

Garrison Diversion

● (1750)

Mr. Roger Simmons (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on the subject raised by the hon. member for Selkirk-Interlake (Mr. Sargeant). He covered a fair amount of what I intended to say about the background of the project. I am grateful to him because it allows me to get on to the second part of my remarks. He covered quite adequately what is involved in this irrigation project. He explained how the water would get from the Missouri basin to the Hudson Bay basin. Also he covered some concerns which I intended to express in so far as the introduction of foreign species into Canadian waters is concerned. I thank him for covering those areas quite adequately, and I would like to move on to the second part of my remarks.

In so doing, I should like to respond briefly to the comments of the hon. member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) which were, by and large, helpful, but which in one detail only tended to contradict his appeal for non-partisanship. Having made that appeal a couple of times, he then went on to imply that somehow the Government of Canada had not taken a position.

I believe those members who were listening will attest that the position of the Government of Canada was made as recently as 5.25 this afternoon. This is not the first time the position has been made, but in case the hon. member did not hear the hon. member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) articulate the position of the Government of Canada on this matter, I should like to repeat it for him. At that time my colleague said that it was the firm and unchanging position of the Government of Canada that we are unalterably opposed to any transfer of water from the Missouri basin to the Hudson Bay basin which would involve the transfer of foreign biota, that is to say, foreign fish species and parasitic diseases. She went on to say that we were supported by the findings of the International Joint Commission, that any such transfer would have serious and totally unacceptable consequences for the people and the province of Manitoba. Those comments were made by my colleague approximately 35 minutes ago, but obviously he did not hear them. It is a fairly clear position which indicates our concern. We have made that concern known on a number of occasions to the people in power in Washington.

At this point I should like to review some of the things the government has done to ensure that the ill-effects about which the hon. member for Portage-Marquette and the hon. member for Selkirk-Interlake talked do not take place. First, it is important to stress that the Government of Canada and the government of Manitoba have worked quite closely together on this particular subject, as it is understandably a mutually-shared concern. Since at least 1969 there have been constant consultations in Canada to ensure that all our respective concerns were taken into account and were properly addressed. Manitoba officials made an important contribution to the IJC study to which the hon. member for Selkirk-Interlake referred. The government of Manitoba has been an active participant in our meetings with United States officials on this subject.

We believe we have achieved substantial progress in having our concerns addressed by the United States. The United States government, in a number of official communications, has assured us that it would honour its treaty obligations not to pollute our waters so as to injure health or property in Canada. That is a very important assurance. It has also pledged that the construction and operation of works of direct concern will be held in abeyance until we have been consulted.

Hon. members are aware that the United States Congress has recognized our concern. In my view this has been a major step forward. This degree of assurance that Canadian interests were acknowledged and were to be considered has not always been the case. In the early 1970s the proponents of the project appeared to assume that the massive project would have little or no adverse impact of any kind, let alone effects on Canada. At that time the emphasis was on engineering studies. Information on flow returns, the quality of those returns and specific areas to be irrigated, had not been fully developed.

Through an extended process of keeping pressure on for more information, we know with far more precision what is likely to happen. Through a process of analysing that information, providing the United States with our views, and informing them very specifically and firmly of our concerns, they know what we are talking about. I believe it would be appropriate, then, to review some of the things we have done to ensure we knew what was happening and what was likely to happen to Canada, and how in turn we made sure the United States knew our views.

In 1969 the Canadian government sought detailed information from the United States government on the project. However, at that time environmental studies had not been undertaken and therefore specific details were absent. At that time the United States national environment policy act had not been signed into law. Indeed, it was not signed into law until January 1, 1970.

Meetings were agreed to in 1973 to exchange information and views. However, even by then Canadian authorities were expressing some reservations. By 1973, although available information was still very much incomplete, a very stiff diplomatic note was sent to the United States expressing our concern and demanding assurances that we would not be injured.

It should be noted that during this time period and, indeed, down to this day, a number of organizations in the United States were also raising what United States courts found to be legitimate concerns. In particular, United States courts offered a number of judgments on several factors relating most directly to impacts on wildlife and the adequacy of the environmental assessment process undertaken by the proponents.

In any event, in early 1974 the United States government replied to our 1973 note with the first of a series of assurances that we would be protected, that is, the United States government would, as we would in our turn, honour its treaty commitment under the Boundary Waters Treaty not to pollute waters flowing into Canada to the injury of health and prop-