

the need to build a strong infrastructure in all parts of the country to deal with problems like this. It has been politic and even correct to be more concerned with glamorous types of projects in the industrial sector, from many points of view.

In retrospect, in not only the maritimes but many other areas of Canada, some of the infrastructure relating to the energy field has not been put in place. We are paying very dearly for it now.

Previous speakers made the point very well that the maritimes is not the only area where the cost of energy, particularly electrical energy, is increasing rapidly. This reflects a number of things. First was the putting off investing in capital projects at the time that they should have been advanced.

Initially when the price of energy started to move, people became very concerned about the impact on consumers. They set aside capital projects and capital investment in the energy fields that should have been proceeded with, thinking it would level off and there would be a more opportune time to do it in the future. The problem is that in terms of pricing, the future got worse. For new electrical utilities across Canada the construction program is costing a good deal of money. Interest rates are high. That is a problem. All of this adds up to some very large increases in the cost of energy.

It might be a good lesson for the future that when we are faced with a situation where costs are increasing and, where it makes sense, we should do something about it at the right time. We should have the courage and fortitude to do it then because putting it off will only make the situation considerably worse.

Another point has been the fallacy of it being very opportune to go around the basic problem when we should attack it head on. The Maritimes is not the only area where this is a problem, that is, in terms of using fairly high quality energy, oil and natural gas, to generate electricity, rather than using coal substantially to do that. It was very understandable at the time, and this is prevalent throughout much of the United States, particularly the eastern seaboard where a good deal of the generation of electricity was changed from coal to natural gas and oil for environmental reasons and, perhaps in some cases, cost reasons.

If we have that period to run through again, it would make a good deal more sense to attack the pollution problem sincerely and work on the technology very hard, pay the price of pollution control, and continue to use coal as a fuel source. For a variety of reasons it is incorrect to use natural gas or oil to generate electricity at this point in time. This is needed for many other areas, many of which are related to higher technology and a good deal of employment.

There is a point upon which we take issue with the mover of this motion. I have had a good deal of difficulty with this since coming to this House. I refer to the debate in committee and in the House where the opposition opposes any government intervention in the energy field.

There was long and bitter debate on the Petroleum Administration Act and on the establishment of Petro-Canada. However, when there is a problem the first thing to surface is a motion asking what the government is

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doing. Members opposite once and for all will have to make up their minds about the role of energy. What are they in favour of the private sector doing, and of the public sector doing?

Had Petro-Canada not been established the problem in the maritimes would be a good deal more severe. As the parliamentary secretary indicated, there is a good deal of exploration ongoing through Petro-Canada, and more is planned for the future. If I am correct, between 20 and 25 per cent of its entire budget is for offshore exploration. This indicates an interest in making that area more self sufficient in energy.

It seems this type of approach is the answer to many of the outstanding problems, particularly in the Atlantic area. But it does not seem to be in tune with the debate we heard from the opposite side at great length some time ago opposing the establishing of Petro-Canada. I understand from the newspapers that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) says that if his party is elected to government, they will wind up Petro-Canada. I also note from the newspapers that since becoming leader he has visited the maritimes once. On his next trip he might wish to look at the energy situation a bit closer. Perhaps he will understand that Petro-Canada is a key part of the solution to the energy problem in the maritimes.

There is the other policy issue, and I just comment along that vein because these are difficult issues on both sides. Perhaps that is what the opposition has tried to be. I refer to the establishment of the Petroleum Administration Act. This act gives authority to negotiate one price across Canada. I cannot think of any area in Canada that benefited more by that than the maritimes.

These are policy initiatives the government has taken in the last year and a half, particularly the establishment of Petro-Canada and the Petroleum Administration Act, of which members opposite, particularly those from the maritimes, should be very strongly in favour.

There is both a short term and long term problem to be dealt with. In the long term the objective must surely be to make Canada, particularly the maritime area which is dependent on imported crude, as self sufficient in oil as possible. The hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Maine) will probably support this, when he speaks in a couple of minutes, that some of the ideas put forth today in terms of wind, solar, and tidal, great as they may be, are not short term answers. The only short term answer that we have nationally, and supposedly in the maritimes, is to have a fundamental commitment to a conservation program that works.

● (1750)

It has been suggested we should be making substantial use of solar, wind, and tidal power, but I do not think this is a good short term solution. First, the capital costs involved are enormous, and then again the technology still has a long way to go. If we were to count on these systems in the short term I think we would be disappointed.

I have some small knowledge from my own background of heating in the residential sector. I know that when electrical heating was introduced great emphasis was placed on home heating standards; most of the participating utilities spent a good deal of money and effort not only