

Electricity and Gas Inspection Act

national consumption of electricity and gas will continue to be measured correctly, and my department has a responsibility for seeing to it that the legislation is applied fairly to all marketing agents. Especially with respect to energy and measurement of electricity and gas consumption, this bill is entirely in line with my department's terms of reference. I therefore recommend that this bill be supported by hon. members on both sides of the House.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to take part in the second reading of Bill C-11, an act relating to the inspection of electric and gas metres and supplies.

Perhaps I could paraphrase the words of the Gettysburg Address and suggest that the world will little note nor long remember what is said here, but it can never forget what we are doing here.

I feel like the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I used to sit up in the gallery for the better part of 20 years and wonder what momentous legislation could keep Members of Parliament here on the last day, just before the Christmas recess. Well, this is an example of the momentous kind of legislation. As I say, I feel like the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in filling in these final moments.

As an aside, I am sure that the thoughts of all members of the House are with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre at this time and we all hope to see that distinguished gentleman back here on January 25, even, Sir, if you do not agree with the principles of Bill C-11.

Bill C-11 was first introduced in April, 1980 by the hon. Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet). In fact, it is almost identical to Bill C-20 which was introduced by my esteemed friend, the hon. member for Durham-Northumberland (Mr. Lawrence), when he was minister of consumer and corporate affairs. In 1978, this bill was introduced by the former Liberal minister of consumer and corporate affairs, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East (Mr. Allmand).

It is the opinion of the Progressive Conservative Party that this bill has been required for some time. It is with regret that it has not come before the House for second reading until now. It is our hope that it will proceed quickly through all stages of debate today in the House.

The purpose of Bill C-11 is many-faceted. This legislation will replace two existing acts, the Electricity Inspection Act and the Gas Inspection Act. Both of these acts have not been substantially amended or altered since the 1920s. As well as consolidating and updating the current acts, Bill C-11 will also serve to eliminate a number of inconsistencies in the acts which have resulted in various problems of interpretation and enforcement of these two outmoded pieces of legislation.

Due to the fact that these current acts have not been substantially amended since the 1920s, this new bill will reflect the changing technologies in the gas and electricity metering industry. The legislation is also forward-looking, in my view, in

that it will provide for the application of the provisions of the legislation to new sources or supplies of energy or new forms of energy distribution. This is a very attractive part of the legislation. We in this House are always being accused of only reacting to change, but here we are anticipating it and applauding it.

● (1250)

The act will also legitimize the use of certain recognized units such as British thermal units, of BTUs, as they are commonly known. The criminal offence provisions of the act are also strengthened. The act makes it a criminal offence for any contractor or supplier to "short supply" a customer by incorporating the wording and intent of Sections 33 and 34 of the Weights and Measures Act. The act also makes it an offence to commit theft by substituting a misleading or fraudulent meter.

The main purpose of this bill, however, aside from these very important housekeeping measures, is to permit the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to transfer a portion of its meter inspection function over to the private sector. Not only will this enable the already overburdened and understaffed branch of legal metrology to utilize its staff in other areas, but it also aids in reducing the government's expenditure at a time when many of us on this side of House are determined that the spending priorities of the government must be redesigned and directed particularly to important areas, such as housing and farming.

The act will authorize qualified utilities and meter manufacturers to verify and seal electricity and gas meters, subject to frequent audits and inspections by the staff of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It will, therefore, extend to the Canadian consumer the same protection he currently receives but at considerable savings to the federal government.

I feel it is incumbent upon me, as consumer affairs spokesman for my party, to allay any fears on the part of consumers who may feel that turning over verification of meters to those industries and contractors who sell the product is, in effect, the fox guarding the chickens. Only those utilities which are qualified and competent and accredited meter shops will be permitted to inspect gas and electricity meters. The qualified service people will have to register annually as well as be subject to spot audits by federal government inspectors to ensure that these meter shops and inspectors are maintaining strict quality control procedures.

These utilities and meter shops are required to meet strict standards on the quality of testing equipment and quality control measures. These standards are set by the federal authorities in accordance with prescribed standards of calibration. It at any time a meter verifier fails to meet these standards, the accreditation necessary for him to be in business can be revoked and the meters under his jurisdiction sealed and re-verified.

Should a dispute between an electricity or gas utility and a consumer arise, federal government inspectors will be able to arbitrate the dispute and verify the meter's accuracy. I hope