

Government Orders

It is part of that general misguided sense of ideological purity that only this Prime Minister and his cabinet have. Only they know what is right and these obligations to the discredited members of that old neo-conservative coalition that unfortunately ran too many countries in the industrialized world for the past 10 years must finally come to an end.

I say again to the members of Parliament on the other side for the sake of seniors, for the sake of taxpayers, for the sake of our health care system, for the sake of preserving a Canadian based research industry, for the sake of standing up for the integrity and independence of this country to decide its own policies and not have them decided somewhere else, stand up in your caucus tomorrow morning when you have the chance and tell the Prime Minister, for the sake of this country, to withdraw Bill C-91.

Mrs. Edna Anderson (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, there is one aspect of the debate on Bill C-91 that deserves special attention; that is its impact on Canada's senior citizens.

Seniors are probably the single group that is most strongly interested in the costs of medicine in this country. They are at least twice as likely to need prescription drugs as the average Canadian. Though most senior citizens are covered by provincial drug plans, changes in the costs of pharmaceutical products are something that seniors see and experience directly.

The Canadian government remains sensitive to the concerns of seniors about drug costs. The changes proposed in Bill C-91 will strengthen measures to guard against excessive increases in patent drug prices. Above all, they will expand the powers of the board that reviews patented drug prices in Canada.

Since 1987, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board has tracked increases in the prices of patented pharmaceuticals and it has been singularly successful in keeping those increases well below the rate of inflation.

The record is clear: since the board was created, the costs of patented drugs have risen by an average of only 2.9 per cent a year, well below the average rate of increase in the consumer price index. This is good news for Canadian senior citizens.

The success of the board has even been noticed by our neighbours. A report by the United States general

accounting office recently compared the costs of prescription drug prices in the United States and Canada. It found that on average the manufacturers' price for prescription drugs was 32 per cent higher in the United States than in Canada.

Furthermore, the study found that one half of the drugs cost at least 50 per cent more in the United States. Of the top selling 200 drugs, 27 cost at least 100 per cent more in the United States, three drugs cost 500 per cent more and one, Isodel, used in the treatment of angina, costs an incredible 967 per cent more in the United States than in Canada.

Since there are no differences in manufacturers' costs in the two countries, the study concluded that the major source of the difference in drug prices in the United States and Canada is to be found in the action of the Canadian government.

As the report says, in setting prices manufacturers of patented drugs must conform to Canadian federal regulations that review prices for newly released drugs and restrain price increases for existing drugs. The fact is that the Canadian system is working. The Patented Medicine Prices Review Board has been proven to be an effective mechanism for keeping drug costs in line.

Bill C-91 strengthens the powers of the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. Under its terms, the board will be able to roll back price increases and provide fines and jail terms for those found not to be in compliance with its guidelines.

The legislation also gives the PMPRB new powers to better control the prices at which new drugs are introduced into the marketplace. To enforce the board's authority, Bill C-91 makes it an offence for companies not to respond to board orders or to refuse to provide pricing or sales and expense information.

The net effect of these changes will be to make an already effective mechanism even more effective. It will ensure that those who hold drug patents will not be able to exploit those patents unfairly.

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The provisions of Bill C-91 strike a reasonable balance between rewarding those who produce pharmaceutical innovations and protecting the interest of those like Canadian seniors who need effective and affordable medicines.