

*Gasoline Labelling***NATIONAL TRADE MARK AND TRUE LABELLING ACT****AMENDMENT TO REQUIRE OCTANE RATING OF GASOLINE TO BE DISPLAYED AT PLACES OF SALE**

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West) moved that Bill C-217, to amend the National Trade Mark and True Labelling Act (octane rating of gasoline), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill that stands in my name today was presented at a previous parliament, debated at some length and suffered the usual fate, in some respects, of private members' bills. On that occasion, however, the hon. members who spoke at length until six o'clock were in the opposition benches, and I should simply like to bring to their attention that it was not members on this side of the House who prolonged the debate.

The purpose of my bill is very straightforward: it would provide that the consumer, the purchaser of gasoline would have the right to know what he or she was buying when purchasing gasoline to put into a private automobile or for any other purpose. At the present time a number of companies simply display the indication of high test or low test without giving an indication to the purchaser as to the octane rating. My bill would provide that a technical scale be developed by the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and according to this scale there would be the requirement on every vendor to exhibit conspicuously, in a public place, the octane rating.

I have observed on a number of occasions that there is a great variation in the quality of gas that is rated as high test. Since the time of introducing my bill there have been two developments which may have influenced the enthusiasm in certain quarters for this principle. The first is the recognition by a number of vendors that it is only fair and proper that the consumer be given a choice, and in many cases when the purchaser goes into the gas station to purchase a tank of gas he will see exactly what the octane rating is and a number of blends are offered. I think this is highly commendable.

The second development, and a more recent one since the energy crisis, is the emphasis on more and more lower octane ratings; many of the new engines in cars that are sold today do not require premium gas. It may well be that fuels sold in the near future will require a very minimum octane rating, particularly if it is possible to use unleaded gasoline. This may indeed mean that at some point in the future the purpose of my bill will no longer be required. As long as there are cars on the road that require higher octane gasoline, and as long as there are vendors who have two grades or more which they simply describe in general terms, without giving any technical description of the rating of the product they are selling, I think there is the simple and basic requirement that my bill is designed to meet. The consumer has the right to know what he or she is buying, and the right to know the kind of gasoline they are getting when they spend their money.

I hope this bill will commend itself to hon. members of the House. I see fewer members opposite today than on the day in 1970 when I first presented this bill, and I am hopeful that it will pass.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I understand and sympathize a great deal with the intent put forward by the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) in Bill C-217. However, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, I must say I have some reservations in connection with it.

One thing I think we always have to be concerned about is whether the action we would take in our department in fact would be productive in terms of benefit to the consumer, or whether we would in fact be placing a burden on the manufacturers and producers and, indeed, the government itself that would not be worth the cost involved and perhaps could even impose burdens on those in the industry which would have to be passed on to the consumer in terms of higher prices.

We all know that the principle of disclosure to the consumer is a very important principle, and all the information we can give the consumer is very valuable provided, of course, we do not—as I pointed out a moment ago—impose burdens through disclosure that really is tokenism and does not serve the consumer's interests in the long run.

In connection, specifically, with additional information on the quality of gasoline purchased, particularly with the increased interest in petroleum products over the last year in terms of cost, we have to be extremely careful. Recent legislation by some of the provinces is aimed at making mandatory the disclosure of information to help the consumer make rational decisions in the marketplace. We intend to continue in that direction.

● (1650)

The proposal of the hon. member for Ottawa West that octane ratings be disclosed in accordance with standards to be prescribed by the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is a very complex one, requiring very careful analysis to confirm that the information would be meaningful, that the costs of setting standards and monitoring observances would be reasonable and that the legislative jurisdiction lies with the federal level of government. Some provinces have related gasoline tax legislation, although the only two which have experimented with requiring the disclosure of octane ratings, New Brunswick and Quebec, have now dropped that particular requirement. Only Nova Scotia has a disclosure requirement at the moment. Rather than using octane rating as proposed in this bill, that province calls for the display of the grade of the gasoline on the pump, in three categories—premium, regular, and unleaded.

Federal-provincial responsibility concerning gasoline regulations remains unclear. A positive determination of these responsibilities should first be made before proceeding with this kind of bill as a federal statute. To permit consumers to utilize octane rating as a basis of comparison between brands, and so on, automobile manufacturers would need to specify the precise rating or range of octane ratings suitable for the optimum operation of each motor vehicle. Currently, most manufacturers indicate the brand categories of premium, regular, and non-leaded. While precise octane numbers could be useful to some degree,