

*Government Orders*

Nowadays, we cannot talk about the environment without addressing the issues of health, economy, energy, taxation, public transportation. Everything is linked together.

In fact, all things are interdependent. The whole environmental issue hinges on ecosystems and biodiversity. We need something to support all forms of life, our natural resources and everything that is essential to the wealth of any country, of any community.

We realize today that the only way for us to protect the environment and to ensure that sustainable development is a constant concern in our lives is to integrate the environment with all other aspects of government. That is why it is becoming increasingly important to talk not only about the environment but also about sustainable development, biodiversity and interdependence.

That is why, in an ideal world, we would not even need an environment department. In an ideal world, such a department would not be needed because each department, whether it be the Department of Health, Finance, Transport or Fisheries, would in itself be a sustainable development department, an environment department.

But we are far from this ideal world. We still need a Department of the Environment to act as a watchdog and to ensure that environmental protection becomes an integral part of the agenda of all other departments.

[*English*]

This is the central objective of Bill C-83. The central objective is to ensure that each ministry of the government, whether it be finance, transportation, health, or any other ministry, will be convinced that the way to promote the environmental cause is to make each ministry's activities and actions sustainable in the long term.

• (1345)

The reason for the bill is to ensure sustainable development strategies within the aegis of each ministry of the federal government. We have now constituted Bill C-83 to install a commissioner of environment and sustainable development within the office of the auditor general to monitor and inspire sustainable development strategies to be installed in each ministry of government, subject to public scrutiny through the office of the commissioner; the commissioner being installed within the office of the auditor general with all the autonomy and independence the office implies and sanctions.

The idea will be for these sustainable development strategies to be public in scope and accountable to the people of Canada through Parliament. They will have to be filed in Parliament and will be monitored by the commissioner who will have to report on them.

Bill C-83 will require the sustainable development strategies to be upgraded on a systematic basis so that the commissioner will have a benchmark starting in two years on the progress of these sustainable development strategies, considering the evolution of society in all its forms.

The office of the commissioner for environment and sustainable development is a key development in the governance of federal institutions. Besides the very important task of monitoring the sustainable development strategies of the ministries, another extremely important element of the commissioner's duties will be to be accountable to the public at large so that the public will have access to the commissioner's office to inquire, to complain if necessary, about the activities of the various ministries with regard to their sustainable development strategies and their environmental consciences.

The second element of public participation, that of accountability to the public, is a feature of the act which is almost if not as important as the first because the two are intertwined. This will provoke a transparent act, a bill that opens the scope of government to the public to ensure the government not only preach the preservation and enhancement of natural resources and the ecosystems that sustain all activities, but put the theory, the concept and the principles into practice in the every day governing of the various ministries of government.

Bill C-83 in that sense is a great step forward for the government, a clear achievement for the Minister of the Environment, in having recognized the necessity for the office in the red book which was the flag ship of the Liberal Party of Canada during the last election and, more important, to have carried out this key commitment at an early stage in its evolution as a government.

• (1350)

I am very pleased to have been part of the standing committee that examined and reported on the concept and office of a commissioner of environment and sustainable development. We are the first industrialized country of our size to have implemented such an office. We followed the lead of a very small country, a leading country of the world in this sense, New Zealand, which seven years ago installed an office of commissioner of sustainable development.

During the course of our hearings we were fortunate to have had the benefit of the experience and the advice of the commissioner for New Zealand, whose trail blazing work today has been the source of inspiration for ourselves. It is our hope that now that Canada has gone forward with the red book commitment and installed a commissioner for environment and sustainable development, this will become a practice that hopefully will be followed by the other nations of the world.