

*Government Organization*

inspectors, field liaison officers and field advisors will make the whole operation of consumer protection more meaningful to the public of Canada because they will have an office of the department in their region to which they can go to learn about our programs. This is where our officials will be able to deal with the work of the department at the grass root level and to deal with the complaints that are received by the department.

We have also been able to establish a consumer service and information branch as well as a new legal branch which will deal with the enforcement of our existing consumer protection legislation and will assist in the development of new legislation and new programs.

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a few brief comments. As the minister indicated, the subject of the reorganization of the department has already been dealt with in the committee, but there are a number of outstanding matters to which I had hoped the minister would take this opportunity to make some reference tonight, such as, for example, the Batten report. The minister referred to it today in reply to a question that I put to him during the oral question period. This is a report on the retail cost of food in the prairie provinces. The minister indicated that he has yet to meet with the three responsible ministers from the prairie provinces to discuss this very serious matter.

The other thing to which the minister did not make reference, and again this matter has been raised in the house on several occasions, is the report of the Alberta royal commission on gasoline marketing. This is a voluminous report of over 700 pages. The minister indicated that it is being scrutinized and studied by the combines investigation branch of his department because this report has national implications. We hope he will make some reference to it because I understand that the report has been under study by the combines investigation branch for over a week. Surely, the house is entitled to hear a statement from the minister regarding the national implications raised in the report of this royal commission because the subject matter of the report affects people in every province of Canada and raises some serious implications.

One of the things that concerns me about the new Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is the conflict of jurisdiction. There are a number of areas in which the

[Mr. Basford.]

minister finds himself in conflict with the provinces. For example, I can refer to that part of the department's responsibilities which deal with corporations and corporate securities. The minister has made several brief references in this house to the business of the federal securities commission, just enough to cause some concern among provincial securities commissions and among other people who are concerned about how the government proposes to cope with this conflict in jurisdictions.

These are some of the things to which we hope the minister will make reference before the committee gives consent to passing this section of the bill which concerns the reorganization of the minister's department. We hope that in time the department's responsibilities will become a little more clearly defined than they are at present.

• (9:10 p.m.)

There are a number of areas in respect of which the minister and the appropriate officials of the department are receiving complaints from consumers across the country. The stock reply to those complaints and representations is that these matters fall under provincial jurisdiction, so there is not a great deal the department can do about them. I hope the area of the hon. gentleman's responsibilities will become more clearly defined in order that he may be less subject to the accusation that his department's activities amount only to window dressing, that he does not have the power to do what he is supposed to be doing in the exercise of his functions under the act.

The hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings referred last night to the fact that the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce was split up some five years ago to provide a portfolio for a new minister. Now, five years later, we find that the original arrangement is to be restored under the very legislation we have before us. That particular piece of reorganization cost the taxpayers in excess of \$50 million. We hope this experience will not be repeated in the case of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, because there is a genuine desire on the part of hon. members to do something effective to protect the consumer of this country.

I know the minister is genuine in this desire. He was co-chairman of the committee whose studies preceded the setting up of the department, and he did a most effective job in that capacity. We trust this is not another