

the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington. It is the question of such political activity that we are raising in the House today to illustrate the Government's lack of agenda on such an important matter.

I submit that when the Parliamentary Secretary speaks on this subject he would be better off to tell us the record of the Government and not simply comment on the Environmental Contaminants Act in the future. As I indicated, such a measure will not take care of the discharge and leaks of contaminants into our rivers. We must clean up the present mess and we must deal with industries which discharge their substances into the St. Clair River daily. Such action is necessary in order to show the Americans that we take our obligation under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement seriously with respect to the St. Clair River and we expect them to do the same along the Niagara.

These are the contemporary issues on the table. The question is not whether the information is reliable. What further information does the Parliamentary Secretary need before he is convinced that action must be taken?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? If not, resuming debate.

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to extend to Members of the House and the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) in particular the regret of the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) at not being able to be here today to participate in the debate. He is presently in Calgary announcing the Four Mountains Park Plan which provides guidelines for the management of four of Canada's greatest national treasures—Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay National Parks—over the next 15 years. The plan will ensure that the heritage resources in these parks are protected and preserved for future generations of Canadians.

On behalf of the Minister let me explain the Government's position on the environment and the Hon. Member's motion in particular. Before doing so, I found it rather interesting that the Member for Davenport thought that the debate should not take place today because there were important budgetary Bills that should be passed. I agree with him, but I find the argument which he puts forward to be a weak one, especially on behalf of the Liberal Party. On the one hand, if we look at budgetary legislation, they are the ones who have been blocking it, be it in the House or in committee. That is the first point to be made. To make it very specific let us look at the family allowance legislation which they passed. They started implementing a reduced family allowance benefit in January and got the legislation passed in December of that year. However, he lectured us on the fact that we should be getting these Bills through the House of Commons. I agree that we should get them through the House, and I agree with the British system in terms of the passage of budgetary Bills. In number of days after the Budget comes down they are passed, and the Opposition has that period of time within which to debate them. I agree with the Hon. Member, but I do not

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think he should use the argument both ways when he tries to make his point.

● (1210)

Mr. Penner: You were a great teacher when you were in the Opposition.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): I am pleased I now have their attention.

The other point which I should like to make is that the Government indicated that we should have a regular period of time in which the Budget comes down so that ordinary Canadians and the provincial Governments can plan. In fact, that will be done this year. It speaks exactly to the point raised by the Hon. Member. I know he is interested in the environment. I mean that sincerely, but I suggest that his memory about budgetary items is not only somewhat faulty but has been put into a time capsule. If he is a Liberal, I would suggest that he should open up his mind a bit.

I should like to speak specifically to the motion before us. Toxic chemicals which we now find in all parts of the environment are indications that we have been living with the benefits of a chemical society and often without addressing the risks associated with those benefits. This is not a new problem and it is not only an issue with which this Government has to deal. I think the Hon. Member, as a former Minister of the Environment, would indicate that he made some strides but, in his more sanguine moments, I am sure he would also indicate that he did not make as much progress as he thought he might, or as he wished. I think all of us have to have a common front on some of these issues.

The problem has been with us since we started to depend upon chemicals for our lifestyle. Of course, it was accelerated after the last World War. There are warning symptoms of a very real problem facing countries as they learn to deal with both the benefits and the risks of living with chemicals. We live in a global chemical society. We plough chemicals into our fields, we release them into the air, we treat our food with them, we wear them, and we use them in thousands of products. Each day Canadians enjoy a quality of life enhanced but dependent upon the use of chemicals. Possibly life without chemicals has become virtually impossible, and I would suggest even unthinkable. It is important for us to put forward both these points of view in this debate.

The people involved in that industry and in that research have done much to enhance our quality of life. We often discuss chemicals in a negative light when we deal with important environmental issues, but their benefits to Canadians are high and immediate. However, short-term benefits are creating a long-term legacy of continuing problems which we all have to address. We must ensure that we do not make decisions today that will cause problems for tomorrow's generations. The St. Clair River, which Hon. Members have discussed in the House, makes that point clear.