

Narcotic Control Act

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: The questions enumerated by the Parliamentary Secretary have been answered. Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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[English]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. David Smith (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I would ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: Shall the remaining notices of motions stand?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

● (1510)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. Shall all orders listed under Private Members' Public Bills preceding order No. 484 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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NARCOTIC CONTROL ACT

AMENDMENT RESPECTING THERAPEUTIC USE OF HEROIN

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton) moved that Bill C-684, an Act to amend the Narcotic Control Act (therapeutic use of heroin), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to express my thanks to the authorities of the House who arrange Private Members' Business for allowing my Bill to come forward today. This Bill received first reading in the House on April 29, 1983 and its purpose is as set forth in its title. It is to amend the Narcotic Control Act to allow for the therapeutic use of heroin by designated physicians, particularly those in cancer clinics, to alleviate pain for those who are terminally ill and suffering from cancer.

I do not think there has been another Bill like this introduced in the House of Commons. There has been legislation

introduced in other jurisdictions, but it is this jurisdiction which has the right to deal with the matter.

For historical purposes, because of a treaty, undertaking or agreement through the World Health Organization in 1954, heroin, which had been previously used as a prescriptive drug by physicians, was denied to those physicians for any purpose. Recently, there has been a strong feeling growing within the public of Canada and within some segments of the medical profession that those who fight against cancer should have every possible armament and every possible arrow in their quiver to relieve the anguish and the pain of the terminally ill.

If I may, I want to pay tribute to Dr. Kenneth Walker of Niagara Falls who, in a column under the pen name of Gifford-Jones, has raised the issue of the therapeutic use of heroin. Indeed, he has a petition which, at last count, was signed by 15,000 Canadians that he knows of who have indicated their support. I want to pay tribute to him for keeping this issue in the forefront of our minds.

I also want to pay tribute to another group of people. I became interested in the subject of the therapeutic use of heroin for a very personal reason. My wife has beaten cancer twice. During her fight with cancer, I came to know and to meet and to talk to many people who were suffering from cancer in the real sense of the word. Fortunately, we are thankful that my wife was not in that position. I talked to these people and their families, to members of the medical profession, members of the nursing profession, and to many other Canadians. I believe that confession is a good thing from time to time, and I confess to the House that this is what raised my interest in this subject.

In 1982 I sent out a questionnaire to some 40,000 homes in my riding, the constituency of Nepean-Carleton, which is the same as any other constituency. The return on that questionnaire was unprecedented. Of the 40,000 questionnaires sent, there were 10,000 responses. That means that 25 per cent of the families in my constituency responded. Of those 10,000 responses, 92 per cent—I repeat, 92 per cent—of the people agreed with the proposition that physicians should be armed with every possible weapon in the fight against cancer.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that letters I received from people who were then suffering the anguish of cancer, people who were watching loved ones suffer the anguish of cancer, hardened my resolve to bring this matter before the House of Commons at some time because I believe that when these questions are asked and responses given, one has a duty to the people who responded. I had frankly hoped that this session of Parliament would be over and we would be into a new session, and perhaps that will be the case, I do not know; but I could not wait any longer to bring this Bill forward.

Opinions in the country are divided on the subject of the therapeutic use of heroin. There are divisions of opinion in the medical profession, but the very fact that there are divisions of opinion indicates that in the medical profession and the nursing profession there are those who professionally feel that heroin is a help to the terminally ill, and there are certainly members of the public who share those feelings. In a few