Federal Sales Tax on Drugs

Mr. Georges Valade (Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by my house leader that our party agrees to the unanimous consent needed for this motion. Since some specific problems may arise, we do so with the understanding, of course, that when the occasion arises for such a motion to be moved on our part, the hon. member and his colleagues will also agree to giving unanimous consent.

Motion agreed to.

• (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Forest: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions and I believe the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman) is ready to deal with item No. 176 on today's list. After this has been dealt with, then we shall deal with item No. 2, which is also in his name.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

REQUEST FOR COPIES OF REPORTS; REVIEWS OR STUDIES ON FEDERAL SALES TAX ON DRUGS

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo) moved:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of any reports, reviews or studies of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs regarding the removal of the federal sales tax on pharmaceuticals and drugs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, there is great importance to this motion in the sense that we really need the particular information for which I have asked in order to properly assess how effectively the policies of the department are. At the time that the federal sales tax was removed on pharmaceuticals and drugs, some questions were raised as to whether these savings would be passed on to the consumers. By comparing prices considerable evidence is accumulating which shows that many of these savings are not being passed on to the consumer.

The reason for asking whether the department is prepared to issue copies of these reports, reviews or studies is to ascertain the effectiveness of this program. If the department has these studies, certainly Parliament should be aware of them so that we can do an effective job of lowering drug prices to the consumers. On the other hand, if by asking for these reports and studies the government is placed in a somewhat embarrassing position because they do not have them, the public should be made aware of this shortcoming. Therefore, for any reason Your Honour may wish to examine, it will be seen that we are very much in order in asking that this information be made available.

In a more general way, we have repeatedly asked for information on this and other subjects only to be told that the documents are internal working documents and cannot be released to the public. I see no reason why internal working documents cannot be released. We realize that sometimes there is controversy within a department. There may be different views held within a department as to the way to proceed. If that is the case, I feel this information should be available.

The government often accuses the opposition of being irrelevant or not dealing with a subject as well as we might. In the same breath that they make that accusation, they deny the opposition information which would assist them in debating a subject. Surely, there can be no argument against the opposition having as much factual information as possible in the interests of having a more meaningful discussion in this House.

In concluding these remarks, I urge upon the hon. gentleman who will be speaking on behalf of the government department to indicate in a very clear way why he cannot comply with this request. More hopefully, I trust he will agree with the argument made today and give us an opportunity of having this information, so that our work in this House can be more effective and, as a result, more beneficial to the public.

Mr. Yves Forest (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have some further information for the hon. member. I hope after the hon. member hears what I have to say that he will withdraw his motion. I am informed that primary responsibility for dealing with representations made in connection with the removal of the sales tax on drugs rested, of course, with the Department of Finance. At that time the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs had not been established and its predecessor was not directly involved in the decision to remove the tax.

The office of the Director of Investigation and Research under the Combines Investiga-