

Oil Substitution Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was just introducing the motion for debate.

Mr. Waddell: I heard a lot of people saying—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There were a lot of voices at the time. I got a loud response.

Mr. Waddell: I just wanted to make sure the motion was not lost inadvertently.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, we are starting debate on the motion.

Mr. McDermid: I am assuming, then, that the Chair has accepted the amendment and we are now debating the amendment to the main motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid) is correct in his assessment of the situation.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the effect of this motion is to hoist this Bill for six months. I was not aware that that motion was going to be moved, and I was rising to speak on the main motion. But I am pleased to participate in debate on this amendment. I think my constituents, at least, will understand the impact it will have on them.

● (1450)

The CHIP and COSP programs were put into effect between 1973 and 1977. At that time I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs, the Hon. Barney Danson. I vividly remember working on these programs to persuade Canadians of the importance of energy conservation?

One must think back to 1973 to appreciate the urgency and economic difficulties that Canadians were experiencing with their heating costs. Oil prices were rising at a very rapid rate. Most of us were using oil to heat our homes. Consequently, the costs of heating were becoming difficult to bear. As a responsible Government at that time, we felt it was necessary to convince Canadians to insulate their homes better and to transfer from oil to other sources of energy such as gas, electricity, and wood, which became very popular after this crisis.

The CHIP program which is addressed in Bill C-24 provided grants to homeowners who invested in residential energy conservation. The COSP program provided grants to encourage these same Canadians to convert from oil to other forms of energy. The programs were very successful in my riding and were used to the limit. The riding I represent in the Ottawa-Carleton region is the oldest section of Ottawa and much of the housing was indeed in need of better insulation. Our own house was insulated with newspapers and sawdust which had packed down, resulting in the tops of the walls and the attic being very cold. The problem of insulating against the cold of winter was not addressed because oil was cheap. It cost 12, 13

or 14 cents a gallon so one did not bother with insulation which was very expensive and hard to instal.

The recent decision of the Government to abolish this program is not easy to take. It indicates to Canadians that we have now reached a plateau of energy conservation which we think Canadians understand. It is quite possible that the Government is right in saying that Canadians must now take up their responsibilities and should themselves insulate and, if they want, change from oil to other sources of energy. They should do it themselves. I feel that part of our obligation as parliamentarians is to tell Canadians how we see problems and issues and how better to deal with them.

With regard to the question of energy, in the last 12 years we did a good job of telling Canadians that better insulation would save them money. We told Canadians that the oil crisis which the world has undergone was indeed a serious problem to cope with.

The Government has now decided to cancel these two programs. It has the right to do that since it is the Government. I do not agree, and from the correspondence that I am receiving I believe that many other Canadians do not agree either. The decision to terminate the program causes some difficulties for certain Canadians. I have a letter here from the Electrical Contractors' Association of Ottawa. It says:

Due to a serious shortage of electric heating equipment, most of which will not be manufactured until late March, it appears that many homeowners who have signed contracts for the conversion of their heating systems will find themselves ineligible for the COSP grant.

That is not the fault of the contractor, or of the consumer. The letter goes on to say:

We propose that the COSP program be extended to September 30, 1985, a more realistic date, considering the heating season in Canada does not end March 31.

My colleague, in his remarks on Bill C-4 talked about the gas companies which were also experiencing certain problems with installation and conversion. We all know that the ground freezes over in the winter time making it difficult to instal pipes. The electrical contractors tell me that they have had difficulties getting equipment. They tell me that it would be reasonable to ask for an extension of this program until September 30, 1985.

I do not want to take any more of the time of the House on this subject, except to say that if the Government can see its way to prolonging this program until September 30, 1985 it would be appreciated by a lot of consumers and contractors who have applications for the COSP grant for conversion. They are good applications which could save Canadians money in the long run. They should be received and carried forward by these contractors.

Before the Government says no, would it consider that perhaps an extension would be useful? The amendment to hoist this Bill for six months would give the Government time to address the immediate concerns of Canadians in the area that I represent. We have had a hard winter. We have not had the time or the capacity to make the conversions. Please give us the spring and summer to do the work we want to do.