

Oil Substitution Act

the House of Commons. The Hon. Member would be wise to pay close attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep my feet solidly on the floor.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak today on such an important matter as the conservation of energy, of "our energy". For years Canadians have been preparing for conservation, and thanks to programs introduced by the previous Canadian Government we have managed and are still managing to redirect and save a significant part of our energy resources.

Clearly, with this Bill intended merely to eliminate certain programs, we can no longer make any projection for the future, we can no longer assume that we will still be able to realize any further energy savings after this.

Indeed, the Tory Government is coming in with a hasty and ill-advised proposal to amend the Oil Substitution and Conservation Act and the Canadian Home Insulation Program Act.

Bill C-24 is a hasty, ill-advised proposal for the simple reason that the Tory Government has failed to analyze the impact of the cuts introduced in those two programs. Such a failure is unforgivable, Mr. Speaker, because it has wrought surprise and panic among consumers, and discouragement in private business.

Let us first look at the Canadian Home Insulation Program, the CHIP program.

It is worth mentioning that this program was established under a Liberal Government. It was brought in to save energy and provide greater comfort, and this has nothing to do with luxury. It is a matter of need, of necessity.

As you are no doubt aware, Mr. Speaker, that with the damp, cold winds sweeping over the Maritimes, people must have very well-insulated homes. Under that kind of geographic and weather conditions, obviously efficient home insulation is essential and even vital in some areas. Although this may come as a surprise, there are still thousands of Canadian homes that do not meet minimum insulation standards. The insulation program, for instance, was intended for owners whose homes were built before September 1977. Statistics provided by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to your Department of Energy, Mines and Resources show there were more than 7 million homes with inadequate insulation and therefore eligible for the Canadian Government Insulation Program. Of those 7 million, 190,000 were in New Brunswick and when a province with a population of 706,000 has 190,000 badly-insulated houses, clearly an assistance program is needed.

The Government of the day understood the situation and introduced its insulation program, and 35 per cent of eligible

Canadian homes were accepted under the program. In New Brunswick, 35 per cent of the work has now been done and this means that there are still 65 per cent of homes that do not meet the minimal insulation standards. Therefore this is no time, Mr. Speaker, to axe the program.

Well over five years were needed to do the job of insulating 2.5 million homes across the land or 35 per cent. How does the Government opposite hope to complete the other 65 per cent of the work by next year? This is all the more unthinkable considering that under the Liberal Government, the federal contribution had been set at 60 per cent for each claim to a maximum of \$500. Now, under this new Government, the Minister has announced, without further ado, that the federal grant would be slashed down to 27 per cent as of April 1st, 1985. That policy is unacceptable. The Government is bent on cutting everywhere. This is asking too much from the people within such a short period of time.

● (1240)

Clearly, since those cuts were announced last November, there is a general panic among homeowners whose residences need to be insulated and who cannot afford the total cost of an insulation job. And with the federal grant cut down to 30 per cent, consumers will have to pay more money, which means that there are Canadians who will not be able to pay the extra costs that were not included before November, 1984. In other words, less Canadians will benefit from the insulation program from April 1st, 1985, onwards. This is bad, Mr. Speaker, but the Government opposite does not seem to care.

Unfortunately, that is not all. The cut in the insulation program has other implications that are just as negative. Has anyone in the new Government ever thought that by announcing all of a sudden a 30 per cent cut in the federal contribution to the insulation program, and the complete withdrawal of the program for 1986, Canadian consumers will all try to apply for the program before March 31, 1985? Therefore, such a volume of unexpected applications will lead to a glut of orders far exceeding the current capacity of private companies doing insulation work. According to figures supplied by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, there have been 84,000 applications for grants under the insulation program between November 8, 1984, the date of the announcement by the Hon. Minister Wilson, and December 31, 1984. If we are to rely on statistics, officials of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources told us that between January and November 1984, there had been 218,253 applications under the program in those 10 months. If you divide the number of applications by the number of months, you get an average of 21,825 applications each month. During the two months following the announcement by the Minister of Finance, there were 84,000 applications, which is twice as much.

Striking figures like that are due to the fact that as soon as April 1985, the government will pay only 30 per cent of the