

ketplace. Therefore, I hope that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford), who can occasionally be a reasonable man, will recognize the validity of this amendment and what it is trying to do. It is trying to further consumer education and assist the harassed consumer in making a value judgment which the marketplace more often obscures than enlightens.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that unit pricing will one day come into effect in this country. We heard evidence during the exhaustive study of this bill in committee in support of unit pricing. We heard the questions and comments of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), who moved this amendment, and others. We also heard very substantial evidence against unit pricing at this time.

Nobody in his right mind would be against unit pricing per se. It is a very desirable goal, a very worth-while and indeed necessary objective to strive for. But I think from the evidence that we heard during our examination of this bill in committee, including that of the minister who will have responsibility for administering this legislation, I am led to the conclusion, as are the majority of the members of the committee, that unit pricing—as worth-while and necessary an objective as it may be—is not practical at this time. I shall not go into the constitutional aspect of the question, although it was raised in the committee, but there is one important aspect which I think is worthy of mention.

The hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman) said that it would be a very simple matter to provide space on packages for unit pricing. Nobody would disagree with that. If this were the law, manufacturers could comply with it with very little effort and relatively modest additional cost. But the problem arises at the retail level, because the retailer has ultimate responsibility. Bearing in mind the many thousands of items that are handled by supermarkets and grocery retailers in Canada, one can readily grasp how thoroughly impractical it would be at present to force retailers to stamp on each individual item, each can, container or package the unit price of the product. It would be a nightmare for the retailer. One of the objects of the bill is to reduce the proliferation of sizes of packages on the market. If we succeed in doing that we will get much closer to the day when we can have unit pricing in Canada. But until we arrive at that stage, I submit that unit pricing is totally impractical, desirable though it may be.

Indeed, this amendment is very typical of the type that we are used to getting from our friends in the NDP. It is what I would call a "motherhood" amendment, where they place us in the position of speaking against motherhood—in this case motherhood being unit pricing. Everyone in Canada knows that unit pricing is desirable. All of us have had experience at one time or another of going to the supermarket and making the necessary purchases for the family. We have had the problem of wrestling with the price of an article when there is a proliferation of sizes and containers of that item on the supermarket

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shelf. But to suggest that the average consumer enter a supermarket with a slide-rule and start computing the unit cost of a can of foodstuffs is to my mind not reasonable.

Evidence has been placed before the committee to support the case for unit pricing. I am sure that some of this evidence will be presented to the House, if not in a speech of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway, then in one of the speeches made by her colleagues. Nobody can quarrel with the case put forward on the evidence that has been presented. What I suggest is unit pricing some time in the future, but unit pricing now is not practical. I subscribe to the arguments presented in the committee by the minister, arguments that I am sure he will very eloquently present to this House, showing why it is not practical at this particular time.

● (8:40 p.m.)

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, desirable though it may be to have unit pricing in Canada, until we arrive at a stage where we can reduce the proliferation of sizes and until we can clear up the confusion that already exists in the minds of consumers with respect to this proliferation, I submit that unit pricing at this time is not practical, and desirable though it may be we cannot support the amendment.

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the whole matter concerning this amendment and the question of unit pricing was gone into at very great length in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs which examined this bill. I think there were three or four meetings of the committee at which the question of unit pricing came up. I made it clear in the committee and in the House during debate on second reading, that of course in so far as unit pricing made comparability of products easier for the consumer, in so far as it provided the consumer with full and accurate information, both pricewise and otherwise as to the products that the consumer was buying, then unit pricing was a good thing.

It indicated that we in the department and I as the minister had certainly not been unaware of the developments that had been going on in Canada and the United States with regard to studies of unit pricing, their implications, the cost of unit pricing, whether or not in fact they were used by consumers, whether or not in fact consumers took into account the unit pricing of products and what products were suitable for pricing. All of these were experiments conducted in this country and in the United States, of which we were aware and on which we maintained a watching brief, if I may put it that way. We sent officials of the department to observe and participate in studies being conducted in New York by the department of consumer affairs there, and in Washington where one of the leading chains was conducting certain studies.

Our problem here is one we went into very fully in the committee, that in the view of the law officers of the Crown there are some difficulties constitutionally with