

Oral Questions

NATURE OF ADVERTISING

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, it might be excusable if the Hon. Minister had missed the translation of the question, but it is inexcusable that he has not been reading the newspapers. Miles Laboratories has been sending out, under the title of an educative newsletter, a statement or article to the effect that generic drugs are substantially more dangerous than the patented original. This is misleading advertising.

The Minister is supposed to protect the consumer. What will the Minister do about this clear example of misleading advertising being used to sell a drug on the basis of the fear of patients? Will he not take action?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, there are provisions within the law against misleading advertising. If the Hon. Member feels that this is misleading advertising, he can bring it to the attention of officials in my Department whom he knows—

Mr. McCurdy: I am.

Ms. Mitchell: He's trying to bring it to you right now.

Mr. Andre: Just a minute. If the Hon. Member would close his mouth and leave his ears open for a moment I would explain to him that the officials operate with an independent mandate. I cannot direct them to instigate an investigation or lay charges or so on. They do that independently as provided under the law.

I repeat again, the products in question are not products that consumers can purchase on their own. They are prescription drugs which are prescribed by physicians. For the Hon. Member to suggest that the Government should intervene and make judgments as to the quality of information being given to physicians—

Mr. McCurdy: Yes, yes.

Mr. Andre: The Hon. Member is shaking his head affirmatively. I think he wants to think about that before he shakes his head affirmatively.

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ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

PCB CONTAMINATION IN BIG TROUT LAKE INDIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. Since 1985 the Government of Canada has known about the serious PCB environmental problem in the Indian community of Big Trout Lake located in northwestern Ontario. Government tests show that PCB contamination of quite a number of individuals is above the level of concern. In fact, many are approaching an above the alarm level. Representatives of that community are

in Ottawa today protesting the lack of action by the Government of Canada through the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

• (1450)

I ask the Minister why it has taken so long for action to be taken in the community of Big Trout Lake? Why has he not acted in the way the Health and Welfare report calls upon him to do, that is, in a determined and thorough manner?

Hon. Tom McMillan (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the immediate issue at hand concerns a capacitor containing PCBs which was stolen from a storage facility of the Atmospheric Environmental Service of my Department by the band council in question. The storage was under the most rigorous authority and a permit was given by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment for that purpose. Storage was on an approved site in an approved fashion, and yet the facility was broken into and the capacitor is now in the hands of the band. I think that situation, Sir, is the most immediate risk to the health of the Indians whose cause the Hon. Member is championing.

I will give the Hon. Member my assurance, on behalf of the federal Government, that if the band will co-operate with the Crown, no charges will be pressed. I will dispatch the highest official possible to retrieve the capacitor. It will be stored under the best of authority, and as far removed from the area in question as the band would like.

TOXIC WASTE SPILL

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, the Minister has not been fully briefed on this problem. He will be when he meets Chief McKay and members of the council this afternoon. Chief McKay will carefully explain that he knows of Government of Canada transformers buried in the landfill site in the community. One is even exposed down by the lake. Another was found to be leaking. Knowing that, the Government of Canada has taken no action at all.

When there was a PCB spill on the Trans-Canada Highway the Government acted promptly. When there is one in an Indian community it drags its feet. Is there a double standard in this country—one form of action for all other Canadian citizens and another form of action if you happen to be a native Canadian?

Hon. Tom McMillan (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's question is replete with equal measures of inaccuracy, hyperbole, and exaggerated rhetoric. There is no foundation whatever to the substance of the Hon. Member's question.

My Department, the Department of my colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and those of some of my other colleagues met with the Indians in question on January 12. Subsequent meetings were cancelled by the Indians themselves. I understand another meeting has been