

*Private Members' Business*

This motion, therefore, is most urgent as it provides an opportunity for the government to alter its current course as outlined in the federal government constitutional proposals. The current proposals would not only prevent us from moving forward as a country but would in fact be toxic to the growth of a mature and responsible attitude toward the environment.

While it is true that there is a proposal to recognize the environment in the Canada clause with a commitment to sustainable development, it is only a symbolic gesture which is empty in law and meaning. Put simply, it is unenforceable.

Proposal 22 would transfer to the provinces the authority for non-national matters which are not specifically assigned under the Constitution, hence the environment. This would further shoulder the provinces with the mantle of being pollution havens. Industry would be able to continue to offer up shop with the attractive spin-offs of job creation and related economic growth to the province most willing to ignore or reduce environmental standards. This would pose the same threat to the environment that the current free trade talks with Mexico pose, that of pollution havens.

Proposal 24 would transfer powers relating to forestry and much of energy, mines and resources to the provinces. The federal government has also set out in its constitutional proposals recognition of the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces in the following areas and to withdraw from these fields in a manner appropriate to each sector. It outlines tourism, forestry, mining, recreation and housing.

The government also proposes to discuss with the provinces for the purpose of administrative and/or legislative delegation wildlife conservation and protection, transportation of dangerous goods, soil and water conservation. The proposal to guarantee property rights in the Constitution stands in stark opposition to the intent of my motion today, to recognize the right of every person in Canada to a clean and healthful environment.

It does not take a fortune teller to see big business dumping toxins no matter how foul into any water or land on its property, pointing to property rights as a defence for doing whatever it wants on its own property. Environment and communities be damned in a case like this. Further erosion of the federal government's power

not only ignores the inherent transboundary nature of the environment, but it would severely restrict the ability of the government to participate in international treaties concerning the environment as well.

• (1710)

As my colleague, the member for Skeena, has stated: "This is a bottom line vision for the boardroom, not a survivor's manifest".

The constitutional proposal package offers a symbolic and unenforceable reference to the environment proposed for the Canada clause. It is nothing more than a cheap political effort to mislead Canadians into believing that the environment is a Conservative constitutional priority.

In fact the January 1992 all-party House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment found many locations where the package undermines or handicaps avenues to protect or enhance the environment.

According to the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Canada may be the only country to have adopted or amended a Constitution since 1975 which did not include recognition of the right to a clean environment. More than 20 countries now have environmental rights entrenched in their constitutions.

We missed an opportunity in 1981-82 when the Constitution was patriated and before Parliament. We neglected the environment in the ill-fated Meech Lake Accord. We missed an opportunity just last fall when I proposed that this Parliament draft a bill of rights guaranteeing the environmental rights of all Canadians.

The federal government attempts to bypass serious environmental protection in the Constitution during these talks and it comes at a particularly bad time with the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development slated for Rio de Janeiro in only four months' time.

The government's constitutional proposals would hinder our ability to play any significant role, much less a leadership role, in such areas as global warming, forestry, biodiversity, biotechnology, marine pollution, and fisheries.

To sum up, the current big business-federal government constitutional proposals stand to gut the federal