

Octane Enhancers

It is a pleasure to enter the debate on this private Members' resolution. I think it is a good one and the suggestion that it should go to committee makes a heck of a lot of sense. All of us recognize that alternate energy sources are important. We are living in a fool's paradise if we believe the energy crisis is over. All we have is some time in which we can get our house in order, so to speak. We do not have an energy or oil crisis now because of general economic conditions and because more oil and gas fields have been developed in the last number of years. However, we all know that oil and gas are not renewable resources. They are finite resources. Eventually mankind will have to face the fact that we have run out of these precious resources. To do nothing would be criminal. It would be socially irresponsible for any Government to claim that there is no longer an energy crisis and therefore we do not have to do any further research into alternate forms of energy. Regardless of what political Party is in power, any Government which took that attitude would be socially irresponsible. As I mentioned before, common sense tells you that at some stage down the line we will again be facing shortages of oil. The resolution in front of us makes sense from that point of view.

It also makes sense from the environmental point of view. A few years ago, I believe in 1983, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported on the greenhouse effect. That report stated that this greenhouse effect will be felt and seen within a 15 to 20 year period. Airborne carbon particles will cover the globe and trap the earth's heat within the atmosphere causing major climatic and environmental changes which will have tremendous effect on the world as we know it today. At that time I asked the then Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources if he considered this report to be a serious one and would he give the same type of grants and incentives to developing alternate energy sources as he was providing to the oil companies. He pooh-poohed the idea. He suggested there was no linkage between the greenhouse effect and the grants and subsidies we were giving to the oil industry, particularly for drilling for oil in the Beaufort and along the Atlantic coast. Well, a good case can be made that all forms of energy research receive the same type of grants, incentives and tax breaks. I really wonder whether Government can determine what type of technology is developed through its taxation and grant programs. It seems as well that there was a degree of social irresponsibility when on the one hand we have some of the best scientists in the world warning us about the greenhouse effect, and on the other hand another arm of Government is promoting the very thing which will cause the greenhouse effect.

I found it unfortunate that at the beginning of this Government's mandate it chose to counsel some of the important work that the National Research Council was doing into alternate energy. At that time, in front of the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates, the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Siddon) stated that: "In many cases, after some 10 years of funding, it has become evident that, particularly in the areas of solar and wind energy, the return on that investment was not evident". I have expressed before in this

House the sentiment that new forms of energy do take a long time to develop and make economically viable. As such, I have to disagree with the Minister when he says that 10 years is enough. I have pointed out previously that nuclear energy took 30 years of research and development before it became economically viable. Even now, there is a good question whether it is still economically viable.

I really do not have much more to add to the debate, Mr. Speaker. I think the mover and the spokesperson from the Liberal Party have covered many of the points I was going to raise. I will not repeat what they have said other than to indicate that we in the NDP support the resolution. We hope that the standing committee will seriously consider this motion. We welcome as well the establishment of a committee, which I understood was announced last week, to deal with hydrogen. Hydrogen is my choice for the ideal fuel. It is the cleanest fuel. Its only by-product is water vapour. Considering the warnings we have received about the greenhouse effect, I believe the fuel of the future is hydrogen. That was the conclusion of a special committee of Members of this House a few years ago. Their chief recommendation was that we begin to change Canada to a country which is based and dependent upon hydrogen. I would like to see hydrogen added to this list but it is my understanding that a committee has been struck to investigate the potential of hydrogen and the state of art of that technology. Therefore, I will accept the resolution as is, although I understand that the Government speaker after me will introduce a minor amendment which we will support as well.

In conclusion, we support this private Members' resolution and congratulate him because he will be one of the few lucky ones to see this resolution actually pass this House and not be talked out.

Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to congratulate my good friend, the Hon. Member for Kent (Mr. Hardey) for introducing this very thoughtful motion. It is something that I know the committee concerned with natural resources is anxious to get its teeth into for an in depth study. If I might, I want to for a few moments talk about this well intentioned motion and introduce one concern that I have which will cause me to, with your permission, introduce an amendment at the end of my remarks.

The one area that I am concerned about in the motion is that the federal Government should direct Petro-Canada. We all know that the federal Government has no authority to direct Petro-Canada to take the lead in the production and distribution of gasoline blended with octane enhancers. Petro-Canada is an autonomous company in pursuit of commercial goals, and such a federal directive could be interpreted as interventionist. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, without any federal prompting, Petro-Canada has been conducting studies on the use of methanol and ethanol extenders. I will be introducing an amendment a little later to that effect.