

● (1640)

It is this one aspect of the failure, that is trying to provide some tax relief on the PGRT, that we find offensive. We find it offensive not in the sense that it provides relief but in that it fails to provide relief on a general basis. The Government is proposing to give some tax relief to oil companies in an indiscriminate way. Except for one small provision in the legislation, it will generally give tax relief to oil companies. It will improve the lot or cash flow positions of the oil companies. Some oil companies will definitely benefit and be able to carry on activities, but there are some which have benefited over the course of Canadian history to a tremendous degree. Their parent companies in other countries have also benefited, at the expense of Canadians, to a tremendous degree. They will be allowed to take a much larger share of this unconditional windfall tax benefit.

We find that extremely offensive. It violates a fundamental principle of the National Energy Program in that it is absolutely unfair. It discriminates against Canadians. Obviously, when I and others see multinational oil companies obtaining unconditional windfall tax breaks, we find the Bill offensive and we believe it should not be approved.

It is about time the Government began to husband tax dollars which are gleaned in such a difficult manner from Canadians. Those tax dollars should be spent in such a way that Canadian people obtain a definite benefit from them. I would like to refer to a small example in the legislation which does not go far enough toward tying unconditional tax breaks or opportunities to improve cash flow to investing and defining products which will ultimately provide Canadians with the economic expansion and employment opportunities they require. Tax breaks can no longer be unconditional. They must be tied to economic benefits. When we see unconditional tax benefits being given to multinational oil companies, people begin to wonder why disabled persons and pensioners are not receiving the attention or benefits they need. We need look no further than the legislation in which the Government proposes unconditional tax breaks to companies, some of which are not doing all that well when compared with other groups and other businesses in society.

Another interesting but offensive aspect of this particular piece of legislation is the fact that the unconditional windfall tax break to major multinational oil companies, Canadian oil companies and smaller oil companies, will not be passed through to consumers. When we take a look at the price at the gas pump, we realize that the people who have been hammered beyond belief by the Government are average Canadians who live in Courtenay or Powell River, British Columbia, or the small-businessman or fisherman who is being driven into the earth by increasing costs—high fixed costs, high interest rates and high energy costs. The Government has no way of ensuring that the tax break at the upstream end of the system, this unconditional windfall tax break which will occur to oil companies, will pass through to consumers.

The other day when there was an appeal in the House for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) to look at a mechanism

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in his Budget for providing some relief to fishermen from high energy costs, high murage costs or for refinancing to obtain lower interest rates, he just laughed and said, "We gave them the six and five; that is all the relief they need". That is absolute nonsense. When will the Government start looking at a downstream energy policy? When will it start looking at the possibility that when a tax concession is made, it be allowed to move down the stream to consumers? Frankly, government Members do not care about consumers, fishermen, small businesses or small transportation outfits. They do not care about the way in which inflation is affected by high energy costs, even when they are giving the tax dollars of those same consumers back to oil companies in the form of a windfall or even when they are failing to provide an adequate distribution in the country on the basis of some equitable measure of taxation. It is offensive in a very serious way.

Another offensive aspect of the Bill is that it represents a tampering with some of the smaller components of a national energy policy which has failed. I think the reason we have had so many problems is that the former Minister of Energy, who is now the Minister of Finance, was a tremendously strong individual who had decided on an approach for a national energy policy and rammed it through without any consideration whatsoever. What must have happened inside the planning area in the upper echelons of the Liberal Government is that there was a realization that the assumptions were wrong and that the national energy policy would undoubtedly fail. Then there was a switch—the Minister of Energy became the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice became the Minister of Energy. We are concerned that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Chrétien) is not giving the attention to this portfolio which he gave when he was in his previous portfolio and working on the Constitution. The energy he put into the Constitution is certainly not the energy which he is putting into his present portfolio. One could suggest, by the answers he has given in the House and his failure to understand some basic concepts which are developing from his Department, that he is spending more time seeking the leadership of his Party than paying attention to his household duties in the Department of Energy and to pursuing for Canadians an alternate policy which may fit the reality. That has to be considered. Certainly that Minister is capable of providing higher quality based answers in the House and actions to protect Canadian interests in this area.

Another aspect of the Bill before us today that is offensive is once again the tampering concept. The Minister of State for Finance (Mr. MacLaren) will not admit that the energy policy has collapsed. He wants to tamper with the symptoms of failure. He wants to give oil companies a \$250,000 break because their cash flow has collapsed and he wants to assist them. Unfortunately, he will pass it on to others who we do not believe deserve it. It is not tied to conditions or to improvements which will generally benefit Canadians. It is not specific enough. He wants to back off on the PGRT. Again it is not specific enough, again it is tampering. However, we believe that he is failing to provide Canadians with a beginning of a