clearly related to commercial navigation to give rise to any federal responsibility. That part of my constituency along the St. Clair shore which was most severely affected by the storm would, therefore, not appear to have the right to claim any assistance from the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Dubé) under the existing erosion policy.

Mr. Speaker, this may be reasonable as the response of a single department which is concerned with the administration of one existing policy which has to do with erosion caused by commercial shipping, but it is not acceptable as the total response of the federal government to the problem which has arisen in the past few months. There is also