

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 25, 1991

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

OAK RIDGES MORaine

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should commit itself to entering into negotiations with the government of Ontario to safeguard the Oak Ridges Moraine and protect the headwater aquifers sourcing Lake Ontario from further pollution and toxic contamination.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a subject that is of great importance to the people of Ontario and Canada. My motion states that in the opinion of this House, the government should commit itself to entering into negotiations with the government of Ontario to safeguard the Oak Ridges moraine and protect the headwater aquifers sourcing Lake Ontario from further pollution and toxic contamination.

I have presented this motion to the House because I firmly believe that this issue merits the attention of and action by the Parliament of Canada.

I also believe just as firmly that the government has a responsibility to involve itself in co-operation with the provincial government in the protection of this moraine. I believe this because I understand how important the Oak Ridges moraine is to the environmental well-being of this country. Given that many millions of Canadians depend directly on the moraine for water, I can say that the protection of the entire structure of the Oak Ridges moraine is potentially the most important environmental issue in Canada.

To illustrate this, I should begin by providing the House with a certain amount of background information for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the moraine.

The Oak Ridges moraine was created some 14,000 years ago when glaciers from the last ice age began to recede across Ontario. It is a very large geographical formation, 1,500 square kilometres in area, stretching from the Niagara escarpment in the west to Trenton in the east.

The composition of the moraine is what gives it its important role in Ontario's ecosystem. As it was caused by the pressure of two glaciers, the moraine is made up of a combination of sand, gravel and rock fragments of various sizes. This means that the inside of the moraine is porous like a sponge. Unlike the Canadian Shield which water runs off, melting snow and rainwater seep through the soil on the surface of the moraine and collect inside.

So the Oak Ridges moraine is in a sense a combined holding tank and filtration system designed by nature. No one should be surprised to learn that a great deal of life depends on it functioning properly.

The water contained in the aquifers found in the moraine is the source of many rivers in south-central Ontario: the Rouge, the Don, the Humber, the Holland, the Nottawasaga and the Ganaraska all flow from these headwaters. These rivers flow into Lake Simcoe, Lake Ontario, Georgian Bay and ultimately into the lower part of the Great Lakes. The fact that the Great Lakes are affected adds an international element that should not be overlooked.

It is clear therefore that the Oak Ridges moraine has an impact on the quality and quantity of water in southern Ontario. This affects many wetland habitats and other wildlife as well as agriculture and human consumption.

Unfortunately, the speed of growth in south-central Ontario now threatens the continued health of this moraine. The Keele Valley landfill site located in my riding is the largest dump site in Canada. It sits on the centre of the moraine. At the edges of the moraine, aggregate mining activities have increased in recent years, contributing to the erosion of the formation and threatening its ecological integrity. At every point along