

Bill C-91 is not just a bill about exorbitant drug prices. It is actually an abrogation of Canada's autonomy. It is very serious for the future of medicare and for the future of our own economy and our own autonomy. I call on all Canadians to join us in demanding an end to this bill and an end to this government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre): Mr. Speaker, since Bill C-91 was presented to the House, it was studied by a committee which heard many witnesses. The witnesses were experts in this field from all across Canada; some of them represented the health ministers of nine provinces, except Quebec. I will return to the subject of Quebec later.

We are faced with a bill that according to all experts will undoubtedly make drug prices go up. Comparing costs with those in the United States, we know that the average American pays 62 per cent more for pharmaceuticals than Canadians do. This is only an indication. Once we have to follow the multinationals' increases in lock step, we will certainly pay the same prices. If we rationalize the drug system, we will not be able to go on paying the same price as now when all the other countries that signed an agreement pay more.

Considering what we have heard so far, common sense tells us there seems to be a major problem with this bill, when 14 amendments presented by our colleague, the hon. member for Dartmouth, in Nova Scotia, are rejected. By the way, I applaud the hon. member's perseverance. It is uncommon to see the kind of defence that was conducted by the hon. member for Dartmouth. Three cheers.

In Quebec, the Department of Health did not bother to appear before the committee or submit a brief, let alone defend the bill, because it did not have a case, but we can assume the department hopes to see some spin-offs in R and D.

This is another myth that is going around. They want us to believe that R and D spin-offs will be extraordinary, but all we have to go by are statistics. There is no indication on the basis of past experience that this will happen. Fortunately, we were able to hear testimony by

people in the industry, and they pointed out that our procedure did not make sense, since no amendments were accepted. The government insists that there will be price controls. How can we believe that, considering pressure from all parts of the United States, for instance, to give up our present policy on pharmaceutical products in Canada? They want us to give it up. There is a reason, obviously. We know the kind of prices they pay in the United States, and they want us to pay the same prices in this country.

We table amendments to protect us against abuse, but the amendments are turned down. How can you expect us to take this seriously or believe in the government's good faith when it will not accept amendments that would help and protect Canadians?

Could members on the government side explain why the government will not accept safeguards—in other words, amendments—that will protect us against abuse? New products coming on the market are very expensive, right from the start. Once the bill is passed, companies will be able to say after x number of months: "Look, there were no increases". Of course not. The increase was included when the product came on the market.

Despite all the figures quoted before the committee and all the testimony on this issue, they still insist that we are acting against the best interests of Canadians. I would ask my colleagues on the government side who represent ridings in Quebec how they expect to explain future increases in the cost of pharmaceutical products. They know perfectly well that many witnesses testified the cost of our health care system would soar as a result of increases in the price of drugs.

I wonder how they expect to explain that to the people of this country. I think this is one of the worst examples of the government's betrayal of Canadians, and I am referring to what it is doing about pharmaceutical products and Bill C-91. However, the devastating impact of these increases will only be felt over time.

Some of you may no longer be here. You will not have to stand up and defend these issues, but there is no doubt in my mind that the bill before the House today was literally dictated from the outside.