

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Hon. Hugh John Flemming (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, the motion we are considering expresses the view that in order to protect and preserve our environment, immediate national standards for environmental quality must be set for air, water and land. I submit this is an important objective which we would do well to consider carefully in the realization that most people in our country consider the subject to be of tremendous interest and concern. I would like to have seen the word "improvement" in the motion because I do not think one can change overnight a situation which has been in existence for 200 or 300 years. I believe that is too much to expect.

I believe, however, we should work toward improvement. As a consequence, I would like to have seen the word "improvement" in the motion, recognizing full well that it can only come about through people in authority such as representatives of the government of Canada and of our provinces and municipalities, as well as citizens generally taking great interest in improving the situation.

I submit that the control of pollutants in the air, in the water and in the land requires an element of greater supervision and regulation than now exists. It may be all right to say the federal authorities should exercise this control, but in my opinion you get better results are closer to the situation if you have control through the provincial and municipal authorities. When the federal machine is involved, people have to come to Ottawa to tell their story and in the process I am afraid a lot of effectiveness is lost. I suggest that if we dealt with this problem at the municipal level we would achieve better results because the municipalities are right on the spot.

The motion says that the municipalities should be assisted by loans to them and to certain industries to ensure no further delay in the building of sewage treatment plants. That seems a laudable objective. Therefore I think this House can say that the substance of the motion is logical and hon. members should have no hesitation supporting it in so far as the principle is concerned.

I think the House would do well to consider that, while hon. members might approve of the principle of working with great diligence toward all the objectives contained in the motion, these activities should of necessity be coupled with an awareness of existing situations which involve the services of many people. This adds up to jobs. I do not think we should merely say we are going to do away with something overnight when the livelihood of many people is at stake. I think it is a reasonable assumption that improvement can be affected. I think we should say that conditions which have existed for many years must be improved. We must believe that the situation, rather than deteriorating further is improving and from every point of view.

I submit that in our approach to the improvement of the environment we must be governed first by short-term objective. The short-term objective may have become critical and must be dealt with immediately by some jurisdictional authority. The longer term objective, of course, involves government, it makes no difference at what level, enunciating the policy it intends to continue from year to

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year with the idea of ultimately effecting improvement. I think we must take these matters into consideration when dealing with the problem in the short term and in the long term.

• (2010)

I have a distinct recollection of the situation that existed in my province of New Brunswick, and the general quality of water resources there when our administration was in office. At that time I took quite a bit of satisfaction, and in fact a reasonable amount of pride, in our passing legislation covering this matter. I think we were a bit ahead of our time, Mr. Speaker, because that was in the mid-1950s.

Mr. Pepin: It was a good Conservative government!

Mr. Flemming: That's just it. I know that the minister, with his intelligence and knowledge, can quickly recognize something that has merit. We passed legislation in this field and agreed to participate in the improvements of which I speak. We agreed to support the municipalities financially if they would instal sewage treatment plants and facilities of that nature. We also set up a water authority in that province. It had the duty to study the situation and recommend concrete steps that could be taken to bring about improvements.

I think we obtained some good results from that legislation. In fact, the legislation is still in operation. The Saint John River is a case in point. It is a long river. It lies partly in the state of Maine, becomes the international river between the state of Maine and New Brunswick, then it comes into New Brunswick and becomes a New Brunswick river. Three different types of authority were involved in the legislation, with all their various problems created from a jurisdictional point of view. There are many villages and towns along the Saint John River. Generally speaking, they all have sewage disposal systems. It must be remembered that one branch of the Saint John River rises in the state of Maine and villages and towns are located on its banks.

As my hon. friend from Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) knows, there are industrial plants in his city. In fact, there is a large plant there which was guilty of causing some pollution of that river. The matter has now been rectified, but it posed a problem for some time. As I say, we made an improvement. I give this example because I think this type of approach should become more national.

I now turn to the question of the Bay of Fundy, which is in the southern part of New Brunswick, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence which is on its eastern side. Here I deal with the question of transportation. At present we have some problems connected with the spillage of oil from ships. We had the wreck of the *Arrow* and the pollution by oil of Chedabucto Bay. In spite of the pride that we all have in Bill C-2, which provides certain penalties and regulations, I think a little more attention might have been paid to the tax imposed on vessels which by the nature of their physical condition and age are a greater menace to navigation and a source of oil spillage than more modern, larger vessels.