

Oil Substitution Act

ment to its senses. At the end of that six-month period, I am sure the Government will admit that it made a mistake, that Bill C-24 is not a good idea and that it will provide better legislation.

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I too rise to oppose Bill C-24 and to ask for a six-month hoist. I believe it makes no sense to deal with this Bill in the middle of winter when the program cannot be used by many northerners and people who cannot connect their gas lines in this type of weather.

● (1200)

The principle of the Bill also makes no sense, Mr. Speaker. I cannot understand why the Conservative Government wants to cut back on two very important programs, the Canada Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program. I might add that I believe the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, which is also being cut back, really should be considered in the same category.

Why does the Government want to cut grants which are very beneficial to low and middle-income home owners? I would think that probably the majority of homes in western and northern Canada are much older homes and have greater insulation problems. Why does the Government want to cut back on grants for these types of homes, turning against the whole philosophy of grants, and in turn give such large amounts to the oil companies either through direct grants or tax write-offs through the PIP program?

My colleague, our energy critic, tells me that \$1.6 billion is being given away to oil companies this year, Mr. Speaker. I cannot understand why a Conservative Government, which says that it does not want give-aways or grants, would give that amount of money to the oil companies when it is taking \$250 million away from both the Home Insulation Program and the Oil Substitution Program. Approximately \$125 million is being cut from each of those programs this year. That really does not make any sense from the point of view of logic. It, of course, makes a great deal of sense from the point of view of the dogma and political philosophy of the Progressive Conservative Party.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that there are many reasons why these programs are important and a good investment. They really do not cost a lot, they improve homes, and they do stimulate small business. First, consumers will save on their heating costs and for many families who are in older homes this is quite an important item. It is of particular importance to senior citizens whose taxes are increasing and whose fuel costs are really going up, not to mention food costs. It is important to save on heating costs from the point of view of the consumer, particularly consumers who do not have a lot of money and could not insulate their homes without help. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, these programs also mean a great deal to northerners and people who do not have insulated homes, being perhaps the older homes in the east.

I cannot understand why the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) would support this Bill. Surely in the interests of his constituents he would oppose this Bill and would strongly support the kinds of programs which would help the people of his riding insulate their homes. Why is he supporting a program which is going to be imposed in the middle of winter when his own constituents cannot make use of it? Those who did not get in on the program previously would have had no chance to get in during the winter months. That is one of the reasons we believe a six-month hoist is very important.

As my colleague has also mentioned, there is the whole matter of energy conservation. That was the main reason, of course, that the Liberals brought these programs into existence in the first place. The speaker from the Liberal Party who just spoke a few moments ago said that 60,000 barrels of oil per day are saved through these programs. I agree with him that that is a significant saving. I spend part of my time on one of the Gulf Islands just off the mainland of British Columbia. Many people there are now heating with wood. Some people are experimenting with solar heating. There are many improved methods of heating now which make it very sensible to look at alternate energy sources. I think these kinds of grants to home owners make a great deal of sense, coupled with research and development.

The third point I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that this program helps to improve our housing stock. The RRAP program, which the Conservative Government is now cutting back—about which the municipalities are very concerned—is another program that made a great deal of sense. It was used to improve older housing stock, to insulate and improve the quality of housing. It also enabled some people to subdivide their homes. In some communities where there is a tight housing problem many older people who have large homes are “over-housed”, as CMHC refers to it. Through some of these programs it is possible to subdivide so they could perhaps have separate accommodations or in-law suites which would help to house more people. But they have to have some help in conversions and insulation. The CHIP and COSP programs were certainly valid programs from their point of view.

These programs are labour-intensive programs. They create and maintain jobs. In British Columbia we heard last week that 60 per cent or 70 per cent of construction workers are out of work. This is not only because there is a slack period in construction but also because of high technology being brought in. There are new methods of construction being used in large apartment buildings and major construction projects. We were told that in one high-rise development in downtown Vancouver which is using prefabricated methods—the walls are brought in and put up by cranes—they are now in the second stage of high technology and have reduced the number of carpenters needed to just three carpenters per high-rise. There is no question that many of these large projects are not using our skilled carpenters. Therefore, the smaller projects, home insulation and conversions to other heating methods, as well as the