

*Quality of Water*

Canadians, and indeed people around the world, are seriously concerned about the abuses that we as human beings have been perpetrating on the environment and the ecology.

I do not want to sound too cynical when I make these remarks because I welcome that new-found interest. In doing that I think the Government should take an enlightened view toward this Private Members' Bill presented for the consideration of the House and allow it to go to a legislative committee for further consideration.

The Bill has four main elements. One, it would provide opportunities for public involvement in the making of regulations to set maximum permissible levels for contaminants and other substances in drinking water applicable to both public and private water systems.

Two, it would establish a water review board to monitor the safety of our drinking water.

Three, it would establish an expert water advisory council to apprise the Minister of current research related to drinking water quality, contaminants, substances and their effects. It would also promote new research into drinking water quality.

It came as some surprise to me when this Bill was in the draw and was drawn for debate. It went before the committee which makes the decisions on which Bills receive one hour of debate or six hours of debate followed by a vote of the House. Prior to my appearance before that committee my office had received a number of telephone calls from the Law Branch of the House of Commons to the effect that it did not feel that this Bill was properly before the House, that the responsibility for water quality rests with municipal governments and to some extent provincial governments. That came as a surprise to me because I never heard that argument before. This Bill has been in the House previously on at least four or five occasions. At no time did any government Member or a Minister raise that kind of objection. It came up under the present Government and a prior Liberal Government, so it came as a surprise to me to hear that kind of argument being made for a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker.

Water quality clearly falls under federal jurisdiction in some respects. That is why we have an International Joint Commission. That is why we have international

agreements, particularly with the United States, which govern the water quality in the Great Lakes system and other water bodies across the country.

I understand the argument and accept it that municipal governments have the clear responsibility of supplying safe drinking water to the populations they serve, namely, the delivery of systems. Surely to goodness, the federal and provincial Governments have a clear responsibility for the quality of water before it comes under municipal jurisdiction, such as in Lake Ontario. Millions of people live around Lake Ontario. They rely on Lake Ontario for a safe drinking water supply. But that water is supplied by the Niagara River which is under joint jurisdiction between Canada and the U.S. How can an argument be made that the federal Government has no jurisdiction over the water quality? I say to the House as I have said in committee that there are all kinds of studies which have been made and which have concluded that water quality falls under federal jurisdiction.

For my purposes I make the argument that the federal Government has jurisdiction over the Great Lakes through the international joint agreement with the U.S.

I do not want to get too far off the arguments that the Bill presents, but on the best statistics alone, it is reasonable enough to believe that the federal Government, the House of Commons if you will, has a clear responsibility to give guidance and if that guidance is not forthcoming, the power to provide legislation to enforce the quality of drinking water across Canada and to work preferably in co-operation with provincial Governments to ensure that that happens. In the absence of that co-operation being established, I think that we at the federal level have the responsibility to act on behalf of Canadians to ensure that water quality is maintained at levels we would expect from our water resources.

I just want to give some background information about the seriousness of the dangers that are presented through our water supply, not only in Canada but internationally as well.

Canada has less than 1 per cent of the world's population yet we possess an estimated 25 per cent of the world's fresh water. The Great Lakes contain 18 per cent of the planet's surface fresh water. Canada's rivers have a combined flow of some 68,000 cubic metres per second,