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Mr. Leon Benoit

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): We are now in a public meeting.

Mr. Gravelle, it's your motion. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Everybody should have a copy of the motion. It's very simple. It requests that we do a study on the ecoEnergy retrofit program. It's a very good program that the government put in place. A lot of people took advantage of it, and it's something that we believe should be made permanent. It saves energy, it saves on greenhouse gases, and it creates employment.

We would like to hear from expert witnesses to give us some data, in case the government ever wants to bring it back. This is not trying to force the government to bring it back—we just want to study it. If the government of the day ever decides to bring the program back, they'll have statistics and data to refer to.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gravelle.

[English]

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Trost.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to Mr. Gravelle for bringing this motion forward.

First of all, we are doing a fair number of reports right now. I was on the industry committee back in 2004 when we started doing reports that never got finished. That was with the minority government. My point is this: when we start to do too many reports, we begin to lose track of where we're going. If we take, say, three or four weeks to do this and then do the write-up for another two, it puts us that much farther from some of the other projects we started back in October.

I appreciate the member's compliments on the government's good programming. I'm sure the minister will take the NDP's endorsement for what it's worth, but I think it behooves this committee to finish some projects before we do it. We have some flexibility for some other small reports we're doing, but it's starting to bend too far. If you want to bring this back in June or next September, it might be more worthwhile thinking about it then. I just don't want to get us on too many reports at this point.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Trost.

Madame Day.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): This program is very important for four reasons: it responds to a significant demand, it creates jobs, it stimulates the economy and it is beneficial for the environment.

I would like to give you some figures. More than 510,000 registrations have been submitted and they have risen in number from 37,500 to 200,000 per year. The program is clearly very popular. As an example, 1,139 grants have been made in my constituency, meaning that 1% of the population has benefited. The government receives more than 500 requests for information per day. That is a significant figure.

In terms of job creation, it means 3,500 person-hours. It is a significant aspect of energy efficiency. The jobs created are well-paid, either in construction, renovation and administration, or for manufacturers, suppliers and wholesalers. The Save ecoENERGY Coalition represents more than 1,600 companies. This has a major impact on, and contributes positively to, the economy. For every \$100 invested, homeowners invest \$10. It brings in taxes. For every dollar invested by homeowners, the government collects \$2 in taxes. One thousand local businesses in the energy efficiency sector are threatened with closure if the ecoENERGY program is not maintained.

In closing, I would like to say that these initiatives correspond fully with Canada's international obligations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is important, therefore, to talk about this program a lot. As the budget will soon be presented, I feel that it is an area where all our energy must be directed.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, go ahead.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I think we can almost call the question here, but I'm very glad to hear the NDP calling this a very good, popular program. They believe in it, Mr. Chair. They see there are some huge benefits to employment and to the environment.

I want to point out they had three chances to vote for it. They opposed it at each point, and I'm sure if we brought it back a fourth time they would be voting against it again, but nevertheless, we appreciate their support for one of our programs, and we can probably put the questions fairly quickly here.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gravelle. Do you want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you for your compliments, Mr. Anderson. If you want to bring the ecoEnergy efficiency program in a separate government bill, all by itself, we'll support it 100%, guaranteed, but if you bring it with back-to-work legislation, we're not going to support it.

As Ms. Day said, this is a very beneficial program.

I spoke last night informally to a fellow by the name of Warren Heeley, who is the president of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada. They are telling me it created 350,000 jobs. The cost per job is \$5,700, which is relatively cheap compared to other jobs that are created.

I know what Mr. Trost's concerns are, but if we were to take two weeks or three weeks maximum to look at this, I don't think it would take very long, and it would be a short report because around the table we all agree this is a good thing to look at.

If we could look at it as soon as possible, it would be a benefit to the government.

• (0910)

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Gravelle.

Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Looking at some statistics we got this morning that were provided on the program, one thing that popped out at me was how different regions

have used this program differently. There may be a reason to revisit the program just to look at different regions. For example, Alberta, with 11% of the population, received only 4% of the grants. Quebec also isn't using its proportion of the money, so maybe there are different ways of advertising it or something that would make Alberta and Quebec come up to the national level of usage. That would be one reason to take another look at it and maybe call in some experts from the regions to see how it was advertised.

The Chair: Mr. Gravelle, go ahead.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Could I make just one more comment?

Talking with you, Mr. Anderson, a few weeks ago, if I remember correctly, you said that it wasn't a benefit to rural areas in your neck of the woods. I remember you telling me that rural people don't take advantage of this.

If we were to study ecoEnergy, we could find out why or what could be done so that rural homeowners can take advantage of this program.

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing no further interventions, I will call the question on Mr. Gravelle's motion.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: We will move in camera again, so I will suspend for just a minute.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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