

**Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government):** I was answering questions that were put by your colleagues, senator.

**Senator Thériault:** Let me ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate this question: When it pushed Bill C-22 and Bill C-91 through, did the government expect the increases in the prices of drugs that we are facing today?

**Senator Murray:** The honourable senator is referring to a report, the first word of which we had in yesterday's media. The act in question was passed by Parliament several years ago.

**Senator Thériault:** There were two pieces of legislation that concerned the prices of drugs.

I want to tell senators today that, as a New Brunswicker, I am upset. The Minister of Health for New Brunswick appeared before the committee and told us what would happen if nothing was done. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance in New Brunswick had to cut \$11 million from the program that assists the elderly and the poor in obtaining their prescription drugs. That was predicted by the Minister of Health for New Brunswick, but we were told that the minister was wrong.

I would suggest, honourable senators, as was suggested by the Leader of the Opposition, that the whole matter be referred to a committee. Would the Leader of the Government in the Senate please pass on my request that Dr. Eastman be asked to appear before a committee — and that can be organized between the government and the opposition — so that he can tell us what he found in the review? Incidentally, that review was under way when Bill C-91 was being processed, but we were never told about it.

We were told by Dr. Eastman, at least to my understanding of what he said, that he was not quite sure whether he had the power to roll back the prices of drugs or even control the prices of drugs.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, as part of my preamble, perhaps I may refer to what was said by Minister Bouchard:

If prices are too high, we have the mechanisms to control them and we will control them. That is exactly what I told the federal Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, which now comes under the Department of National Health and Welfare.

Honourable senators, many Canadian experts claim that the board lacks the necessary powers because first of all, in Canada, price control is a provincial responsibility. If the board had those powers, I am sure Dr. Eastman would not

have let prices go up as they have done since the government decided to give everything to its Conservative friends, the big pharmaceutical companies that have contributed thousands — or should I say millions — of dollars to the Conservative Party since 1984.

Would the Leader of the Government in the Senate consider having a Senate committee appointed by the the government with the co-operation of the opposition, and then having Dr. Eastman appear before the committee to explain the current situation?

**Senator Murray:** Honourable senators, let's take this step by step. I have already promised to table documents requested by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. I will also provide an analysis of the report ordered by the board. As soon as I have tabled these documents, we can then consider the honourable senator's suggestion that the whole issue should be referred to a committee of this house.

[English]

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Honourable senators, I must point out that the time for Question Period has elapsed.

**Senator Thériault:** Could I have the permission of the Senate to continue? It will take me 30 seconds.

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Thériault:** I ask the Leader of the Government if he will put a rush on what he has just said would happen. In New Brunswick, all the seniors, elderly and poor who are depending on assistance from government are cut off as of today, and next year will be too late for them.

• (1440)

**Senator Murray:** Honourable senators, I am well aware of the difficulties that all governments in this country face with regard to deficit and debt. I am also well aware of the very courageous steps that have had to be taken in various provinces, notably New Brunswick, not just in the present budget but for several years now.

Having said all that, I remind the honourable senator of the old saying, "To govern is to choose". It was a decision of the Minister of Finance and his colleagues in New Brunswick to take the steps to which the honourable senator refers. No doubt they considered other options for reducing their expenditures. They settled upon the ones announced yesterday. I do not think it is reasonable of the honourable senator to hold the federal government responsible for those decisions.

**Senator Thériault:** Who will you hold responsible, me?