

Oral Questions

All options are open in doing that. The difference between us and the members of the Liberal Party is that the members of the Liberal Party have only one option.

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister.

Either a national referendum is one of the four options of the government or it is not. If it is, I would like to ask the minister: Why is the government stalling on introducing legislation to allow for a referendum? If it is not stalling, I want to know why the government is repudiating the promise of the constitutional affairs minister who said that the government would introduce legislation for a national referendum?

I ask the minister to explain what is obviously a real discrepancy.

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, if a discrepancy exists it is in the hon. gentleman's mind.

The government has been abundantly clear and I repeat again: all options are open. What we want to do in all of our efforts on the Constitution is to bring in measures which include Canadians and bind them together instead of pitting region against region, group against group.

If a referendum on the Constitution will be helpful in terms of unifying Canada, we are certainly prepared to consider that. But members of Parliament on all sides of the House have a responsibility to put partisan considerations to one side and put the unity of Canada first.

* * *

GATT

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for whoever is speaking for the government on trade today.

With the GATT negotiations approaching a panic situation like we saw prior to the acceptance of the Canada-U.S. trade agreement, Canadian consumers, taxpayers and workers in Canada's generic drug industry and in the provincial drug plans are fearful that our

negotiators are accepting the U.S. proposals covering intellectual property rights without reservation.

Is the government negotiating for a continuation of our right to produce generic drugs by Canadian companies, or will it be accepting the U.S. proposition that will destroy the generic industry and substantially increase the already \$8.5 billion now spent on drugs in Canada each year?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Of course we are not doing that, Mr. Speaker. It would be absolutely ridiculous to do so when we take a look at the reality. Since the government legislated some four years ago patent protection for pharmaceutical companies, that industry has responded with unprecedented R and D activities in Canada into the millions of dollars.

Price rises have also been kept below the Consumer Price Index. The government continues to make it clear that it is committed to making sure that prices are reasonable for consumers. The government continues to take into account the concerns of the brand name and generic drug producers as well as those of consumers. Why would we change such an effective policy?

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister should review the statistics. Prices have gone up 36 per cent in the last four years, a higher rate of increase than occurred before.

With regard to article XI, has the government submitted to American pressure to move everything to tariffication as reports indicate and as our negotiators report back? Will they give up on supply management farmers that are producing poultry and dairy products now, supplying Canadian consumers with extremely efficient low cost products? Why are negotiators taking an American position at the GATT? Why is tariffication being considered by our negotiating team?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, if I can answer on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, the tariffication proposals are of course before the MTN, but the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister for International Trade last week in Geneva made very clear our position on article XI and our position on supply management. We continue to stand by that.