Oil Substitution Act

treatment. That is why I appeal to the back-benchers of the Government to put pressure on the Government, because it is in their ridings that people are converting. It is in their ridings that the people are finally getting a little bit of help. Put pressure on the Government so that the Cabinet extends this program for six more months. That is all we are asking and I think it is very reasonable.

I believe that a Government that was really concerned about consulting people and about listening would not bring down the guillotine on this debate. I believe instead that it would say that it was prepared to look at this matter and extend it for another six months because it understands the justice and economic sense of such an extension.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate again, but on the other hand, I am disappointed in the new Government's lack of enthusiasm for recommendations and claims that we feel are well founded. Mr. Speaker, I am particularly disappointed that, in addition to setting a deadline in the Bill itself, the Government should have imposed time limitation on debate. It is too bad we have to repeat the same arguments a hundred times to make ourselves understood. However, I am prepared to do so if the Government can be persuaded to review the Bill before the House today.

It is too bad the Government has not understood our message, a message that is clear and unequivocal. The Canadian Home Insulation Program, CHIP, and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program COSP, were very good, I would even say excellent, federal programs, whose ultimate purpose was to promote energy conservation.

After carefully listening to and reading speeches by Members of the various Parties, I think we all agree that these programs have been very useful. However, we in the Opposition cannot go along with the Government's decision to eliminate these programs. As my colleagues have pointed out before, the termination of these programs has taken everyone, and especially the private sector, by surprise. If this Government thinks it can cut and withdraw programs without generating controversy, it is wrong. People do not act without analyzing the consequences of what they do. They do not speak before considering what they want to say. A government cannot afford to draft legislation unthinkingly, especially a government that thinks so highly of consultation and consensus. Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Government has a certain amount of pride and is thus reluctant to reverse its decisions. However, pride has no future but common sense does. And common sense dictates that we should offer entrepreneurs and consumers an extension.

Common sense dictates that the interests of Canadians should be considered above all else. The Government must act to allay the fears and quiet the feelings of panic that have held this country in their grip since November 8 last year.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians have reason to be worried. First of all, when these two programs are cut, homeowners who want to upgrade their insulation and change their heating systems to save energy and money will no longer be able to take advantage of the grants offered by the Government. Second, contractors who are carrying out these conversions cannot possibly cope with any excess demand between now and March 31. Third, what will happen once the contracts have been completed? The answer is simple: there will be a sharp drop in employment, something we cannot afford with nearly one and a half million Canadians unemployed. I fail to understand why, with the kind of unemployment we have, the Government does not at least help maintain existing jobs that were created by private enterprise, if it is reluctant to create jobs directly.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, not only the government has not yet introduced new job creation programs, not only does it hope that those jobs will be created by magic, not only does it deny small businesses the assistance they need to provide more jobs, not only is the government inactive in job creation, but it has also created unemployment by cutting programs.

Since the election, it has substantially cut the budget of several large companies, it has cut jobs, it has increased the federal tax on several items so that private companies have to raise their prices and the consumers pay more.

Mr. Speaker, I will be kind and leave it at that, but I do not need to say more to demonstrate that the Government has been going too far. We should be realistic and understand all the economic implications of the COSP and CHIP programs for the creation of jobs. We have to realize that those programs contribute to the creation of jobs. How many Canadians would have converted their heating system or would have insulated their homes if those federal programs had not been in effect? Far less, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you. This partial subsidy of the conversion costs has helped Canadians make a decision that thousands of them would not have made otherwise. This is why the implementation of programs such as CHIP and COSP was beneficial to many Canadians, allowing them to change their system so that various contractors throughout the country could have work and create other jobs, thus increasing the performance of their business.

When we refer to an improved performance of a business, we mean a wider scale of better services at more competitive prices so that in the future those businesses will have a sound basis and will continue to thrive. However, through the too early and too quick cancellation of programs, the Government has threatened the infrastructure of businesses which were not solidly established. Such an infrastructure takes a long time to set up and an unexperienced government should not be allowed to give it up.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, businesses and jobs are too important in the Canadian economy. Not only are those jobs a major component of our economy, they are also absolutely essential in the Atlantic Provinces, particularly New Bruns-