

*Oral Questions***ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

TOXIC CHEMICAL CONTROL PROGRAM

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue a question that I asked twice yesterday during the environment debate of the Minister of the Environment, without getting a reply.

Why, as of April 1 this year, can Canadians no longer count on the toxic chemical control program which was suddenly dropped without any notice, a program meant to protect the health of Canadians? It measures the presence of toxic chemicals in lakes and rivers. It monitors the leaching into the Niagara River from the chemical dump sites there which are of great concern to four million Canadians who live in the Niagara Peninsula. Why did the Minister all of a sudden cancel this program, without any notice?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the research program to which the former Minister of the Environment is referring was a temporary one which existed already under his mandate. He is therefore well aware of the terms of reference of this research program. It was a temporary one which was due to expire at the end of the fiscal year 1984-85. Mr. Speaker, this is the type of spurious issue and question which the former Minister of the Environment likes to raise in the House. If he should require further information, I would provide it to him in writing. This program has never been cut.

[*English*]

REQUEST THAT PROGRAM BE RENEWED

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister look at her mandate, her responsibilities, her duties, and discover that if she were to do that she has the full power and responsibility and the mandate to go to Treasury Board and ask for a renewal of any program, particularly a program having to do with the health of Canadians? Why did the Minister surreptitiously cancel this program and not take the trouble to renew it for the protection of the health of millions of Canadians in the Niagara region?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the dramatic stance which the former Minister of the Environment has taken does not fool anybody. I repeat that this program came to its normal end, and that if I did not reinstate it, it is because it was a temporary one and is now included in my main estimates.

• (1450)

[*English*]

HEALTH

NATIONAL EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CENTRE PROPOSAL

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In the House in the last week or so, as well as in northwestern Ontario, we have been concerned about the immediate impacts of the PCB spill, but I would like to take a look at the longer term. The Minister knows that the registration of incidents of birth defects and certain diseases can assist Governments, both federal and provincial, in pinpointing above average outbreaks. In some cases this pinpointing can allow Governments to determine that there has been an environmental cause or environmental link.

Would the Minister be prepared to provide sufficient funding for the operation of a national epidemiological centre so that we could monitor the eruption of any specific diseases in a specific area, and therefore react more quickly to the impacts of chemicals on our environment?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in response to the Hon. Member's question, he should be aware that both through the Department of National Health and Welfare and provincial Departments of Health there is a constant monitoring of any risk factors. If he is specifically referring to risk factors as related to the PCB situation in northern Ontario, which perhaps has given rise to the question but is not the specific point of his question, there is very close co-operation between the federal and provincial Governments in terms of assessing risk factors. At the moment, unless other evidence is made available to me, I believe the system is working well and protecting the health of Canadians.

MONITORING OF BIRTH DEFECTS

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, agencies like the Canadian Congenital Anomalies Surveillance System have raised some concerns about the lack of proper funding for them to do the kind of job they need to do to monitor birth defects. Would the Minister reconsider the level of funding which is going to that organization, to ensure that at the very least, when children are involved, we begin to see some patterns to which we can react to make sure that we treat the problem, and not just a band-aid?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, on the questions of congenital birth defects and exchange of information, it has been my experience in discussing the issues with my provincial counterparts that what would possibly be more helpful is a more free exchange of information that is already available both within provincial jurisdictions and within federal jurisdictions. If he goes back to the Canada Health Act, there was a provision for information