

Quality of Water

The findings we made then are still true today. Nothing has changed. In fact, we have drawings that pinpoint the location of every one of these dump sites and every one of them contains a chemical soup. That chemical soup poses a day-to-day threat to the safe drinking water supply of the people who rely on Lake Ontario to provide that safe drinking water.

I urge the Government and Hon. Members to realize the reality of that threat. Even if Hon. Members do not pass this Bill, we should at the very minimum ask the appropriate House of Commons committee, whether it be a standing committee or a special committee, to take a good, hard look at the threat those chemical dump sites are posing to our water systems, especially in southern Ontario. It would also be worth while to take a look at some of the contaminants that are being poured into the rivers across Canada, whether by sawmills in British Columbia or by whatever caused the problem found with the blob in the Lake St. Clair area.

I see that you are indicating to me that my time has expired, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for your patience. At the very least, I would ask the House to seriously consider establishing such a committee.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, I welcome this opportunity to speak to you about the safety of our drinking water, an issue that is of considerable importance for the health and well-being of all Canadians and thus an issue that the Department of National Health and Welfare takes very seriously. I am much encouraged by the decision made by the Hon. Member for Beaches—Woodbine (Mr. Young) to table Bill C-224 which concerns the safety of our drinking water. I would like to inform the Hon. Member that I would indeed appreciate receiving a copy of his research papers, as he so kindly offered during his speech.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should recall that this Bill is similar to Bills C-212, C-266 and C-276 which were tabled in recent years. The Minister of National Health and Welfare has pointed out on a number of occasions

the importance of safe drinking water for public health. For this reason, the Department of National Health and Welfare has a primary responsibility, at the federal level, for the quality of our drinking water.

When Bills C-212, C-266 and C-276 were presented, we indicated that the Government intended to introduce its own legislation on safe drinking water in Canada.

We must not forget that both levels of government, federal and provincial or territorial, have important roles to play in distributing drinking water that is absolutely safe to drink. The Department of National Health and Welfare fully realizes the extent of the responsibility provincial governments have always had for water treatment for the purpose of producing and distributing drinking water. In fact, the provinces are primarily responsible for protecting and monitoring the water resources that provide our drinking water supply. Generally, authority has been delegated to municipalities, and the public utilities responsible for treating our water supply, to produce drinking water and provide for its distribution in their respective communities. The standards or guidelines for the quality of this water are set by the Department of National Health and Welfare, in co-operation with the provincial governments.

• (1900)

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Department has been actively involved in setting guidelines for drinking water quality ever since 1923, when an order in council was passed to regulate the bacteriological content of drinking water on board ships supplied with continental water. In 1968, the Department published the first statement of standards and universal objectives for drinking water in Canada, which set the standards for a substantial number of toxic chemical products, radioactive substances and micro-organisms. These standards were completely revised in 1978 by a federal-provincial committee. *Canadian Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality in 1978* provided guidelines regarding 51 parameters, 42 of which concern chemical substances.

Since that date, new scientific data have revealed that water contains a host of chemical products, as the Hon. Member for Beaches—Woodbine mentioned, and that some of them are the result of the treatment process itself.