

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Winnipeg North is lucky because the period of the first five hours of debate ends in one minute and he is the last speaker to benefit from a 20-minute speech and questions and comments. The hon. member for Winnipeg North has 20 minutes maximum.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed sad that the time left for this debate is only 20 minutes. I know that a number of MPs are still wanting to debate this issue because the government has made a terrible mistake once more.

I should like to start with what prompted this government to introduce this bill. To put it on the record, it is part of its economic agenda that was started in 1984. The then Minister of Finance, the present Minister for International Trade, said when he appeared before the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Canada last October, and I quote: "Since 1984 when the federal government brought in its agenda for economic renewal, this is precisely what we have been doing and will continue to do so in the future".

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in introducing this bill last September 17 said: "As far as economic benefits are concerned, Bill C-91 is another step in the government's program to modernize and rationalize Canadian patent legislation".

This is part of the government's economic agenda. However, Canadians know that its economic agenda has been a failure. We have a recession. We have 1.6 millions Canadians unemployed. We have the longest food bank line in the world and this government is trying to tell us that we should believe and that we should have trust and have faith in its economic agenda and therefore accept this new bill, Bill C-91.

I ask: Is it fair to ask of Canadians to trust this government? Canadians have spoken loudly. They do not trust this government and so they cannot trust as well the intent behind this bill as a tool for an economic agenda.

I should also indicate that this raises a fundamental issue. The same Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in opening debate on this bill last September 17 indicated as well: "Under Bill C-91 pharmaceutical products will be allowed the same 20-year protection as tools and communication systems". In other words, this

minister is speaking for his government and cannot distinguish the fundamental difference between machine tools and drugs and medicines. Drugs and medicines are needed by patients because of illness, not because they would like to create something new. It is a desire for something, a necessity, without which human life is in danger and this minister equates medicines and drugs with tools by giving them the same life span of patent protection.

• (1300)

It raises the question then as to whether we will use the debate on this bill as an economic issue, or is it really a social issue? I submit that Bill C-91 is very much a social issue. I am sure there will be winners and losers and I speak for those on the losing end of this legislation. I am most concerned with them. They are my constituents in Winnipeg North, in the province of Manitoba, and in all of Canada. They are the men and women on the street who pay for prescription drugs, items that have become key to our health and continued well-being.

I submit that health consumers, especially seniors, will be the first casualties of Bill C-91 if enacted into law. I come to their defence because this government has failed to do so, siding instead with multinationals that develop their products elsewhere, refine their chemicals offshore, and tend to be evasive about the types and amount of research and development they actually do in this country.

We have heard from the Coalition for Biomedical and Health Research that the amount of research spent by the pharmaceutical industries in basic research is abysmal, really very small. Yet it is also known that the advances in basic research have contributed greatly to the introduction of new drugs and innovations into the pharmaceutical industry.

The pharmaceutical industry must be helped but we also have our health care system which is struggling for sustainability and this bill comes at the expense of medicare and the government cannot deny it.

Either the minister of health has been under a gag order or has been swayed by the politics of his peers, turning deaf ears to the provinces. The provinces have been left to squirm like bugs on a pin. They have been forced to endure freezes in federal transfer payments for health care.