

Government Orders

covered at this time. If we do not address the problem now fortified houses will spread as the way to avoid prosecution under provisions of the act.

This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. Bill C-7 is a comprehensive drug strategy. Let us cover all the loopholes and give communities the tools they need to deal with the problem that creates untold damage in human lives and safety in our communities.

I urge my colleagues to support Bill C-7 and to support an amendment that will address the problem of fortified drug houses at the same time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond): Madam Speaker, I will be commenting on Bill C-7 in my capacity as Official Opposition health critic.

The Minister of Health has introduced on behalf of the government Bill C-7, An Act respecting the control of certain drugs, their precursors and other substances.

After reviewing this bill carefully and mindful of the seriousness of the health issues at stake here, I have to say that the bill misses the mark because of the underlying push to criminalize certain activities and that it is a failed attempt to modernize our approach to combatting this costly scourge on society.

• (1545)

At the outset, I wish to point out to this House that I, along with the Bloc Quebecois, support the move to criminalize the sale of illegal drugs. Adequate and effective measures and pertinent legislation are needed to control mood-altering substances. Not just any legislation, mind you and, from my perspective as health critic, especially not legislation that focuses only on the repressive aspects of the issue and overshadows basic public health considerations. Such considerations must be a key component of any legislation, initiative or regulation aimed at combatting drug abuse.

In this respect, Bill C-7 needs to be radically amended. Although this bill was introduced by the Minister of Health, it does not contain any provisions designed to improve public health or the health of the many people who abuse drugs. In short, this bill proposes to fight one of society's ills through coercion and relentless legal efforts.

In the next few minutes, I will show how illegal drug use is much more of a health problem than a crime problem.

There are many reasons why a person turns to drugs. A person may be searching for a high or a feeling of euphoria or seeking temporary respite from the problems associated with depression or stress. Others who may find it difficult to keep up with the demands of our consumer-driven society see drugs as a way of overcoming fatigue or increasing their productivity. Teenagers

in search of an identity often try drugs to defy established authority or simply to conform to standards of behaviour dictated by their environment. An unhealthy family environment and pervasive poverty, violence and despair are often a one-way ticket to drug abuse.

The one common denominator in all of this is that drug abusers experienced health, emotional or social problems before they actually started using drugs. The criminal activity, that is obtaining and using the drugs, is secondary to their illness or social failure.

Canada's Drug Strategy was adopted to spearhead the fight against drug abuse.

A total budget of \$270 million over five years has been earmarked for the CDS. This works out to an average annual budget of \$54 million. So, to fight drugs, we will invest about \$1.98 per person per year. Yet, according to the revenue department, drug trafficking in Canada generates some \$4.6 billion, which represents \$168.52 per Canadian per year. If you invest \$1.98 to fight an activity which generates \$168.52, you are going to look like David against Goliath.

In 1984, the Addiction Research Foundation estimated that drug use led to additional medical care totalling \$2.728 billion, which is almost \$100 per Canadian per year, while the monies allocated for treatment and rehabilitation only represent \$0.75 per person, or 38 per cent of the CDS budget, and the funds for education and prevention are equivalent to \$0.63 per person per year, or 32 per cent of that same budget.

Every year, reduced productivity linked to drug use costs each Quebecer and Canadian the equivalent of \$37.54, while the costs of implementing the law amount to \$31.10. These figures are self-explanatory.

• (1550)

The amount of money spent to fight drugs is nowhere near the health, social and economic costs generated by this plague, or the profits generated by this traffic.

The bill which is before us has no long-term vision regarding the fight against drugs, which is something we had to include as parliamentarians. On the contrary, this legislation proposes or suggests old and archaic recipes as an easy way out.

There is an explanation to that. By merely revamping the old Bill C-85 tabled by the previous government, this government is sending the message that initiative and new ideas are not its forte when dealing with such important issues.

Personally, I deeply deplore the fact that a bill from the Department of Health gives so little consideration to its own field of responsibility, namely public health in Canada. Instead of seeking to treat and rehabilitate innocent victims, this legislation provides for criminalization and incarceration.