

Oil Substitution Act

extremely unfortunate both for Canadians and for the Government.

Let us look at the \$500 which went to each family under COSP. We realize they were tremendous. Each home owner received those amounts under those two programs. It cannot be left there. The benefits of these two programs went well beyond the grants, mainly because the federal Government sponsored the programs. In this case, the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program do not deal with members of boards of directors of the multinational oil companies. You are not dealing with people who work in the energy industry day in and day out; you are dealing with average Canadians who are concerned with what energy will cost them for their homes and automobiles in particular. This is tremendously important to keep in mind. They want to know how they can reduce their energy costs.

● (1200)

With a growing number of unemployed and a growing percentage of our people over the age of 65 on fixed incomes and the wage settlements in this country falling behind, it is becoming more important how people can redirect these energy costs to other tremendously important costs, such as rent, food and clothing for themselves and their children. That is tremendously important.

Look at this program other than just from the funding aspect. How was this program delivered? It was delivered by the federal Government with a tremendous amount of information. It provided information not only on the expense of oil, but on the cost of competing fuel sources. Most important, it supplied confidence to the Canadian consumer because the federal Government was involved in it. The federal Government provided brochures. It provided information and other sources. Very important, it provided a toll-free telephone inquiry service so that the average Canadian could call the federal Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and get information.

I do not think there are too many Members of this House who have not come in contact with Canadians who have taken advantage of this program. As Members of Parliament and before they became Members, there were a lot of problems that came into play. Most important were people trying to take advantage of this program. The Government required, for example, that furnaces be CSA approved. An awful lot of people came to me who said: "I bought this furnace from so-and-so because he assured me that it was a great furnace, and now I find that I cannot collect the \$800". That is a tragic situation. The person literally could not afford to pay that \$800.

That person went into the program on the strength of what he or she had read and the fact that the Government provided information. Their attention was drawn to it because they were going to get \$800. What kind of attention is the ordinary Canadian going to give to literature that does not have that very important carrot of the \$800? This is a devastating opportunity for the average Canadian to be taken advantage of

with regard to oil and energy conservation now that the Government has backed out of these two very important programs.

What will happen? The Government says everything will be all right, that people will still be able to convert without these programs. Anybody can convert, if that is all there is to it. They are free to convert, but what will be their financial position? What will be their knowledge of the possibilities about which we have been giving information over the past seven and a half years with regard to the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program? What will be the situation?

The Government says that the people of Canada are sophisticated and they know the options with regard to conservation. A lot of people do. The reason they know is because they took advantage of both these programs. Those who have not taken advantage of the programs do not have the same information. The people who have taken advantage of the programs have the information, but not those who have yet to take advantage of them. That is a tremendously important factor of which we must be cognizant.

The Minister said that both CHIP and COSP, the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program, have served their purpose and are no longer needed to encourage people to become energy conscious. I do not agree with that. The facts do not indicate that. If any Ontario Members are interested, they can call Consumers Gas in Ontario and get the facts.

Between October 1, 1983 and February 28, 1984, 4,814 people took advantage of the Canadian Oil Substitution Program. Between October 1, 1984, and February 26, 1985, 17,912 applications have been received by Consumers Gas in Ontario. They have to try to put in these gas systems before March 31, 1985. Within one month they have to put in these systems. Of those 17,912 applications, 8,889 came in January alone. That is the highest number of applications that has ever come to Consumers Gas in Ontario in any one month period.

The Government says that people knew the program would end and that is why there is this rush. That is true to a certain extent. Word got around and that increased the number of applications. But these people are left hanging because of the way the Government is doing things. The Government has not taken into consideration very important factors. It has reduced the amount of the Canadian Home Insulation Program from 60 per cent to one-third as of January 1. That alone is damaging enough to low-income Canadians who cannot afford that difference. Now it is going to take away the whole program if a person did not make his application before November 8, 1984; or, if he made the application after November 8, if the system is in place before the end of March, 1985.

What have we done? Consumers Gas now has 50 to 55 crews working seven days a week trying to service these requests. They are trying to put gas lines in frozen ground covered by snow. If a deadline is going to be set, it should be