

*Government Orders**[English]*

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the House on this important bill which establishes, in my view, a more effective environmental assessment process which replaces the EARP guidelines that we had for some time.

As I said in speaking on its predecessor bill, Bill C-78 from the previous session, the principle behind this bill is a good one. No one can dispute the importance of determining the environmental impact of projects before they are begun.

The federal government and other levels of government must be leaders in this area. As we have learned, much to our distress sometimes, and it should be something that all Canadians understand, it is easier to avoid environmental disasters, environmental damage, in the first place than to try to repair it later. That is essentially the purpose at hand.

Too many environmental mistakes have been made in the past because of our collective negligence. Because I have been, like many members in this House, preoccupied with other committees, I have not had a chance to sit on this committee, but I have an interest in it because in my riding it is the number one issue.

When I ask constituents to list the number of issues and the priority in which they see them, they list environment and their jobs as being those two preoccupations to which they think we should attach importance.

Bill C-13 which is before us on third reading has come a long way in my view from its predecessor bill, Bill C-78. It is significantly improved, although I admit it still has some flaws. I want to give credit to those who worked on this committee and pay tribute to a member of this House, the member for Davenport, who has in my view, brought forward his work, his expertise, his advice and his concerns. He has improved this bill by being very much interested in environmental questions. Yesterday the Canadian environmental assessment caucus stated in its press release: "It is best to look at this legislation as a glass half full rather than half empty".

• (1620)

This group which includes environmental lawyers and advocates from organizations across Canada noted in its

press release that there are still many improvements that can be made to this legislation.

I want to list some of the issues that the Canadian environmental assessment caucus put forth. First, it said that the environmental review process should apply to government programs and policies, not just projects which would include the North American free trade deal.

Second, the definition of federal authority should include federal agencies such as the Harbour Commission. I will come back to that in a few minutes because I have some suggestions of my own to make.

Third, the right of the public to participate in the process should be less discretionary and spelled out in more detail.

Fourth, every screening and study should include determining the purpose of and need for a project, the alternatives to the project, and ultimate means of carrying out the project.

Last, the bill should contain stronger powers to enforce compliance with the assessment process.

The bill still leaves the minister in charge of a project rather than the Minister of the Environment with the power to decide whether a project should go ahead. This leaves the process open to possible political interference.

The environment should not be sacrificed for political gains.

[Translation]

On a loftier plane we could say that the environment is a moral and social responsibility. Each and everyone of us is aware, now more than ever before, of the importance of preserving our environment and, especially, of being wary of polluting substances which have often been a source of environmental problems.

In Ottawa—Vanier, in my riding, for instance, I have had some experience with projects that were environmentally harmful and had not been examined or assessed for the impact they would have on the environment. However, thanks to a local organization, which I mention here because they are people from communities in my riding, we were able to prevent construction of an incinerator in Overbrook, which the regional govern-