

Government Orders

being followed up very closely to ensure that it really responds to the reality of truly integrating economy and environment in our governance.

Further, the public can now intervene with the commissioner. The public can send petitions to the commissioner if it does not agree with government policy or government programs relating to environment and sustainable development. The commissioner will transmit the petitions to the ministers and the ministers will be bound by this bill, Bill C-83, to respond to the commissioner within a reasonable delay so that the public at large will feel very truly that in the commissioner for environment and sustainable development it has an ally, an ombudsman, somebody it can turn to at all times and in complete open freedom.

[Translation]

The commissioner will have to table before the House an annual report to Parliament. This annual report will give the status of each department regarding its sustainable development strategy.

[English]

Furthermore, the report of the commissioner will have to give details of all the petitions he has received from the Canadian public, what action has been taken, and what response the ministers have given in regard to these petitions.

The key issue here is if this commissioner of environment and sustainable development will be truly independent and have the necessary powers, autonomy, independence to ensure that he or she is listened to and that the public feels that through this office it has a voice and a say.

The best answer to this is that we will now have to amend the law of the auditor general. I think all Canadians are fully satisfied to date about the independence, the autonomy, the openness of the auditor general to freely criticize government when he or she feels that criticism is deserved and that criticism is carried far and wide into the land and the government pays heed. I am convinced that it will be the case with the commissioner for environment and sustainable development and that the commissioner will have the full independence and autonomy that he or she deserves on behalf of the Canadian public.

We have just undergone work on behalf of the committee on the environment and sustainable development under the leadership of the member for Davenport on a massive review of the mainstay of Canadian environmental legislation at the federal level, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. This review has touched on the various aspects of what must guide the environmental cause in the future: the fact that we cannot govern ourselves now in little compartments, that ecosystems mean that everything is connected with everything else and we human beings are connected with the ecosystems, that without this interconnection, this interdependence of all the elements that form the ecosystems and bioregions, economic develop-

ment or profit is impossible. You cannot plant trees in a desert. You cannot use water if the stream has dried up.

• (1335)

We who are blessed with natural resources beyond compare have a duty to guide ourselves in the future so that instead of short term we look to what our aboriginal brothers and sisters say: seven generations ahead. We really truly believe, as they do, that a healthy mother earth provides a healthy quality of life but a sick mother earth makes us sick as well.

I believe that the CEPA review, having put out all these new ideas into the realm of the Canadian public today, will see in the office of the commissioner of environment and sustainable development a tremendous opportunity for these ideas gaining ground in actual governance inside the federal system.

I believe the time has come for us to realize that we cannot be the society of waste we have been. We cannot continue to be the society of overuse of energy. We must live differently. We must find new ways of production. We cannot toxify and harm our natural resources forever without suffering the consequences. This is why this bill is so important to all of us today.

I was listening to the official opposition with all its litany of partisan politics about the referendum. I have always believed and my experience has shown me, as a politician in Quebec and also at the federal level, that the environment is the greatest binding thread among people because it knows no colour, it knows no race, no creed, no physical boundary. The environment is all of us. It is life itself. It is whatever sustains life and living. It is a tremendous binding force for good.

I think at this time especially we should reflect on the tremendous binding force the environment can be among Canadians. If we really truly believe in the environmental cause, in quality of life, in the seven generations, then we will back Bill C-83 with great conviction. I am convinced that it will change the way we govern ourselves. It will lead to change in the way we act and live as citizens so that we will look to our natural resources to be there not only when we ourselves grow old but for the generations to come.

It is with great conviction that I will vote for Bill C-83.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to be here today to take part in the debate and listen to the hon. parliamentary secretary respond to the bill before us.

The parliamentary secretary make a couple of important notations in his remarks to the House. He talked about sustainable development being more than just words. Obviously all of us agree with that. The whole activity of working toward sustainability must be more than just words. It must be seen to be happening, not just heard to be happening. Governments often are not trusted because they say things that cannot be seen.