

● (1730)

Similarly, I would say to the Minister, who has been flitting in and out of the House all afternoon, that while she has indeed, as has been said, been the victim of some sexist and biased reporting in the media, just because the media are against her does not mean that she is in fact doing her job. It is my belief that the extensive cut-backs that have been inflicted on the Ministry of the Environment by the present Government are indicative of a relative lack of strength in that Ministry. It appears to have allowed itself to be set up as one that can be readily cut back without offending regional interests or getting powerful members of the Cabinet opposed to its cuts. I feel that is an attitude in Cabinet which we do not have the luxury of allowing to continue.

Let me briefly go through some of the chronology of the recent PCB spill between Ignace and Kenora. On April 15, the Minister of the Environment responded in the House that this was a provincial responsibility. At the same time, provincial officials were saying that it was a federal responsibility. It seems to me that a criticism that we should all take to heart is that, as Canadian elected political leaders, all too often we think in terms not of what is happening in our country and in our communities but in terms of what level of Government is responsible for the corrective action or the original omission that has led to the problem.

After all, in the House on Tuesday the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) said that it was a federal responsibility, while, on the other hand, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. Fraser) was saying that it was a shared responsibility. Notwithstanding the evident disagreement among three members of the Cabinet, they looked rather good in comparison with the Ontario Minister of the Environment, who stated that the only danger from such a spill would be if one were a rat licking the material off the Trans-Canada Highway. That gentleman may have some funny ideas about what people in northwestern Ontario keep as pets, but I should let him know that there are indeed at least two cats which have been contaminated by the PCBs, which took that material home and consequently contaminated the home environment where they were pets and, of course, the people who tried to clean them up.

I believe the most encouraging aspect to all the government actions and reactions to this situation was at the local level. The actions of the local officials, while certainly not beyond reproach—since hindsight is 20-20—do them some credit. I think the municipal Government in Kenora and the municipal emergency measures coordination group worked well to establish the mechanisms that were needed to respond to the legitimate and real concerns of the people of the Kenora area.

I am glad to see that they used that CANUTEC number. When I was a mayor in a neighbouring community, I had that number posted on my desk for such an eventuality. I think that some of the activities of the health officials in the area also bear commendation. While the pamphlet put out by the district medical officer of health seemed to have some minor

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contradictions, I thought it was a commendable initiative in the circumstances.

In my question in the House on Tuesday, I cited the statement made to me in a letter from the Minister of the Environment that her officials and the officials of the Department of Transport had been working for years at the federal level on the transportation of dangerous goods. I was critical of the Minister of Transport at that time for offering the July 1 implementation date for the regulations that presumably resulted from that consultation process. I must acknowledge with pleasure that he has chosen now to make the ban immediate.

It was four days after the spill when the first federal official arrived on the scene. Even after the initial spill we saw some errors being made by government officials that were unfortunate errors, not errors of malice, of course, but errors of oversight in the shipping of unmarked boxes containing contaminated PCB samples on Nordair, a commercial air service, through Dryden, without telling the people who were handling them what they were handling.

Such an occurrence should not be permissible in our society. I am glad that the Minister of Transport, in his answer, at least contemplated some form of disciplinary action being taken in those circumstances.

The advice that has gone out to residents in the area has mostly been good. While some has been contradictory, I believe that over-all the local Government would appear to be well in the lead of the provincial and federal Governments in the effectiveness of its actions in relation to this spill.

When something like this happens in northwestern Ontario, we who live there have a very ambivalent reaction to the resulting events. We are descended upon by a media circus that we only see during election campaigns other than when there is an environmental disaster. It is indeed a media circus which exhibits a dedication and ferocious attention to the matter that it believes to be at hand, but which, to many of us, smacks of tunnel vision. It is certainly not that we would wish bad news not to be reported. This is bad news and it has been extensively reported.

There is also other bad news. Something that strikes me when looking at this recent spill is the clouding of people's vision which occurs, for whatever reasons, to some of the other problems that exist both in our environment and in my own region of northwestern Ontario.

For example, the spill did not lead directly to the death of a young man on a dangerous corner of the Trans-Canada Highway on Thursday night. The spill was not responsible for that. That death was not reported in the national media. It was not recorded on the CBC, but that is an example of what happens when that media focus all of their attention on a single issue and do not look at the social, economic and environmental aetiology in the area in which they are making their report.

We have a situation where the bureaucrats rather than the Ministers or the media actually come out looking the best in this situation. We also have a situation of a psychology, of