

Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act

medical people and were told that it was probably just an irritation, but they went from one doctor to another and from one hospital to another.

By phase three, government agencies were receiving so many complaints that they thought it might be better to do something about it, or to look into the matter. So after being flooded with complaints for a fair length of time, they reacted by setting up technical evaluation facilities for the problem which measured the formaldehyde concentrations in the air and in the walls of houses insulated with the product. Whenever the air concentration was lower than .1 per cent, the home owners were told there was no reason that they should be sick. It did not matter that they were sick. Finally, during phase four, which is really a recent phase, it became quite clear that urea formaldehyde is harmful to health or does affect the health of a large proportion of people who have it in their buildings.

It was then necessary to ask the following questions: Is it possible to protect ourselves from urea formaldehyde foam insulation? What can be done to get rid of it? Can we neutralize it in any way? We have gone through all the possible questions which could be asked, without considering tearing down the buildings. But the final solution, as admitted by the minister and the government, is that the only way to get rid of urea formaldehyde foam insulation is to take it out. The cost of taking it out is the issue in this particular bill.

The discussion today of Bill C-109 is really part of an inquest procedure by which we are finding out how much it will cost to take this insulation out and how much it will cost to replace it with something else. Over the years, in the rush to reach energy self-sufficiency, the government made some grievous errors, and the promotion of urea formaldehyde foam insulation was one of them. This insulation was acceptable under the CHIP program and was given government authorization. Many people decided to use it.

What they have paid for in making that choice have been substantial health risks, not only the money they put into it. They received only a small rebate from the energy department of this government. They also paid for it in sharply reduced values for their dwellings. If they put them on the market now the chances are that they will be unable to sell them. They also paid for it in the long battle, which is not yet over, to try to make the government realize that it has a responsibility for putting and allowing unsafe products in the marketplace of Canada—in fact, not only allowing them, but pushing them, recommending them, suggesting them and paying people to use them.

Bill C-109 is therefore another bail-out bill for the government in a long series, the kind of bail-out in which the government opposite specializes. I am certain that the government sees this as a kind of response to the democratic process and an acceptance of the needs of the people. I see it, and the UFFI users see it, as a belated response to a national problem which was created by the government.

We now have the bill before us. First reading was given on April 27 and now, on July 27, we are in second reading stage.

The government has not moved very quickly. It will blame that on the NDP. However, let us look at the story.

● (1620)

In December, the problem was major. When the bill was put before the House in April, it was a recognition that something had to be done. But what is going to be done? This bill sets a limit on the disbursement of funds until December 31, 1982. Therefore, the longer it takes the bill to pass, the shorter the time to make payments to those affected by UFFI contaminants. This is another ploy. This ploy has been placed in the bill to try and stampede UFFI victims into taking what the government will give now rather than what may be the evaluation after home owners have looked at the cost of removing it. Putting a limit on time short-circuits the input of many individual members of this House who have UFFI victims in their constituencies.

No one has done more than the hon. member for Comox-Powell River (Mr. Skelly) to bring the problem of foam insulation to the attention of this House and the minister. I might note in passing that when the noted Canadian journalist, George Bain, was writing a book on UFFI, while in Ottawa he visited the hon. member for Comox-Powell River for first-hand information on the problem. We in this caucus have similar confidence in the hon. member. When he tells us that a one-shot grant assistance which the government is proposing to pay UFFI victims is inadequate, we say to the minister: "Show us why and how he is wrong." Is it inadequate or is it not?

The minister may say, and I have heard him say, that victims of UFFI want their money now. We say that members of the minister's own UFFI home owners' council are telling us and other people privately that the amount proposed is inadequate. The minister may say that there may be more money in the future, but from where and from whom? We suggest that once a bill is passed, there will be no further assistance. The government is trying to get the bill through, saying it will pay a maximum of \$5,000 and then look around for other money; but the chances of getting it are very slim.

Bill C-109 does not terminate a victim's recourse to the courts, but it does give the public a fairly low evaluation of the worth of this kind of suffering. In return for exposing yourself to a health hazard and subjecting your house to the most extreme reconstruction problems, the government of Canada will pay you \$5,000. This is a miserly amount.

My experience with government compensation has been somewhat similar. My most recent experience was compensation for the grain and oilseed producers of Canada for the damage they sustained as a result of our ill-conceived and economically catastrophic grains embargo on the Soviet Union. That embargo represented a substantial loss to farmers, particularly western grain farmers. The government said it would pay compensation, just like it says it will pay compensation to UFFI victims today.

The compensation was difficult to calculate, but the government said it would make a fair stab at it. The University of Saskatchewan, the Department of Agriculture and the Library