

*Canadian Centre on Substance*

crack, which makes a lot of headlines, the reality is that the most serious and pressing problem that touches every family and every community is one of alcohol abuse and we have to address some very specific recommendations.

*[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. Our committee made 31 recommendations, good recommendations that would not cost Canadian taxpayers a cent, including a decision to put warning labels on bottles, indicating, as is already being done in California and Massachusetts, that continued use of alcohol by pregnant women may cause deformations in the fetus. The research is not very specific, but in any case, we know that if a mother drinks too much alcohol, there is a certain syndrome called the alcohol syndrome which affects the fetus.

All we wanted was a warning label, indicating the kind of problems that might occur. The Minister said no. It wouldn't cost a cent, but he refused just the same.

We made another recommendation. It is a fact, and the Speaker knows better than anyone else, that today, although alcohol manufacturers may not advertise on television, beer and wine producers do have that right. We asked, and there were even witnesses who asked, to prohibit all advertising. The committee said no. We don't think all advertising should be prohibited right now, but we want to ask companies to set aside 15 per cent of their advertising budget for advertisements on health and alcohol problems. I think this is already being done by the National Canadian Brewers Association, up to 10 per cent. So we asked the Government to ask companies to set aside 15 per cent of their advertising budget. The Minister refused.

We support this Bill which would establish a centre on substance abuse, but we challenge the Minister's right to say, as he just did, that he followed very closely the recommendations made by our committee, because in the final instance, he rejected 29 out of 31 recommendations. He accepted only 2, one of which we are considering today in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) should realize that, as our committee concluded, federal funding should focus first and foremost on the issue of treatment. Even representatives of the RCMP who appeared before our committee told us: If we try to spend all our money and effort on prohibition, in other words, on preventing drugs from entering the country, if we cut off one route, they will find another one. It's up to the federal Government, through education . . . Even the RCMP said that, for instance, they were starting to visit elementary schools to explain, to educate people so they don't get involved in drugs, whether legal or illegal. And that is where the federal Government should put the emphasis when it launches a so-called drug strategy.

The Minister announced a program worth hundreds of millions of dollars to deal with drugs, but if we look at his Department's figures, there has been a drop of almost 30 per

cent in spending in the area of treatment for alcohol and drug abuse since he took over the Department.

I said earlier, and I find it somewhat surprising, that since the Conservative Government came to power, that part of the Department's budget that deals with alcohol and drug issues dropped from \$2,322,000 in 1984-85 (the last period for which the Liberals were responsible) to \$1,529,000 in 1986-87. So when the Minister refers to a so-called drug epidemic, we first have to realize that he is not referring to an epidemic of illegal drugs, because the Minister himself said the use of illegal drugs was decreasing in Canada. In any case, the Department must focus its spending on treatment, on programs and on the problems of Native people and youth. Unfortunately, the Minister turned down 29 of the committee's 31 recommendations. So it is easy for him to say: Fine, we are going to establish the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. That will make a nice headline just before the election. As for a realistic approach to dealing with the problem of legal and illegal drugs, he didn't even mention the issue of prescription drugs, because this is another area, Mr. Speaker, where there is incredible abuse. We suggested, for instance . . .

• (1350)

*[English]*

Another recommendation which was rejected by the Government was that the Canadian Government could take a page from the book of the Alberta Government, which has introduced a method of controlling by computerization the distribution of legal prescription drugs across the province. The pharmacare program of that province is computerized in such a way that it eliminates the practice that we have seen in many provinces where a patient moves from one doctor to another to obtain multiple prescriptions. We made a recommendation in that regard which was ignored by the Government as well.

We do not have time today to get into the whole area of prescription drugs. One of the frustrations that we felt in the committee was that the whole area of legal and illegal drug abuse and substance abuse is so widespread as to make it extremely difficult to zero in on the key areas. However, we agreed unanimously that the very key area was in the area of alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, the reaction of the Minister to date to the committee report has been to ignore almost every single recommendation dealing with abuse of alcohol.

While we intend to support the specific legislation dealing with the creation of the national centre, we would also like the Minister to come forward with some specific legislation before the election. We would certainly give him our support if he could move in the areas of publicity and labelling, two areas which would not require the expenditure of a single cent of the taxpayers' money. We would give him our support if he would also move in the area of employee assistance programs for federal government employees so that we would actually be in a position to start attacking the problem at the root.