

*Food and Drugs Act*

order to bring it to the attention of the public and before this House for discussion. After proper discussions have taken place, the Government will bring forward a Bill which will encompass in a more complete fashion the problems which exist.

**Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada):** Madam Speaker, as we are all aware, it is the official mandate of certain Departments to be concerned with the health of Canadians. Together, the Department of National Health and Welfare and the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs work to ensure the development and adoption of legislation designed to protect the Canadian consumer, keep Canadians informed, and ensure their fundamental well-being. It is in that same spirit that the Food and Drug Act regulates the labelling of drugs to ensure that users are aware of the quantities of all medicinal ingredients in those products.

Similar rules are also applied to the packaging and labelling of numerous consumer products that Canadians purchase in grocery stores and put on the dinner table every day. It is not only a matter of ensuring that Canadians eat well and take safe and effective medical products when they are needed, but of respecting their right to be well and properly informed about what they consume. Further, it is a matter of making it possible for those who suffer from allergies to know precisely what substances and ingredients make up the drugs they take and the foods they eat.

Bill C-289 directly addresses the concerns of those Canadians who may unwittingly consume foods containing specific ingredients to which they are allergic or whole foods that bring on allergic reactions.

Under the provisions of this legislation restaurateurs would have to make available to their clientele a list of all ingredients used in the preparation of the foods offered on their menus. Similarly, restaurant franchises and chains would have to list the ingredients they use on their product packaging. Of course, Madam Speaker, this should be done in both official languages.

Let me expand upon this matter further in order to show clearly that the problem addressed by Bill C-289 is of real and pressing concern. For example, diabetics and those suffering from celiac disease must exercise great care in finding out the ingredients of all foods which they themselves have not prepared. If in doubt, these people must simply avoid the food product.

The same holds true for those who suffer from food-related allergies. They must be ever cautious in asking restaurants for complete details on the ingredients and makeup of the food in the meals being offered. For people in both these categories, as well as for many others too numerous to mention here today, it often comes down to their very survival, a matter of life and death.

Since October, 1986, at least three people have died as a result of allergic reactions brought on by foods eaten in restaurants where the ingredients were not known to them. Of those, two were teenagers. Had better and more complete information been available, these tragedies might not have occurred.

It is true that the concept of allergic reaction and its relationship to food is, in most cases, poorly defined. We are all aware that certain foods and certain drinks may lead to upset digestion or allergic reactions and that these reactions, although fortunately mild for the most part, are nonetheless unpleasant.

We also know that the effects of these same irritants can be exacerbated when we are worried, over-tired, ill, or subject to great stress. Finally, we know that in facing all these allergic reactions the medical community seems singularly perplexed and at a loss when it comes to quantifying the incidence, gravity, and growth of these problems. Certainly science is evolving rapidly along with new and improved techniques and we remain hopeful that effective solutions will be found.

However, we must take steps to avoid the death of other children who may suffer for simply having a snack after a hockey game, a swim meet, or a general get together. So, too, we must act on behalf of those consumers who, for reasons medical, religious, or personal, must avoid certain foods or ingredients and be made aware of their presence. We can no longer remain indifferent.

It should also be noted that the foods we eat today undergo complex processing and are made up of numerous ingredients. Most restaurants make use of an incredible number of ingredients in preparing their products. Even those establishments with limited menus and fast food outlets can use up to 1,000 ingredients. In the vast majority of cases these restaurants are at the mercy of suppliers who themselves can alter and substitute ingredients without notice.

Faced with the complexity of this situation, something must be done. We must determine the nature of the problem from a medical standpoint; identify the allergies, the foods involved, the groups exposed, and the treatment for those who suffer; and carry out the necessary research. We must increase awareness within the restaurant industry in order that its members can fulfil their duty to advise the public as to the ingredients they employ. Finally, we must protect the health of all Canadians who are vulnerable and who need not take chances when dining in restaurants.

As a result of Bill C-289 we have the chance to take a step in the right direction by proposing a solution, however imperfect it may be. I am convinced that the authorities within the Departments of National Health and Welfare and Consumer and Corporate Affairs will undertake a detailed examination of all that it entails and continue to ensure the safety of Canadians so that they will be able to enjoy eating outside the home without fear of allergic reaction.