

Food and Drugs Act

to have the opportunity to speak on what is obviously a very important issue.

Mr. Alan Redway (York East): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words with respect to Bill C-289, a Bill to amend the Food and Drug Act put forward by the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps).

This is a very topical Bill. It is topical because of some of the incidents that have occurred recently, one of which occurred right here in the City of Ottawa. It is because of those incidents that the spotlight has focused on this situation and has brought to our attention this health concern, a health concern which relates particularly to those who suffer from allergies to various foods and who have a problem when they eat out and are not able to identify the ingredients in the food they eat. This problem was highlighted by an incident which occurred a short time ago here in the City of Ottawa, and it is a problem that also relates to many, many people.

A week ago today, I believe, I had the opportunity to raise in the House the concerns of those who suffer from environmental hypersensitivity, which is a similar kind of problem to the one we are discussing here. In fact, many of those who have this problem could be put in one category, that of those with environmental hypersensitivity.

Constituents of mine, the Black family, came to me a few months ago with this problem as it relates to another aspect, the whole issue of the tax deductibility of the medical expenses that people suffering from this kind of problem have to incur.

• (1440)

I am interested to see the Hon. Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) in the House. He will know that I had correspondence with him, his colleague, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), and their colleague, the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. MacKay) on this very topic of the deductibility of prescriptions to treat people with environmentally hypersensitive health problems.

For instance, the Black family pointed out to me their great difficulty in having to actually modify and change their entire way of living. They had to make drastic changes in their household and, in doing so, incurred enormous expenses in making actual physical changes to their house. This included removing the rugs and making changes to the rooms. They incurred \$15,000 to \$20,000 in expenses that related to environmental health problems.

They tried to deduct these expenses from their income tax as prescription health expenses. They were successful in their first year. The Department of National Revenue allowed them to deduct these expenses from their income. However, the next year, when they submitted a similar tax return, the same kind of expenses were disallowed. When they appealed their income tax assessment on the basis of what had occurred the year before, the Department went back and reassessed them from the year before and, in fact, found that all of those expenses

were not deductible under the Income Tax Act because they related to environmental health problems, not the average health problem.

Consequently, I have made representations on their behalf to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Revenue. I am hopeful that eventually they will see the light of day and understand that there are many people in this country who suffer from environmental health problems.

It is interesting to note as well that there is a lobbyist on behalf of people with environmental health problems, Mr. Chris Brown, who is making representations in Ottawa all the time. He is trying to get some changes in this regard. It is another example of what is being dealt with in this Bill.

This Bill is aimed particularly at restaurants. By virtue of this Bill, restaurants would be obligated to make available to the public a list, in both official languages, of all the ingredients contained in the foods they sell. The Bill would obligate suppliers to print in French and English the list of all ingredients that are used in the preparation of those meals. Today, the number of Canadians who are eating in restaurants is increasing by leaps and bounds.

Madam Speaker, if you were to cast your mind back a few years to think about the number of times you and your family ate in restaurants, it would probably have been rather minimal. Today, all of us are spending more and more time in local restaurants or fancy restaurants rather than preparing our own meals. This trend seems to be on the increase. I know that in our household we seldom seem to use the stove. We may use the microwave oven or barbecue, but seldom do we use the traditional stove.

Families are getting away from eating meals that are prepared over a long period of time at home and are concentrating more on quick meals. If they want to have a more leisurely meal, it is done as part of an entertainment package. Rather than going to a movie, they will spend the evening at a restaurant, as a form of recreation. This may even have replaced a visit to the shopping plaza as a form of recreation.

The point is that an increasing number of people are eating at restaurants and it is becoming a more significant problem because there is more opportunity for exposure to these problems as Canadians eat out more.

The objective of this Bill is to protect consumers who are affected by food-related allergies, while protecting all Canadians whose right it is to be made aware of the contents of meals served to them in restaurants. Just as they have the right to know the contents of a prescription and over the counter drugs they purchase, they should have a right to know the ingredients of these foods, particularly if they are in any way sensitive to some of these ingredients.

Consumers are faced with the same problem when they purchase foods in stores, but in this case the problem is at least partially solved by the fact that the Food and Drugs Act has