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Office of / bureau de
Dennis Bevington MP
Western Arctic

House of Commons Debates
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The Environment

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak tonight on an issue I raised earlier this year with the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

In the Northwest Territories, the biomass energy strategy of conversion of large buildings to this form of energy for heating has been an unqualified success. The program has been carried out for the last two to three years. We are seeing much reduced costs in heating these large buildings. We are seeing a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of a considerable amount through the use of biomass energy, mostly from waste products from sawmills in Alberta and British Columbia.

This is a very big opportunity for northern Canada to reduce its cost of living. These opportunities provide energy that is clean and that has very good environmental characteristics in terms of handling and carrying. The wood pellets that are being employed are half the cost of the most common heating feature in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut, which is home heating oil. In fact, 175 communities across northern Canada rely almost entirely on this product, which is very expensive.

Therefore, my question for the minister was, as the Department of Public Works and other government agencies have many large buildings throughout northern Canada, did the government have a program or had it considered a program that would convert these buildings in northern Canada to this new-found heating source?

If this were accomplished, we would see that the market for the product would grow very quickly in the three territories. The federal government could be a shining example of how to buy into a successful program. We would see the volumes go up. This is not a small affair. The use of fuel oil in the three territories are in excess of half a billion dollars in costs for heating throughout those three territories, whether in homes, commercial buildings or in industrial facilities.

The federal government's role in this as a promoter of clean energy would be very useful to the north. The conversion of its buildings' heating to wood pellets or this renewable form of energy would provide an extra market for entrepreneurs to develop supply chains to supply this product throughout the north and many smaller users, such as residences and small businesses, would benefit from this transfer.

It is a very simple, straightforward question. Will the government consider this program? Will it work toward the directions that are turning out to be successful in the north and work with northerners to make a better life for ourselves?

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is actually a great topic. Biomass and biofuel energy are ways to produce green energy and certainly something I acknowledge.

I have seen many different and interesting technologies cross my desk, not only this year but in my previous life at the University of Calgary. It is something that is uniquely Canadian in that we have a thriving sector working in R and D. In fact, our government is supporting this area. I can think off the top of my head of Sustainable Development Technology Canada and several other agencies that are working to promote both the development and receptor capacity for these new technologies.

As far as the adoption of technology goes, our government has invested heavily in this area through the eco-energy renewable power program. The government invested up to \$1.48 billion over 14 years to support renewable power sources, such as wind, solar, biomass and hydro energy. Also, the eco-energy innovation initiative will invest \$281 million over five years to support the development and demonstration of clean energy technologies. This will help give Canada's entrepreneurs and manufacturers a leading edge in energy innovation. This program currently supports 104 projects across Canada, representing 4,458 megawatts of capacity.

I know that our government is investing in both the research and adoption of a variety of clean energy sources. In Canada we are blessed by having over 75% of our electricity produced by renewable or non-carbon-emitting sources. This is certainly something that our government has supported and has invested in, and it will continue to do so.

Mr. Dennis Bevington:

Mr. Speaker, in reality there is no need for technological development. There is no need to actually even come up with the capital. Private enterprise has taken hold in this market throughout the north, but without the federal government actually putting its buildings up for conversion, even the private enterprise cannot enter into that market. With the federal government not having a program that says it wants to convert, this will not happen. If it simply puts out tenders to provide heating for its buildings over a period of years, we will see that the competitive prices that it achieves from those tenders will spur the industry.

It is not really a very difficult conversion for the government to make; it simply has to have the will to do it. I encourage the government to go ahead with that.

Ms. Michelle Rempel:

Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague opposite for his question and for his interest in ensuring that we have clean, renewable sources of energy in the north. I want to reiterate that our government has invested heavily in the adoption of such technologies, and certainly this is something that we will continue to support through our budgetary measures in the future.

