

Government Orders

As the member for Calgary Southwest said earlier in his remarks, there are people out there who believe that maybe this legislation should wait until some of the land claims, et cetera are settled. I tend to share his view that when it comes to this issue, time is of the essence.

I believe it goes well beyond the land claims issue. I believe that right now if there is one issue in this country that can still galvanize us as a nation, it is the issue of the water resource management. It is very important that the national government take a lead role in making sure our legislation is right up to speed.

As time evolves here, if the position of the national government in terms of water resource management is not crystal clear, we are going to get into all kinds of jurisdictional disputes. I see this bill as being very important in sending out a strong signal that even though we respect the territorial management of these water resource management bills, at the same time we should never forget that the national government is ultimately the body responsible for managing the environment in this country.

It seems that in the last few days we are getting conflicting signals, that different provinces are suggesting for example that Bill C-13 is somehow an infringement on provincial responsibility and authority.

We should set the record straight right now. If we cannot have national environmental standards, and if we have a situation where the national government is subservient in an environmental act to a provincial standard, then what kind of a joke are we going to be to the rest of the world. If there is one thing that we all agree on today, it is the fact that we must do what we have to do to save the planet. The last thing that we need is a situation where coming from Canada we have seven different voices and seven different standards as to how the environmental standards of this country should be set, or managed, or administered.

• (1130)

When it comes to this particular issue, I believe it is the one issue on which Canadians want us to speak with one voice. We have been talking a lot for the last few months about referendums. We wanted to have referendums on the Constitution, we wanted to have referendums on different aspects of our economy. If there is one

area on which we should consider a national referendum it should be the environment.

If we had a national referendum in this country as to what body of government should ultimately be responsible for setting national standards, I would venture to say that 90 per cent of Canadians would say the national government should be the ultimate spokesman in this area.

I want to commend the government for putting these bills on the agenda, moving them through so quickly and making sure there is a clear-cut signal sent that our environmental house will be in order in the not too distant future. As I said earlier, it is the one issue on which all Canadians will get behind us in this House if we say that we are ultimately going to set national standards.

Mr. Alex Kindy (Calgary Northeast): I would like to make a comment and maybe ask a question of the hon. member.

This act respecting water resources in the Northwest Territories is certainly an act that would be acceptable. What bothers me is that we do not talk about the water resources in Canada and the implications to the North American continent.

The Americans have been interested in Canada's water for a long, long time. I remember seeing a program on American television in which Californians were talking about their problems with water. They said the problem is going to be solved once they get the water from Canada, from the Northwest Territories and other rivers.

We had a free trade agreement and if I remember correctly, the government said that water was not included in this agreement. Now the government is negotiating what it calls NAFTA, the North American free trade agreement. We, as members of Parliament, have not been consulted. Other members in the House have asked questions of the government. They wanted information because they say the Mexicans know how the negotiations are progressing. The American Congress is involved but Canadian parliamentarians are not. We are being set aside and in one moment, maybe next week, the government is going to present an agreement and ask us to support the North American free trade agreement which might sell our water to the Americans.