

Private Members' Business

The federal government's current proposals for dealing with the environment in the Constitution are based on the very same principles that come into play in the free trade agreement, privatization, and deregulation.

These proposals are based upon the lowest possible wages, the lowest possible job protection and the lowest possible ecological standards. *Carte blanche* for developers and the short-term interests of big business bottom lines are the winners in the constitutional proposals, and not the environment that we are borrowing from our children.

As the Assembly of First Nations' brief to the Standing Committee on the Environment reminds us, the earth and its biosystems existed as a whole before humankind. European economic and political development commenced the true partitioning of land with various enclosure acts. Our way of looking at the environment to date is to try to package it into contrived political boundaries and play political football with issues too important to consider a game.

If we are to survive we must mimic the natural life systems of the earth. A Constitution must serve to divide responsibilities for the environment as the environment exists crossing politically created and redefined borders.

In order to recognize every Canadian's right to a healthy and safe environment, we need a strong federal role in international issues. Catastrophes such as deterioration of the ozone and global warming need concerted federal attention.

The federal government's proposals would lead us exactly the wrong way down a one-way street. The trend to provincial pollution havens implicit in these dangerous proposals must be reversed.

There is good reason for a strong federal role in the environment. The West Coast Environmental Law Association stated: "The environment is Canada's national heritage. Every Canadian has a right to have that heritage protected. It follows that every Canadian has a right to reasonable protection of all of the Canadian environment, and not merely the environment of the province in which he or she lives. It is important that the federal government set minimum environmental standards so that the provinces are not tempted to compete

among themselves to attract industry by cutting environmental standards".

This call to recognize the right of every person in Canada to a safe and healthy environment is the first step in protecting that heritage, in honouring the trust of borrowing our environment from our children.

I ask the House for its support.

Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I welcome this opportunity to discuss the hon. member's proposal. Indeed it is an important one.

• (1720)

It is an important one, particularly in light of the fact that the goals which the hon. member is seeking to achieve are indeed the same goals that the federal government is seeking to achieve.

Where we differ is with respect to the question of how best to achieve those goals. The hon. member, as you know, is proposing that we should establish and entrench an environmental bill of rights.

In our mind that is not the best approach for the preservation of the environment in Canada. We agree with him and I am sure all members of the House would join with me in saying that we share a common goal of striving to ensure that the environment be protected not only for this generation but for future generations.

We believe that his approach, and I know it is a view shared by others, would in fact fragment the environment because it would be based upon the assumption that the environment could be managed in isolation of its social and economic context.

I am of the opinion, and I believe it is an opinion shared by many in this House, that the best way in Canada both in the past and in the present for us to resolve our differences with others, to resolve the problems which are common to all of us is through a process of dialogue and co-operation.

In our minds the process of dialogue and co-operation first of all must include working in concert with other levels of government because it is very clear that they indeed have important roles of responsibility.

I think the judgment on the Oldman reaffirms the fact that the provincial government indeed has certain areas of responsibility. I might say in passing that I was pleased to see the Oldman decision reaffirming the philosophy of the government as practised in the implementation of