

Point of Order

My wife now counsels and consoles women in the same situation. They are waiting in line while the government is funding boxes in domes with its infrastructure program. What is the government going to do about that? What should my wife tell these women who are waiting in line while their lives are being threatened?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's wife was well treated when she became ill, thanks to Canada's good medicare system.

Yes, there are challenges and they are not always easy to meet. However, we do not meet them by ripping up something that is very good. They are met by working at protecting the very values which have served Canadians so well.

It is very important that all Canadians continue to have access to the services they need, not just because they can afford to pay extra for them, but because they need them. We have to work very closely with provincial governments, which we are doing. We are going to continue to do that.

It is a question of equity and good access, not of having some get ahead in the line because they can pay more. That is not what is fair. Think of the 38 million Americans who have no insurance at all. What kind of lines are they in?

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PHARMACEUTICALS

Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

Prescription drugs represent 17 per cent of the total cost of health care in the country. These prices have increased 13 per cent each year over the past eight years due to Bill C-91, which the Liberals opposed in opposition but seem to support in government.

The government can save Canadians nearly \$1 billion yearly, simply by doing one thing: repealing Bill C-91 or, at the very least, abolishing the automatic injunction clause of the patented medicines regulations.

Why will the government not stop the pharmaceutical drug manufacturers from ripping off Canadians with usury pricing of prescription drugs?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me help the hon. member with some of his statistics because I think he would want to get them right.

First, 15.1 per cent of national health expenditures in the last year for which we have full statistics were for pharmaceuticals. Patented drugs only account for 40 per cent of the pharmaceuticals purchased in those expenditures. In addition, with respect to patented medicines, and this is determined by an independent board, the price increase from 1987 to 1994 was 2.1 per cent per year.

If the hon. member begins to take those statistics into account he might phrase his question a little differently. As he knows, and I have assured the House several times, we are reviewing Canada's drug patent policy. In addition, under Bill C-91 there is a parliamentary review process that will be invoked in 1997.

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[Translation]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am happy to note that the hon. member for Roberval is here while I raise this issue.

During question period, my colleague, the hon. member for Timiskaming—French River decided to put a question to a government minister. He chose to do so in English, which is obviously his second language. While he was on his feet, a heckler on the other side of the House asked the hon. member: "Can't you speak French?"

● (1505)

[English]

The Speaker: All the more reason that we have to be ever vigilant in the words we use in the House of Commons. I did not hear the statement. Of course this is not a point of order but I am sure the point made by the government whip has been taken.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order concerning the auditor general's report tabled on October 5, 1995 and referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I contend that the tabling and referral to the committee of this report is out of order because the report in question contravenes the Auditor General Act and the conventions and prerogatives of the House.

I draw attention to section 5 of the Auditor General Act which defines the position as the "auditor of the accounts of Canada" and section 7(2) which sets out the parameters of the auditor general's reports. This paragraph empowers the auditor general to report that the records of the public accounts were faithfully kept, that expenditures have been made only as authorized by Parliament and with due regard for efficiency, and that due measures are taken to measure the effectiveness of programs.

In his latest report the auditor general has clearly overstepped the legal and customary boundaries of his duties as a servant of the House and in my judgment has interfered with the rights of the House by making politically biased statements. Let me illustrate this claim with some direct quotations from the auditor general's report in question.