

*Artificial Food Additives*

on the other side of the House to know that the official opposition is very concerned, and the people of Canada ought to congratulate the hon. member for Athabasca for the persistence he has exhibited with regard to this motion.

The president of the Canadian School Trustees Association also indicated that he was going to request the chairman of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. McRae) to place the subject matter of this motion on the agenda of that standing committee, and why not? There are medical reasons why this matter should be considered, and there is a request by an agency which is involved, so is there any reason why this House should talk out this motion or vote against it?

I felt I should rise and support the action of the hon. member for Athabasca, who has done us a great service. We ought not to denigrate the spirit in which the motion was put forward or the importance of this question by failing to pass the motion or by talking it out, whichever the case may be. This is a matter which requires some re-evaluation, particularly in view of the way things containing food additives can cross the border. We should have strict standards. We certainly should be no less strict than other jurisdictions.

This matter need not have been brought to the attention of the House, if indeed it is being studied in the department—or, as we understand, it is to be studied, or may be studied in some unidentified hospital—but this House ought to indicate its concern and pass a motion which will not do anyone any harm but which may do the country a lot of good.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Before I recognize the hon. member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau), I should mention that at 3.50 p.m. the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) called it four o'clock, and that was proceeded upon. What the Chair might have failed to do was to seek the unanimous consent of hon. members, so therefore at this time I ask hon. members whether that is agreed.

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Herb Breau (Gloucester):** Mr. Speaker, motion No. 6 standing in the name of the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) gives us an opportunity to talk about the whole question of regulatory agencies for food safety and the whole question which the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) discussed. The fact is that a private member's initiative like this one does accomplish something.

The object of motions like this is to bring forward an idea or to bring forward something an hon. member would like to have studied. The fact that speeches are put on the record accomplishes what the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton wants to accomplish, and that is to bring the matter to this political forum and to make sure that all arguments are heard. From there, if action is needed, it is taken. It is in that light that I want to speak in this debate about the government's perception of regulatory responsibility in the area of food safety.

● (1620)

First of all, without a coherent philosophy the chances for operational success of a regulatory agency are few and far between. One of the objectives of the Health Protection Branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare is to provide an effective channel of communications between the calorie control food and beverage industry and government officials, and to ensure that necessary scientific, medical and other personal information is available and understood by all concerned. One of the goals of the Health Protection Branch is to ensure that foods consumed by Canadians are safe. Some, perhaps, consider this to be an unreachable goal but it is a goal which we must continuously strive for if in good conscience the Health Protection Branch is to carry out its responsibilities to the public. The magnitude of the task is exemplified by the sheer amount of food consumed in this country each year and the wide variety of sources from which it is obtained.

We can say with confidence that, in the main, the nation's food supply is safer than it has ever been before. Nevertheless, to paraphrase the Irish nationalist, John Philpott Curran, the price of safety is eternal vigilance. Regulations must never be relaxed and we must not reduce our vigilant surveillance of the nation's food supply. We must continuously tune out the shrill voices of those who proclaim one extreme or the other—on the one hand that there is nothing at all to be concerned about and, on the other, that we are all headed for some sort of dietary Armageddon.

The instruments which permit us to strive for the goal of a safe food supply include the Food and Drug Act and regulations. Apart from the Income Tax Act I cannot conceive of any legislation that has greater impact on the purse and the health of Canadians. Historians in the Health Protection Branch of National Health and Welfare believe it is derived from the oldest legislation dealing with food and drugs in the western hemisphere. Its ancestor was born 100 years ago—almost by accident—as a result of the concern about alcohol.

It is interesting to note that a century ago there was widespread concern in Canada about the social effects of alcoholism and broad public support for abolition of the sale of alcoholic beverages. In typical Canadian fashion—for it has long been our practice to appoint a royal commission to investigate contentious issues before making judgment on them—a committee of the House of Commons met to consider the problem raised by excess consumption of alcohol. It concluded that the problem was not one of all liquor but only of bad liquor. As a result, a law to license compounders of alcoholic beverages and to prevent the adulteration of food, drink and drugs—the so-called Inland Revenue Act—was passed by parliament and became operative on January 1, 1875. It was the great-grandfather of today's Food and Drugs Act.

I wish to highlight some of the statutory bases which the act provides for us. Most important, the Food and Drugs Act is criminal law. By virtue of the British North America Act, criminal law is within federal jurisdiction. The British North America Act deals with the legislative, executive and judicial