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## THE USE AND ABUSE OF DRUGS

The following is a partial text of a statement by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. J. Waldo Monteith, to the Special House of Commons Committee on Drugs and Chemical Food Contamination on January 29:

"You will all have read many press reports, and heard a great deal said in the Commons Chamber, on the death-dealing properties of certain drugs, and on the general pollution of his environment by man himself.

"In this Committee, which certainly has an immense task before it, you will have an opportunity to learn at first hand of the views of the experts in medical and scientific fields. You will, we trust, ultimately be able to put this whole picture into perspective, in your own minds and in the minds of all Canadians.

"The apparent effects of thalidomide will be with us through the lives of every man in this room, as its victims grow into the world. It is our job to ensure that these victims are cared for in the best possible manner, that their needs are met to the fullest extent we can devise, and to ensure, as much as is possible, that a similar tragedy will never occur again.

"But we must also bear in mind that thalidomide is still a good drug. It was its side effects, as later evidence indicated, that can be harmful. It induced sleep quickly and without ill effect - but we have learned that it should never be taken during pregnancy....

### NO WHOLLY SAFE DRUGS

"There is no such thing as a completely safe drug. The safety factor must be weighed against the value of the drug in relation to its known dangers.

Penicillin is an example. It has saved millions of lives. But some people, sensitive to it, have died. Should we prevent the sale in Canada of penicillin?

"Canadians must be allowed to enjoy all the benefits of scientific discovery - and there have been many in recent years - but they must also be protected. When the risks cannot be avoided, they must be reduced as much as possible to the point where the balance will be on the side of promoting health and not compounding suffering.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

"This Committee was set up by the Government with twofold terms of reference. It is being asked to consider and report upon:

- (a) the law and practices relating to the control of the introduction, marketing and use of drugs;
- (b) the dangers arising from the contamination of food by the use of chemicals to kill weeds, insects and other pests.

"...The responsibility that every Canadian receive the utmost protection in the use of drugs is one that cannot be discharged by any one division of government. The burden must be shared by manufacturers of drugs, the medical profession, pharmacists and even individual Canadians.

"The role of the Government is not to delay or deny the benefits of science to Canadians, but to ensure that drugs reach the market only after all reasonable precautions have been taken to inform the medical profession of any risks and of any undesirable side effects....

### DRUG-CONTROL LEGISLATION

"Our objective was increased safety for the public when we introduced in Parliament last October

(Over)