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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

Government Orders

[Government Orders]

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Energy Efficiency Act

The House resumed from March 30 consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in the debate on Bill S-3, a bill that would amend the Energy Efficiency Act.

The basic premise of this bill is to broaden the scope of the government's ability to regulate energy-using consumer products. We can all think of a whole range of consumer products that people have in their homes, whether it be washing machines, dryers, fridges or so many others. The government already does regulate many of these under the existing act, through standards, through labelling, and through the promotion of energy-efficient products.

Indeed, this is something that needs to be broadened, because there are so many new appliances and new electronic gadgets these days.

So many of us in this House, of course, use the BlackBerry, which is a great Canadian-made product from my wife's home area of Kitchener—Waterloo. I must say, of course, that I am proud that

Research in Motion also has a building in my riding of Halifax West. That is an interesting connection that my wife and I have with our hometowns.

There are so many items we have in our homes that use power, and there are programs when one is shopping for these things. One can look for the EnerGuide label or the Energy Star label to find out how, for example, one fridge compares to other fridges in its energy consumption, or whether a computer monitor falls within the group that is low enough in terms of energy use to have received the Energy Star. Those are good programs that have been around for a while.

The issue of standby power is an important one. That is one of the things this bill purports to regulate. That is to say, we all know of things in our homes that use power all the time. It may be only a little power, but they are still using power. Anything that has a light on all the time is using power. Often our televisions, even though they are turned off, are still using some power unless they are unplugged.

I can think of things like the new digital video recorders that use quite a bit of power, I gather, particularly if they are recording. Even if they are not recording, there is still a light on. The VCR has a light on, the stereo system has a little light on, and all these things use power.

Even an intercom system is often on all the time. These things are using power.

What this bill will allow the government to do by regulation is limit the amount of standby power that these products can use. Many of these products today use in the range of six to eight watts. At the same time, some of the new products are able to use as little as one watt of power per product. That would be a much better standard to apply to all of them. In fact, that is part of the plan, from what I hear of the government, and that is a good thing.

There are so many things: computers, battery chargers, adapters, stereos, TVs, and microwaves. If a charger for a cellphone is left plugged into the wall, it will become warm. The adapter will become warm. It becomes warm for a reason. That is because it is using power.

One thing that is worthwhile to mention during the debate on this bill is that it is a good opportunity to remind people to unplug these things. It is costing money and it is using power unnecessarily. We all know there are many good reasons not to do that, notably to save money and to help the environment.

In fact, Natural Resources Canada has an office of energy efficiency that has looked into this. They say that as much as 10% of household electrical consumption in Canada comes from this standby power issue. In other words, we could each theoretically reduce as much as 10% of our electrical bills by unplugging these things.

They say that if we did this and dealt with this issue, it could be the equivalent of turning off the power in 300,000 homes. In other words, 300,000 homes worth of electricity per year could be saved across the country. When we are looking at issues like blackouts in Ontario and problems when there are peak energy uses in the summer in particular, we can all see the importance of having that kind of room in the electrical grid.

However, as many have pointed out before, it is not simply what is in this bill that is of concern here and that we ought to be looking at. In fact, what is not in the bill is of major concern.

The measures in this bill were originally in Bill C-30 in the previous Parliament, the government's so-called clean air act which purported to deal with climate change. A special committee of the House

was set aside to deal with the bill. Once it actually got hold of it and made a variety of amendments, it did become what could realistically be called a clean air act, but it certainly was not that when it was proposed by the government. It was the opposition amendments that put it in a form that would have actually achieved something.

What did we see? Did that bill go forward? No, it did not go forward. In fact, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament and called an election. We have not seen the bill come back from the government. We have had lots of comments from the government about dealing with climate change which that bill purported to do, but no action.

In June 2005 the previous government actually listed in the *Canada Gazette* the six major greenhouse gases. That is the beginning of the 18 month process of regulating those greenhouse gases.

There is no reason why the following Conservative government that took over in February 2006 could not have regulated to limit the production, the emission, of those various greenhouse gases within that 18 month period.

Now it is more than three and a half years since those were listed, and we still see no regulations from the government in relation to the limiting of greenhouse gases. We have heard the government talk about cap and trade, we heard that it has a so called "Turning the Corner" plan, but we do not see any corner being turned. We do not see any actual regulations, any real action to deal with greenhouse gases or climate change. That is a concern.

The total lack of trust Canadians have in the government is also a concern. The kind of thing I have talked about is one of the reasons they have so little trust in the government. When it actually comes to bringing forth regulations to ensure the impact of amendments outlined in this bill are actually felt, we do not know what the government will do. This bill does allow the government to regulate in a whole variety of areas.

One of the questions we have heard during debate, both in the Senate and here, is this question of whether or not this bill could be used, this law could be used, to regulate automobile emissions. Well, the wording is very broad. I had a look at the law that exists now and it says in section 200, the definition section, "energy-using product' means a prescribed product".

Actually, that means that the government can set out in regulation what products are included as energy using products that fall within the scope of this bill. In other words, it could certainly regulate automobiles, as they do use an energy product: gasoline obviously, ethanol, even hydrogen these days or electricity. All these things are using energy. In theory, then, the government could certainly regulate automobiles through this bill, although we would expect it to use other legislation that is on the books to do that. It is interesting that that is one of the options.

The point I am making is that we do not know what the government will do with these regulations. We do not know if it will take any action at all. Its record so far in regulating on the environment is so weak that it is hard for Canadians to have any confidence that this bill will actually be used to do anything worthwhile.

The idea of the bill is a fine idea, but it is how it is used. The bill is all about giving that power to regulate to the government. That is an important point.

There are also concerns about the Conservative government's complete failure to understand that energy efficiency is a fundamental issue not just for the environment but for the economy. Dealing

with these things is important in terms of where we go in the economy. What was lacking, for example, in the budget was an understanding of the importance of that.

In the U.S. we have seen the Obama administration's package for economic stimulus. We have seen six times as much spending per capita on the energy efficiency side of things and renewable energies as here in the Conservative government package. That was disappointing. I think the government ought to consider that, reconsider its position, and recognize that it is important for the economy that we become efficient. It can save us in many ways. It can help us with the strains in terms of our electrical grids and in many other areas.

I suspect that the fact that many government members are still climate change deniers is a factor here. I have witnessed that in this House. I witnessed it on Monday during debate on this same bill. My colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca was speaking. He was talking about Antarctica and how we have seen ice shelves, such as the Larsen ice shelf, collapse there and what a concern that is for situations like that around the globe. He gave examples of global warming, examples that are alarming scientists around the globe, and some of the reasons why scientists tell us the evidence is overwhelming that climate change is happening and that it is caused by human activity.

However, the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt was in the chamber and he said that Antarctica is growing. I do not know what planet he is talking about. Maybe there is another Antarctica on another planet somewhere that is growing, but I think it is pretty clear that the opposite is happening here.

In fact we understand, and I think most people do, that the ice in Antarctica does not just freeze every winter. With the ice in Antarctica, or on the Greenland glacier or Arctic ice cap, we are talking primarily about ice that has been formed with snow falling and then more the following year and so much over centuries that it pushes down, compacts and turns into very hard and very old ice.

When we see something that is thousands of years old collapse and fall into the ocean, and a colleague thinks that Antarctica is actually growing, I think he ought to give his head a shake.

It is a bit like those who suggest that there is no link between HIV and AIDS. All the science is in the other direction. It is overwhelmingly clear that there is a link between HIV and AIDS. Or it is like the techniques that were used for years by those people who said there was no link between tobacco and cancer. We hear the same kinds of things from the other side.

It seems to me the Conservatives have not gotten the message. It seems to me that they forget the poll that came out in January 2007 which said that the number one concern of Canadians was the environment. This was about six or eight months after Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth* came into the theatres and people started to become much more concerned about these issues. The media started to talk about this. People got more and more concerned, but it was only after that, that the government suddenly and totally changed direction and started to admit that there was a concern about climate change, or at least it wanted us to believe that it was reformed, that it actually had bought into the idea that this was a real problem.

Yet, it seems that many members on that side did not get the memo, that they have not gotten the message that in fact they are supposed to believe now in climate change, because we hear them say things like the notion that Antarctica is still growing. We hear them say things that are utterly ridiculous and that fly in the face of the overwhelming science that tells us that climate change is real and is the result of human activity.

Maybe they should work on their messaging over there and get the message out. Maybe they need another memo for more of the members on that side to get this clear. Most of them do not say very much normally without the office of the Prime Minister giving the approval, so one would think that maybe they need clearer direction from the PMO on that. Perhaps it is the fact that they are climate change deniers that accounts for their dismal failure to grasp what really are the larger implications that are at play with this bill and the issues of climate change, to which Bill C-30 in the last Parliament was tied.

When this bill was debated in the other place, that red chamber down the hall on the east side of this building, my colleague from Alberta, Senator Grant Mitchell, raised many important questions about this bill. In fact, while this bill was introduced in the Senate by the government leader there, it was Senator Mitchell who has been the driving force behind this idea for some time, pushing for energy efficiency improvements and pushing for changes, so that the government can regulate classes of products, not just certain products. That is a good thing, there is no question.

He was right, in the Senate, when he noted that perhaps one of the biggest questions was the lack of trust Canadians have that the Conservative government will do anything it promises. I have heard from many Canadians that they do not trust the government. They simply do not trust the government to actually implement this or any significant environmental policy because its record is so dismal.

While the Liberal Party supports a broadening of the government's ability to regulate products that use energy, this does not disguise the fact that these changes are in isolation to create the false impression the Conservatives are actually doing something on this file.

Well, they are not, really. We know that. That is why Canadians do not trust the Prime Minister or the government on the environment any more than they trust them to properly manage our country's finances or our economy.

This is the same government that told us last fall that there were no problems. The Prime Minister said that if it was going to get bad, it would already have been bad. We heard that during the election: if the economy is going to be in recession, we would have already had it here.

Well, things got a lot worse. In September he said it was good time to buy stocks. Not only was that insensitive but it was incredibly bad advice, when we consider what has happened since. For a guy who claims to be an economist, that is a pretty scary bit of prognostication. I think most people would have to recognize that.

Why the lack of trust? That is the result when the Conservatives deny climate change in the face of the kind of overwhelming scientific evidence that exists, or when they deny there is a recession in the midst of a global economic meltdown as we have been seeing over the past number of months, or when they say they will balance the books when they have been in deficit for months, as we heard last fall in the fiscal update, which was clearly absolute nonsense and from which the government retreated.

That is the question. Will the Conservatives actually implement these amendments in this bill and act on the regulatory power that this gives them?

We all saw what the Conservatives did with the Kyoto protocol. We saw an announcement related to cap and trade two years ago, and nothing has happened. We saw what they did with Bill C-30 in a previous Parliament, which is where this initiative first saw the light of day.

And did we not have a bill related to fixed term elections? That seems to be something I can recall; something that evaporated in the mind of the Prime Minister around about last September.

Did we not have a promise not to tax income trusts? Did we not have a signed offshore accord with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador that the Prime Minister said would not be abandoned? I think we did.

On the environment, in general, the trust factor is non-existent for the Conservative government. It announced a \$1 billion clean energy fund, which sounded great. But how much of that is going toward things like solar power, wind power, tidal power or geothermal power? When the deputy minister appeared before the natural resources committee, she was asked about this fund and she told the committee that \$850 million was targeted toward carbon capture and sequestration. Now, that is an important technology and it is of great concern to the oil sands, certainly. However, it is not the only issue. What is concerning is that the Conservatives want to give the impression they have this wonderful clean energy fund for a whole range of clean energies. We really see it is almost all going to one particular area.

Aside from this fundamental issue of trust, there are also concerns of what is not in the bill that raises other questions. For instance, what kind of consultation took place in relation to the second section which talks about interprovincial trade? Did the government consult the provinces? We do not know.

There are a variety of other concerns. The questions and comments that I hope will follow will give me an opportunity to talk about them more.