

Our amendment seeks to add a third part to subclause (a), which would read as follows:

(iii) Labelling on containers of cleaning agent and water conditioners, listing percentage contained therein of phosphates or other prescribed nutrients.

As the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Rynard) has said, we may find that there are other nutrients which are also harmful and which also ought to be included under such legislation in the future. For all these reasons, I submit, that it would be well if consumers could be informed by the label on the box of the nutrient content of the detergent inside the box. I hope the government will accept this amendment which I think is logical and harmless and which would be of real value across the country.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief in my comments on this amendment. It seems so eminently reasonable and necessary that I cannot see any reason why the government ought not to accept it. It merely requires that the amount of phosphate within a detergent be printed on the outside of the box. What objection can there be to this, particularly since the minister has not indicated, except in general terms, what his timetable will be for the final reduction with respect to phosphates or other nutrient compounds in detergents. As our knowledge of the effects of the various chemicals in detergents increases, the legislation will no doubt need to be revised from time to time. Perhaps it is not unreasonable for the minister to wish to retain a certain freedom of action in this regard before he finally bans all the various nutrients altogether. He has said that he wishes to maintain this freedom of action and flexibility. If that is so, surely he will find acceptable the amendment now before us.

It will allow people to make a choice. It will give to the people of Canada the opportunity of choosing between detergents, with the full knowledge of their contents. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary will say that the government is accepting the amendment. I submit it is a most reasonable one and ought to be easy to accept.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, may I speak briefly to this particular amendment? I think it is important that the percentage of phosphate in a detergent be marked on the package. During the last three or four months numerous inquiries have come to me about the phosphate content of certain detergents. Many shoppers, includ-

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ing my wife, wish to know the phosphate content of detergents, and wish to know those detergents that contain a high percentage of phosphates. There is an increasing resistance on the part of buyers with respect to these products, and I think that is excellent. It shows that the average housewife is interested in keeping our environment clean. When a woman goes to buy a detergent, she should know the percentage of phosphate that it contains.

While on this point, may I repeat a statement I made earlier? We must make absolutely certain, if this amendment is accepted, that a common criterion governs the percentage of phosphates as marked on the outside of detergent boxes. A number of sheets have been distributed showing the chemical compounds in detergents. Perhaps similar information might be given on the outside of packages. For instance, we have heard that phosphorous pentoxide is used in detergents. The percentage of that chemical and other similar chemicals in the detergent must be clearly indicated. The shoppers of this nation ought to know the phosphate content of detergents in boxes, and the imparting of such information ought to be made mandatory by law. I therefore, endorse this motion.

● (4:30 p.m.)

Mr. Orange: Mr. Speaker, at the outset may I say to the hon. lady that we appreciate her suggestion with regard to labelling the phosphate content in detergents. The mail which the minister has received in the past few weeks has convinced him that there is a sincere and abiding concern among many housewives with respect to the use of phosphates. Many women in our country have written to the department indicating that they would be willing to accept a less effective detergent if they were sure it did not pollute the waters of Canada. It seems to us that under these circumstances it would be worthwhile indeed to experiment with labelling. It is for this reason that I would like to thank the author of the amendment for her useful suggestion and to give her the assurance that the minister is willing to consider it further.

On the other hand, while we agree that labelling may be a useful device, I would not want to allow a charlatan manufacturer to take advantage of the public and foist a useless cleaning agent upon them just because he has cut down on the phosphate content. It is