

to assist the industry to improve insulation techniques and marketing.

The concern for energy conservation and the needs of Canadian homeowners was at the heart of our decision on how to phase out CHIP. Our greatest concern was to be as fair to Canadians as humanly possible. We proceeded carefully. We consulted with the industry and then acted in such a way that Canadians were not denied an appropriate level of funding because of circumstances beyond their control. We acted fairly, we acted properly and we acted generously.

Now that the evidence has been presented to the House, I think the committee must admit that those who did apply during the period January 1 to January 17 and received 60 per cent funding were in fact covered under the old program. We accept and understand that the regulations were brought in after the announced closing of the program. That is fair enough. There were reasons for that and we appreciate the committee drawing this matter to the attention of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, to the House and to the country.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary has put forward some information that is new, at least as far as I am concerned. However, I want to react to it in terms of the mandate of the committee and then hear the Hon. Member's comments. I must say, looking at the revelations that he has just made from the perspective of the committee's mandate, I think he has made the situation worse.

I want to point out two problems to him that arise from what he said. First, he told us that the Government did not stick to its own press release. The press release advised consumers to get their applications in by December 31. However, those who relied on the press release and did not submit an application because they could not make the deadline of December 31, never would have learned that it would have been accepted if they had submitted the application up to two and a half weeks later. This was a great unfairness to people who took the Government seriously when it put out its press release. How many people came in between December 31 and January 17? What information was given to Members who were relying on the press release and advising their constituents who had missed the deadline? How did the information get out that an application submitted during that critical two and one half week period would still be accepted?

That is the first problem which concerns me. I hope there was no preference because people with access to Ministers would have found out about this while those who do not would not have discovered that the Minister had changed her mind about the deadline.

The second problem concerns the contents of the regulation. This is a regulation that we have challenged and which I assume the Government was defending. The regulation stated December 31 as the cut-off date but in fact it took effect on January 17. If December 31 was not the cut-off date and the Government was prepared to give grants for applications that

Motions

were received between December 31 and January 17, what authority does the Government have to honour those applications? It is certainly not the regulation because the regulation imposes a cut-off two and a half weeks earlier.

I support the CHIP program and would have been happy if the Government continued it. I am not talking about it from the point of view of policy, and I am pleased that others were able to receive the money. However, from the point of view of the mandate of the committee, I must ask the Parliamentary Secretary about the meaning of the regulation. What authority does the Government believe it has for ignoring the terms of the regulation and validating applications that were received in that two and one half week period? Those applications that came in between December 31 and January 17 should be honoured, but perhaps they should be honoured out of the salary of the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister rather than the general revenues of the Government of Canada.

Finally, it seems to me that the initial mistake that was made, for which the Minister surely must be accountable, is that she gave her officials an assignment that they could not handle. The Parliamentary Secretary told us himself that there was no way that the regulations could be drafted on time, even though they knew they needed regulations. He has indicated that they needed them to validate what it was they wanted to do. They should have picked a realistic date for their officials in order that the law could have been obeyed. In this way the rule of law could have been complied with and we would not have had the necessity of making the report which is before us. I feel even more strongly than I did before that the Government stands condemned by the terms of our report and by the way it behaved in trying to extricate itself from this very unsatisfactory situation.

• (1210)

Mr. McDermid: Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member expects recipients of CHIP to survive on the salary of a Parliamentary Secretary, then it will be an awfully thin program. I can guarantee him that.

Mr. Waddell: It will be a thin Parliamentary Secretary, too!

Mr. McDermid: That is right.

I say to the Hon. Member that the committee cannot have it both ways; it cannot suck and blow at the same time. It is saying that we cut people off on December 31, that that was illegal and that we should not have done it. He then says that we did not honour them until the regulations were passed, and he asked for a number. There were some 25,000. There were no special favours given. Obviously, people who applied for CHIP grants after the deadline were expecting to receive a 33-1/3 per cent grant. There was no discrimination with respect to the matter whatsoever. It was done absolutely honestly, above board, and with the greatest of fairness and concern for all Canadians who applied for CHIP grants. For the Hon. Member to try to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear is very unfortunate.