

Government Orders

I have a case in point in own city of Winnipeg where I am trying to promote the development of a tri-level task force to deal with the degradation of water in the three rivers running through that city. I think that is a more constructive way to approach the problem as opposed to ending up in front of the tribunals.

I am saying what we should do in the future, which is the reason this bill is important. Unless we have the proper tools at the federal level, the message will not get through. We should be able to see where this kind of madness has prevailed and say that we are trying to solve the problem by building a big capital project and bringing about all kinds of unintended consequences. Until we can say we have the right to make such assessments, we will not begin to get the proper discipline and proper ethics in place in other parts of Canada.

This is as much an ethic and discipline upon ourselves as it is upon others. I am sorry in a sense that the legislation does not reflect that reality, because this in some ways could be the most important way for the federal government to say it is changing its rules. As long as the loopholes are there and the open clauses and the ways of slipping it through, people will continue in their cynicism, believing that the government is not really serious about its responsibilities to the environment.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I was not originally planning to speak to this legislation, but since it touches upon the environment I feel compelled to address a couple of very specific issues such as the binding of the legislation and the power of the federal government to enforce it.

A few months ago I asked the Minister of the Environment about issues that affect Canadians, that is the issue of infrastructure and the issue of controlling the dumping of raw sewage into rivers, oceans, lakes. At the time the minister specifically stated that it was within the jurisdiction of the provincial governments to do so, that the issue was a provincial responsibility and that the federal government had nothing to do with it.

In light of this particular bill, I wonder whether the minister or the government will maintain the same position they had all along or whether there will be some

change in terms of that position and they will be playing a more active role in the area of enforcement.

There is another example where sustainable development plays a very important role. If we are talking about dumping raw sewage into the oceans, of course the negative impact will be tremendous in terms of the fishery and the quality of life for people who rely to a large extent on fishing.

At the same time, the groups that have opposed the legislation are skeptical about the ability of the federal government to listen to their concerns. For instance, if the government is to set up some sort of an advisory body or public participation process, would a decision of the advisory body or panel, *per se* be a binding one or not?

• (1630)

All in all, Mr. Speaker, I think it is a good move on the part of the government to start addressing the issue of the environment. But I think it is extremely important to look at all aspects of the bill before proceeding with it.

I do not think it is too late for the government to go back to the different groups that they have been consulting with, the opposition parties and the public at large, to find out the areas where there are concerns, and try to address those concerns.

In general terms, as my colleagues who have spoken a little earlier stated, the issue in Saskatchewan is quite an alarming one, where we have seen the different jurisdictions fighting over an environmental issue.

I think the time has come for the different levels of government to sit down and really define the responsibility a little more clearly. I would suggest they should forge a partnership between all levels of government when it comes to the environment. I think that it is extremely important to agree on enforcement. Who will oversee the enforcement and who is going to pay for the implementation of it? How are the different relations between the two levels of government going to take place?

There is another important factor and that is the municipal level of government, because the municipal governments are not part of what we are doing. They have been left out.