

Soil Erosion

In that context, I would like to make reference to two or three examples of the practices we have engaged in which have had a very negative impact. I take you back, Mr. Speaker, to the land grab at Pickering for the so-called Pickering Airport. It took land out of productivity without adequate reward for the owners. The same thing happened at Mirabel. Land which could have been productive was taken out of production. Then I think of the policies of some municipalities to pave over good farm land, most particularly in Ontario, but not exclusively. Certainly, we have seen it in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. In fact, a piece of legislation which was introduced by Dave Barrett's Government back in, I believe, 1973, addressed the problem of greenbelts and of retaining land for agricultural purposes rather than having it abused for residential zoning or industrial zoning. Zoning regulations were brought in and they attempted to classify the land of British Columbia according to its quality. What it did, however, was create other serious problems of dislocation. A field, for example, could qualify as a class 4, or be labelled as class 4, yet be very productive. The tax department would say it is not productive land because it is class 4 land. Someone would want to build on it and they would say it is class 2 land and could not be built on, yet it would be a rock pile. So there were anomalies and a lot of problems.

I think it is important to recognize that that legislation is still in effect, although it has been modified and adjusted. I think it responds to concerns of the public in British Columbia.

• (1450)

In summary, we have to think as to what we are going to do with the future. A recent poll has indicated that 70 per cent of Canadians believe that pollution is becoming worse. Another survey found two-thirds of respondents rank protection of the natural environment as first or second priority. Through the voices of individual citizens, lobby groups, professional organizations and NGOs, Canadians are concerned about the maintenance and enhancement of their environment. Canadians feel that the Government and industry are responsible for pollution and environmental degradation. Therefore they are looking to the senior level of government for leadership in combating these problems.

We know from the reports that have been introduced by the Senate and in the House of Commons that this is a very critical issue. Thus in December of last year the federal Cabinet adopted an environmental quality policy framework to strengthen and streamline federal environmental quality action. A fundamental principle is that environmental quality is essential for the protection of Canadian resource-based economies. An important element of this policy is environment-economy integration.

It is in the direction that I think every Member should urge the Government to proceed, and to proceed with the kind of rapidity and urgency that has been stressed by all my colleagues who have spoken on this issue thus far today.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Argenteuil—Papineau): Mr. Speaker, soil erosion is a question that has my particular concern. As a Member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, I have, on several occasions, had an opportunity to question officials from the Department and witnesses appearing before the Committee to testify on various issues, mostly on the farm input costs.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, I received a letter from the Minister, or rather the Deputy Minister, who was responding to one of the concerns I raised in committee about the use of chemical fertilizers. In fact, I wondered whether the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides could have some connection with soil erosion.

Apparently not, according to his answer. Personally, I know some people in the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau, Mr. Speaker, at Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix, who are potato producers, and who in recent years, have had a problem with soil erosion.

Mr. Speaker, soil erosion is a problem that exists throughout the world, not only in developing countries but in industrialized countries as well. The Government of Canada is aware of the situation and has demonstrated its awareness through its contribution to the world conservation strategy. The strategy is aimed at better management of resources to put economic and social development on a durable basis. It concentrates on the main obstacles to conservation objectives and how these obstacles can be overcome.

Environment Canada coordinates activities throughout the country in cooperation with the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers. During Environment Week in 1986, the federal Government hosted the Conservation World Strategy Conference, at which Environment Canada played a major role.

Mr. Speaker, our colleague opposite, who used to be Minister of the Environment, I believe, must certainly be more familiar with environment matters than most of us. However, I do not believe, and he will be the first to admit this, that the previous Government did such great things for the environment. He must agree with this statement as a former minister. In any case, he cannot be very proud of what the previous Government achieved in environmental matters.

Mr. Speaker, the discussions at the Conference to which I have already referred dealt with the effects of economic growth on the environment. The federal Government considers this a very important issue and is concerned about the impact of aggressions against the environment, soil degradation, the rate of flow of our waters, the atmosphere, our forests and our economic future.

There is no need to repeat, as others have already mentioned this, that the Government has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to the environment. The Minister of Environment with his colleague and people from the American Department and officials from the Government of Canada and the Department of Environment have held these last two years discussions and