

*Routine Proceedings*

**Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing):** Mr. Speaker, I also rise to support the government's announcement today of financial compensation for those users of Canada's blood supply who contract AIDS, or become infected with HIV. In the words of the Canadian Haemophilia Society, this is an horrendous medical catastrophe, a colossal failure of the country's blood supply system. By failing to adequately screen the national blood supply system after it became clear that some blood products were contaminated with HIV, and the failure to recall potentially harmful blood products, the government is responsible for part of this tragedy. It is only right that it has moved to compensate the innocent victims.

I note that this announcement today has only come after intense effort by the Canadian Haemophilia Society over 18 months, and after the Royal Society of Canada recommended last year that the government compensate persons infected through the blood supply system.

Now that the government has finally moved to help these people, there is an opportunity for them to finally act to prevent the spread of AIDS through the general population. I note that the total compensation offered to those persons infected through the blood supply system is greater than the entire budget allocated to the fight against AIDS.

**Mr. Beatty:** Wrong!

**Mr. Axworthy:** It seems likely that it was only the possibility of legal liability that encouraged the government to compensate those infected through the blood supply system. Other persons with AIDS, those infected with HIV, and those who will be infected in the future have only a moral and compassionate claim on this government. We have seen how reluctant the government is to act when it is not forced to do so. The Minister of Health has said in the past that he is very concerned about the spread of AIDS, for the plight of the 3,272 persons with AIDS and the approximately 30,000 to 50,000 persons infected with HIV. Yet this often repeated concern has not meant any action to date. It is negligent of this government to continue to stall while new cases of infection are reported each day.

There must be an immediate and national preventive education program. There must be palliative programs to assist persons with AIDS, as this government has already admitted through its announced assistance today the enormous personal and financial cost endured by persons with AIDS, their families and friends.

The minister has pledged that he will not allow AIDS to destroy the human spirit. Perhaps the time will not be too far away before he also sees fit to act to prevent AIDS from destroying ever greater numbers of human lives.

Steps must be taken to alleviate the hardship of old people infected with HIV or with AIDS. The federal government and its provincial counterparts must bear the responsibility for not acting sooner to instigate adequate education and prevention programs. Everyone with HIV or AIDS deserves the same sort of assistance which the minister has announced today for those contracting AIDS from the national blood supply system. Canada does not have adequate social and health facilities for dealing with HIV and AIDS and this situation should have been addressed a long time ago.

The federal government must act with urgency to ensure the adoption of an effective and adequately funded national AIDS strategy. While the announcement today is a welcome one, more is required than a piecemeal approach. It is the government's responsibility and that of the Minister of National Health and Welfare to address the concerns of all of the 3,272 people with AIDS and the estimated 20,000 to 50,000 people infected with HIV.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there remain the other claims on the government, as the minister has mentioned, vaccine-damaged people and the tragic thalidomide victims. If we are to maintain an effective universal vaccine program, it is essential that those harmed by the vaccine be compensated by government, given their difficulty obtaining compensation through the courts.

Likewise, the government bears a special responsibility to those harmed by the drug thalidomide. Their claims are based on strong moral grounds, including the gross failure of the drug approval process which led to government acceptance of a dangerous drug, and the past promise of the Government of Canada to help those harmed by the drug.