

Adjournment Debate

I believe there is a tragic injustice being committed by the department of health and welfare and the minister. The minister refuses to take his ministerial responsibilities seriously. I ask him to be fair and honest and if he cannot be that way, he should resign.

Mr. Ross Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, in June of last year the final arrangements were made for an extraordinary assistance plan for Canadian thalidomide victims and I am pleased to put before the House information on the implementation of that plan since that time.

The plan provides initially for \$4.5 million to be divided equally among all eligible recipients and another \$4 million to be paid on the basis of placement into one of three disability categories.

To this date 105 individuals have been confirmed to be eligible and the government has made payments to 101 of those for a total of \$42,400 per person.

Medical evaluations to determine the level of disability category have been progressing well. Two-thirds of the evaluations have been completed and the rest are to be completed by the end of April. At that time payments will be calculated and paid to the recipients.

Sadly not all those who applied to the plan could be confirmed as thalidomide victims but the criteria for the program are clear. There must be proof of maternal consumption of Kevadon or Talimol, the two brands of the drug available in Canada at that time during the first trimester of pregnancy. There is no other means to determine whether someone is a thalidomide victim.

There are a number of ways of attesting to whether that is—Mr. Speaker, are you allowing me to conclude or telling me to conclude?

• (1720)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am allowing you to conclude.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will be quick.

Anyone who received a settlement from the drug company already proved the question of maternal consumption of thalidomide in that context. Others were identified, as my colleague has said, during a major national research study in 1962–63.

The government has also taken steps to provide non-monetary support, providing up to \$1 million in funding for services needed by thalidomide victims.

In summary, the extraordinary assistance plan is a significant response to Canadian thalidomide victims, and the delivery of the plan to eligible Canadians is progressing well.

NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. David Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast): Mr. Speaker, natural gas is a vital part of the economy of my province as well as Canada's energy future. The region enjoys a large surplus of natural gas reserves which has allowed us to extract this very clean burning fossil fuel for export. More gas projects are under way and there has been very heavy competition between two pipeline consortia for rights to build a new export pipeline out of Alberta to the southwestern U.S.

Natural gas exporters from our province have been fair in their trading activities with our friends to the south beginning last year. However we saw that these exporters had to deal with certain regulators in the state of California who were not interested in playing fair. To put it bluntly those regulators, the California Public Utilities Commission, chose to take advantage of our suppliers by blackmailing them for shorter term supply contracts.

In late November of last year those regulators ordered the largest utility in northern California, Pacific Gas and Electric, to dump its long-term contracts with western Canadian gas producers.

It is a clear violation of article 905 of the free trade agreement. I rose therefore in this House on December 5, 1991 to ask the minister of energy if he agreed. He spoke of joint press conferences, consultations with western provincial energy ministers and consultations with the U.S., but he would not give a simple undertaking to support the claims of our suppliers.

The question was simple: would the minister lend support to groups such as the Independent Petroleum Association of Canada? A review of the matter was held in front of the National Energy Board. Speaking personally I hoped that this issue would transcend partisan cleavages between the minister and myself. I was mistaken, because when the minister rose to answer the supplementary question he said that he could not even bring himself to speak to the question.