

Oral Questions

livelihood, their farming operations, and the continued viability of their farming operations?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member will realize that this is not the first time that similar questions have been raised by members of the Opposition. The Hon. Member should also realize that we recognize that there will be some difficulties in the grape and wine industries, not only as a result of the bilateral trade arrangement but more particularly as a result of the GATT ruling.

The Hon. Member knows that the grape industry is having difficulties today as a direct result of provincial pricing markups and provincial trade barriers. He should also know that, in the interest of assisting from a federal Government's point of view, we convened a first meeting of a cross-section of the industry and the provinces as early as December 4. Those task forces have worked very diligently since that period of time. They have presented a proposal to us. We are going through the process of consultation with the industry and other Departments.

Very shortly we will be in a position to make an announcement with respect to that particular problem which comes about as a direct result of GATT.

REQUEST FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that the former Minister for International Trade indicated that the GATT ruling would be phased-in over 10 or 12 years. In fact, last year she promised the grape growers she would do that. Now they lose half their price differential in the first year.

We are talking about a real situation now where property values have dropped in Niagara and in British Columbia, where loans cannot be obtained, and where farmers are being forced into bankruptcy. What assistance will the Minister give, and when will it be made available? The Ontario Government has quoted as high as \$30 million a year for many years.

When will the Minister make this financial assistance available to those farmers who are being forced off their lands, or who are being threatened with pulling out their entire vineyards this fall? When will the assistance be provided?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member should realize that we have worked diligently on this particular project. He knows that it takes time when one is breaking new ground with an adjustment package of this nature. We will take the time to ensure that we get the package correct. As I indicated before, we should be in position very shortly.

There are some provincial responsibilities here as well. We would expect that the provincial governments would be prepared to provide a fair degree of assistance. The Hon. Member mentions the provinces' interest here. The message that I have been receiving from the provinces is the fact that

they are not even prepared to enter into a surplus purchase program. We indicated our willingness to enter into that project this year as early as December 4.

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● (1440)

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICES

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Last Friday, Statistics Canada released figures which showed that the price of prescription drugs went up three times the rate of inflation; 12.4 per cent was the increase in prescription prices as compared to 4 per cent for inflation.

Can the Minister stand up in this House and tell Canadians what he intends to do in exercising his responsibility as Minister of Consumer Affairs specifically with respect to protecting Canadian consumers from the rip-offs by the multinational drug companies?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-22 contains in it provisions for a patented medicine prices review board and the powers for that board to ensure that prices of drugs do not rise above the rate of inflation except in extraordinary circumstances which must be justified to the board.

That organization would have been in operation last January and would have been able to prevent the price increases indicated had not the Opposition delayed the Bill's passage for so many months.

Appointments have been made to the board. Regulations are being drafted and very soon the board will be in operation. I expect the Board will perform as Parliament has instructed it. Why the board has not done so retroactively—the fault rests with the Opposition for having delayed passage of the Bill.

POWER OF DRUG PRICES REVIEW BOARD

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is also for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

On November 18, 1986, the Minister said:

The price of drugs will not increase by one cent, not those on the market, not those coming on the market, no drugs are going to go up.

In light of the fact the Minister has also in Bill C-22 given the multinational drug companies retroactive protection on their patents, is he prepared to make sure that he writes into the Act that the Drug Prices Review Board will have retroactive power to reduce prices, prices for which Canadians have been ripped off over the last year?