

*Adjournment Debate*

slowing in the growth of total outlays in the last three months of the fiscal year is expected to result from decreased net petroleum compensation payments, among other factors. Thus, the government fully expects to live up to its commitment to restrain the growth of its spending to less than trend GNP, even in this year of cyclical weakness.

HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES—UREA FORMALDEHYDE FOAM INSULATION—NOTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL HEALTH HAZARD

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** Mr. Speaker, tonight the subject I wish to address concerns urea formaldehyde, an insulation product which has been used in roughly 60,000 Canadian homes. This substance has quite a long history. It has been the subject of study in both Europe and the United States. Because of some of the very serious side effects of this product, when improperly installed in homes as insulation, concerns were raised in this country and in this House.

● (2210)

I had occasion to raise this matter last spring, in the summer and in the fall, asking for government action. These requests for action in the committee, and in the House in one case, stemmed from the province of Saskatchewan where the minister of consumer affairs raised the matter with the government in writing, asking that the product be dealt with under the hazardous products provisions. When no action came from that, I was asked if I would meet directly with the ministers concerned and raise the matter, which I did.

The case arose as a result of a family in Saskatchewan which had to be moved because of the fumes, or the formaldehyde gas concentrations in the house. The house was longer habitable.

It was obvious that the situation involved much more than that one case. The answer we continued to receive from the government was that it was still studying the matter. While the government was studying it, people were insulating their homes with this substance under the CHIP program and under other government subsidized and encouraged programs such as the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program. In short, the government was encouraging and paying people to insulate their homes with this material.

Finally on December 12 the minister decided to ban the material. It had been linked to cancer. Certain concentrations of formaldehyde gas was linked to cancer in rats. The minister imposed a ban and a temporary study group continued to look into the problem. Nothing in particular happened. Apparently they are still awaiting the results of that study group.

The government was asked what it was going to do about those Canadians who had experienced the problem. In answer to a question in the House, the minister said these people should contact their doctor, the department of health, energy mines and resources, or the National Research Council.

I contacted those groups. None of them were aware of what to do. No testing equipment was available. Physicians who had

come in contact with people suffering the symptoms were not aware of the cause. I would like to cite a case in my riding.

After reading a column in the paper describing the symptoms, a woman came to my constituency office and stated that two years previous her doctor had asked her to leave work because of some allergy symptoms she was experiencing. As she remained in the home longer, the symptoms got worse. Neither she nor her doctor were aware of the reason. She lost her job and experienced several years of poor health because of this material. It is now clear that is what it was. The point is that the physician was not aware of the facts. There was no testing equipment available to place in the home. At that point, none of the departments the minister recommended had any information.

The minister has two responsibilities, the first being to study this, get the final report and put the ban in place permanently. Second, with regard to those already harmed, all physicians in Canada should be informed of the symptoms of this exposure. Testing equipment should be made available to be used in the homes in my riding where this material has been used, as well as in every other region in this country, in order to determine the level of formaldehyde gas and if these homes are habitable.

A list of every home in Canada in which this material has been placed should be obtained. The symptoms should be described to these home owners, they should be advised how to have their homes tested, and their physicians should be informed as to what must be done. This information is available. Every insulating contractor who has obtained government funding is listed, and there is a list of the people who installed it.

The minister has a responsibility because the government encouraged that this material be placed in the homes. It should provide a funding program to assist people remove the material from those homes that are not habitable as a result of the use of urea formaldehyde.

● (2215)

**Mr. Doug Frith (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the points raised by the hon. member have been discussed within the department. He points out quite correctly that part of the problem envisaged as a result of the use of urea formaldehyde in homes led to a decision by the minister last September to set up a non-government expert committee to review all the available data on the use of urea formaldehyde as a foam insulator. As time passed we realized some problems were arising largely as a result of the release of formaldehyde from the urea formaldehyde foam being used for home insulation. At the very beginning, most of the problems were related to symptoms that resembled the common cold, such as eye and nose irritation.

It was only when we had access to toxicological studies emanating from the United States that we found in laboratory models where there were 15 parts per million of formaldehyde in the atmosphere; cancerous tumours resulted in about 1 per cent of cases. The studies in the United States also found that there were some homes in the United States in which the parts