

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order. Debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, before speaking to the motion moved by my hon. friend from Davenport (Mr. Caccia), I would like to say that I was somewhat surprised earlier today when I saw the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Gurbin) rise in the House and start off his speech by denigrating my hon. colleague's motion and describing it as redundant and even useless.

I find this surprising, because first of all the motion is not negative. We often have Opposition motions that censure the Government, which is not the case here. This motion is positive from beginning to end. It does not censure the Government. It acknowledges what has been done so far. It mentions existing agreements between Canada and the United States on removing pollution from the Great Lakes. It asks the Government to do more, which is only normal, and I fail to see why my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary, is trying to lessen the importance of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should look at what the motion says and try and find whatever negative aspects it may contain. The motion says, and I quote:

That this House urges that the Government of Canada insist that the Government of the United States regard the fulfillment of responsibilities under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement as an obligation, rather than a concession, and further urges the Government of Canada to renegotiate the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to include toxic substance control programs to restore water quality in the Niagara, St. Clair and St. Lawrence Rivers for the benefit of millions of Canadians and Americans and that such negotiations should lead to the adoption of the zero discharge principle already embodied in Annex 12 of the Agreement.

As you see, Mr. Speaker, the motion does not even criticize the Government. It asks the Government to take some additional steps, and in my comments I intend to ask the Minister for some clarification. I also intend to ask him to act more specifically in certain areas, but I am not going to start by kicking him in the shins and tell him that he didn't do a thing, although you must admit that during the year and a half this Government has been in power, in some areas, at least as far as my own region is concerned, some more specific action could have been taken.

To get back to the motion of my colleague from Davenport, it will at least have given Parliament the benefit of a full day's debate on the quality of the water of the Great Lakes, which is something I can only applaud.

Mr. Speaker, the Montreal riding I represent, the riding of Saint-Jacques, may seem very far from the Great Lakes. And it is. It is hundreds of miles away. However, we are closer than we think.

The St. Lawrence River binds us together and ties us closer, but it is not necessarily to our advantage when it comes to pollution. The riding where I live lies along the St. Lawrence River, all the way from Atwater Avenue to Papineau Street. Unfortunately it has been years since Montrealers—at least

those who live in my neighbourhood—were able to enjoy their proximity to the river water because the port of Montreal covers the full extent of my riding. Thanks to certain initiatives taken by the previous Liberal Government, an opening has been made through the port of Montreal so that we now have a window through which downtown Montreal residents can have access to their river. One problem remains to be solved, however: now that people have access to the river they are quite upset to realize that they cannot enjoy it as much as they would like to for the simple reason that the water of the St. Lawrence River does not lend itself to the kind of activities which people generally look forward to. Perhaps they can take boat or canoe rides, but they cannot play in the water, go for a swim or practice scuba-diving because it is prohibited as a result of pollution.

At the risk of being somewhat sentimental, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that some of the fondest memories of my younger days—or of my life, for that matter—relate to an annual visit we made when I was living downtown at the age of eight or nine. It was almost an annual pilgrimage. My parents were not rich by any means, but they managed to save a bit of money to take us for a whole day to Belmont Park close to the Rivière-des-Prairies. Not only did we enjoy ourselves in the various rides, but the best part of it was going for a swim in the Rivière-des-Prairies at the end of the afternoon. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it has been years since people have been allowed to swim in the Rivière-des-Prairies.

At the risk of letting on that I am getting older, I was thinking earlier that you have to be at least 45 to remember people swimming in the St. Lawrence River and to recall the great beaches along its shores. I can understand your smile, Mr. Speaker, as I have just betrayed the fact that I am over 45 even though I may not look it. In any case, for young people today, the St. Lawrence is not a river where people swim, it is a dump, and as a certain Minister of the Environment said a while ago, it could even be described as a cesspool.

Naturally, a lot of the pollution does not necessarily come from the Great Lakes. A lot of it comes directly from the Montreal region. For instance, the sewers of a centre with a population of some two million people certainly do a lot of damage to the water of the St. Lawrence. There is also the fact that surface waters contain a lot of lead because of the very dense automobile traffic in the greater Montreal area, and there are also the industrial wastes from a number of plants as well as waste from the many cities and villages upstream from Montreal as far as the Ottawa River and all the way along the St. Lawrence up to the Great Lakes.

Mr. Speaker, a major part of the pollution in the immediate vicinity of Montreal is being cleaned up gradually thanks to initiatives of the city of Montreal and the various Governments. The newspaper of Saturday March 1 pointed out one thing which is certainly cause for rejoicing, namely the fact that the great sewage treatment plant in Eastern Montreal will provide some breathing space for the St. Lawrence River, called "this chronic patient" in the newspaper, when it