

Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act

Mr. McGrath: Don't ask him to repeat it!

Mr. Jarvis: If the hon. member is asking me whether we want to be party to a delay at the committee stage because the report is not available, I suggest to him that I have some sympathy with that. The down side of that is the problem in coming to grips with what is inadequate. As the hon. member well knows, there is a great deal of legitimate pressure on behalf of some home owners with the problem. I tried to make that clear in my speech. This is a first step.

I do not want to be dogmatic. I understand the great help the board's report would be to committee, not just to parliamentarians but also the witnesses who appear before it. Whether I would like on behalf of our party to be party to a filibuster or a delay or any such thing at committee stage, I am not sure that would get the report in quickly. I do not know if we will get the report or not. I hope the parliamentary secretary to the minister will address that.

In terms of the second part of the problem—and I am sure the hon. member will not take this personally and will forgive me because we have a begrudging but mutual respect for each other—if that party had voted the right way back in 1980, this country would be a lot better off.

● (1630)

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, some hon. members in this debate have described the urea formaldehyde foam insulation situation as a national disaster. It is. There are approximately 80,000 homes with UFFI in them. It has been said already, but it deserves repetition, that if all those homes were together in one place we would consider it a national disaster. If those 80,000 homes had been hit by a flood or an earthquake or some similar national disaster, this House and the government would have rushed immediately to help them. But because they are spread across the country and because these desolate tales come to us in bits and pieces, slowly, it does not have the impact it should have, yet it really is a national disaster.

During the Easter recess, Mr. Speaker, I attended a meeting in my riding of 300 UFFI victims. These were French-speaking victims, not English-speaking victims. I must tell you that I wished that I had the bureaucrats and government officials with me on that night. Women came to the microphone, wept and broke down in tears, at the situation as a result of the gas emitted from the walls of their homes. Others told stories of having lived in garages outside their homes throughout the winter, of parking cheap mobile homes on their property to live in because of the intolerable situation in their homes. Others told of going to live with relatives because they could not live at home; and because they left their homes vacant the insurance companies were charging them additional insurance for fire and theft because they were no longer living at home. To sit there that night as a federal Member of Parliament and listen to those stories was very difficult. I was wishing that all those who could expedite assistance for them had been there with me.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allmand: The problem is not just one of health alone. There are others whose health has not been affected so far, thank God, but they have seen the value of their homes decrease. They do not know from day to day whether there will be some future breakdown in the walls or in the structure with the result that gas will be emitted from the walls. That is to say that in a year's time they may be affected by the gas. They know they have UFFI in their homes, they do not have the health problems yet, but they may have those problems next year or the year after, and they do not know what will happen when the time comes to sell the home when their children grow up. They see their houses decrease in value, they are left in a terrible state of uncertainty and they want corrective measures taken, even though they may not suffer from ill-health right away.

The government says it has no legal responsibility with respect to these people who freely put UFFI in their houses. I think they are correct in that; the government has no strict legal responsibility. If people were to sue in a civil action before the courts, those people would probably fail. But I submit very strongly, Mr. Speaker, that we have come to the aid of people in disaster situations. I refer to earthquakes, to floods and to disasters on the prairies where crops have been destroyed. The government may have had no legal responsibility to do so, but felt it had some responsibility, both politically and morally, to help those people who were in such serious difficulty.

Mr. McKinnon: That is right.

Mr. Allmand: The government has already responded. In December, 1980, by banning the foam, by admitting that it could cause difficult problems. Again, in December, 1981, the government announced a program of testing and assistance. The program has come to us, however, only in bits and pieces. The people I have spoken to in my constituency have not yet received any definite assistance. Some of them have had tests, they have had visits, and there have been letters back and forth. But none of them have got money in their hands to compensate them or to help them rid those homes of UFFI.

With respect to the tests, one man at that meeting of 300 in my constituency to which I referred said he had three tests done on his home and all three came out with different results. The government-sponsored test was done, but he also had tests done by very reliable engineering firms. Even among them, there were two different results. That indicates to me that if we are going to give aid on the basis of these tests, we certainly should not be dogmatic and inflexible. The amount of gas that may be emitted in a home at any one time might depend on weather and other conditions. Otherwise, I do not see how one could explain why the result of the tests were different.

The government has prepared a bill and that bill is before us now. It will go to committee and I am very hopeful that in committee the government will keep an open mind on this issue. I hope it will listen to those groups which represent victims across the country. I hope those representatives will be called to the committee, so that they may give their stories