

*Oral Questions***PHARMACEUTICALS**

In order to do that and to create that job activity in the very short term, we had to go through a process of reallocation. It is important that be pointed out because we have gone through a process of reallocation to put money in those areas that would generate the kind of economic activity and the job creation activity that the hon. member, I am sure, recognizes and that needs to be fulfilled.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, the freight rates for the Atlantic region have been in place since 1927. This government has arbitrarily cut these subsidies, without consulting any of the provinces, without consulting the Atlantic provinces' economic council or the Atlantic provinces transportation commission. They will primarily impact upon manufactured, value added industries, and the minister knows that.

Is the minister prepared to stay these transportation subsidy cuts, to consult with the provincial governments in Atlantic Canada and to consult with the transportation commission to realize a sensible approach to these transportation programs and not to destroy arbitrarily a program that has been in place for nearly 60 years in Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there comes a time when governments are faced with the difficult choice of having to contain spending.

We are at the point where because of the dramatic decline in revenues we have to take extraordinary steps to bring our spending and our revenues more in line. We are asking Canadians across the board; it is not only that there is an attack on the Atlantic region or any one region of the country.

What we are proposing here are across the board reductions for a period of time. It is an exercise in belt tightening so that we can preserve in the future those programs that are so important, have been so important in the past and will be in the future as well.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

In a radio interview this weekend on CBC commenting on the government's drug patent policy, the minister said: "It is not a health issue. Whether it is a bicycle, whether it is a song, whether it is a drug, it is all just intellectual property".

This policy is all about health care. It is all about Canadian consumers and Canadian health care systems having to fork out billions of dollars more to multinational drug companies.

How could the minister possibly make such a ridiculous statement which effectively equates the integrity of Canada's health care system to the patent on a hockey helmet?

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see that the hon. member is now listening to me. It is the first time in the last three years he has even listened to me.

What I mentioned was that obviously this legislation was about intellectual property. Patented drugs represent only 3 per cent of total health costs in this country so the 97 per cent are other matters such as hospital costs, surgery and all those things, as well as generic drugs.

What we should do with that is look at whether Canada wants to be in line with the rest of the world as far as intellectual property is concerned. This is what this bill is all about.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister.

The Minister of Health of British Columbia, Elizabeth Cull, stated clearly: "The British Columbia health care plan will pay out over \$145 million more for just two drugs as a result of this government's patent policy".

When will the minister stop working for the interest of multinational drug companies and start working for the interest of Canadian consumers, the people he was elected to serve?