

*Adjournment Debate*

and request them to consider giving discount prices to motorists who pay cash rather than use credit cards. This would be an appropriate sequel to the actions already taken by the Energy Minister, who has clearly shown that she is an advocate for consumers. It is right that a Minister be that kind of advocate. Lobbyists represent different interest groups within Canadian society on this Hill. Trade, business and labour associations all have their champions here. Who represents individual consumers except their Members of Parliament and the Government they elect?

Speaking out on behalf of consumers is especially appropriate for a Progressive Conservative Government, for ours is a people party that cares about people and their concerns. Time on this adjournment debate does not permit the review of the many occasions when the Conservative Party has acted on behalf of consumers. Robert Stanfield, for example, as Leader of the Opposition, was ready to go as far as price controls.

My question did not urge any action, extreme or moderate. In place of action, it suggested using moral suasion, for moral suasion has been proven to be an effective instrument in gaining fairness for the Canadian consumer. It is well known that over the years the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and the Governor of the Bank of Canada have frequently on behalf of the Canadian people and their well-being made use of moral suasion to influence banking policies. The Energy Minister has herself made use of moral suasion on behalf of motorists in this country. I quote from her remarks in the House on March 12:

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to tell the Hon. Member that politeness pays off. Today Esso and Petro-Canada have announced that they have dropped the price of gasoline by two cents a litre.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that I asked the industry to ensure that the price decreases were passed along to consumers so that everyone could take advantage of our deregulated oil and gas industry.

I have been encouraged by the effectiveness of her moral suasion. On March 13, for example, one gas station in Scarborough West charged 46.9 cents for regular gas and 49 cents for unleaded. Today the same station charges 38.1 cents for regular and 41.1 cents for unleaded, a drop of 8.8 cents a litre. In the past 36 days, the price of regular gas has dropped 18.8 per cent and the price of unleaded 17.6 per cent, demonstrating the effectiveness of moral suasion and the appropriateness of it when a Minister uses it in a private enterprise economy. "Politeness does pay off".

If the Energy Minister would ask Canadian oil companies to take another step on behalf of consumers and to at least consider giving discount prices to motorists who pay cash rather than use credit cards, it would be another opportunity for a Government to show it cares about consumers. A caring Government cares enough to help. As well, the discount for cash proposal is credible. Already one of Canada's major oil companies has informed me that it is "seriously studying" this proposal and its application in British Columbia.

• (1850)

At this very moment in various parts of the U.S., certain major oil companies such as Esso are presently giving discount prices to motorists who pay with cash rather than credit cards in particular regions. The proposal is thus credible and practical. In response to my request on April 7, I was told by the Parliamentary Secretary:

No more would she suggest that a company do that than she would suggest that a haberdasher charge less for a suit when customers pay cash rather than use credit cards.

There was simply no parallel there. The Minister's actions show that retail gas prices are on her agenda and part of her concern. Rightly so. I had to be impressed and somewhat amused by the way the word "haberdasher" was used in a political sense. The late President Harry Truman was a haberdasher. At one point in his life he saw the value of his inventory reduced by over 800 per cent in one week through bank action. There was a haberdasher who would have appreciated some Government action.

It has been demonstrated time and time again that moral suasion by the Government produces results in private enterprise. I commend the Minister for what she has done on behalf of consumers. I hope she might yet take one further step. Moral suasion and politeness pay off.

**Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to reply to my hon. friend, who has always shown a great interest in the consumer. He has made an excellent suggestion to the oil companies. Obviously they have already received his message loud and clear. The Minister does not and will not interfere in the day-to-day operations of private sector companies. She has made that very, very clear. At one time, and I think rightfully so, she said that she expected the savings from falling oil prices would be passed on to the consumer. The companies are doing that. I would like to think that when the Minister sent that telegram to the various companies, it had some effect.

There are many marketing tools, and this is a marketing tool, which the companies use. The Hon. Member mentioned that some of the major oil companies use it in the U.S., but only in certain areas. Obviously it is a marketing tool within a certain area. I know that here in Canada many of our energy companies provide 5 per cent discounts to various organizations which have a special card and buy their gas at a certain station of a certain company. These are all marketing practices carried on by various companies.

The Minister does not want to get involved in day-to-day marketing operations of these companies. We deregulated the industry and as a Government, we are committed to deregulation. The Canadian electorate have said that we should let them operate their businesses and get off their backs. They will do the job, they will create employment and make things better for Canadians, but we should stop placing this burden of