

Routine Proceedings

Canada requires encouraging parents to have their children vaccinated. Even though we know that, in some unpredictable cases, children will have a severe reaction to the vaccine.

Not encouraging vaccinations, however, would lead to a much higher incidence of sickness and death. The government has discussed this issue with provincial governments over the past several months. I hope that we will be able to work co-operatively with the provinces to meet some of the concerns of those families and to ensure that public willingness to have their children vaccinated remains high.

As well, my officials have been discussing the report of the Thalidomide Task Force which we received earlier this year. Thalidomide victims have asked that they be considered separately, and our study of their needs is ongoing.

I have been heartened by the compassion that Canadians continue to show to those who are in need, who will continue to work diligently so that all of us can feel justifiably proud to live in a country that cares for those who are less fortunate.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, persons with haemophilia who have contracted the deadly disease AIDS by relying on our Canadian blood banking system in the past were victims of a national medical catastrophe. The government has announced today assistance for them which is, indeed, welcome. But I wonder whether in fact it is enough.

The Canadian Haemophilia Society had asked on behalf of the victims for three times as much assistance as the government announced today. I would like to ask the government during this Christmas period why only about a third of the society's request has been granted. I would like the hon. minister to account for that discrepancy.

The reasons that assistance is warranted for this group of patients are of course that most haemophilia patients, by the very nature of this disease, are uninsured and hence are not eligible for disability insurance. Also, they had and they continue to incur out of pocket medical costs. For these two fundamental reasons the assistance requested by them and given by the government is truly welcome at this point. But the Canadian Haemophilia

Society had asked for \$340 million for about 1,000 victims. Thus we see the inadequacy of the assistance announced today.

• (1150)

The other point I would like to make is that it took almost a year to respond, and it will still take some months for it to be effective. I wonder why it does not start today upon the announcement.

Another point is in relation to the time frame of notification. If a victim does not apply to the government within a year, perhaps the privilege will be waived. I would like the government to consider that should there be haemophilia AIDS patients who are unable to apply within the year, special consideration be given to them even if cases emerge after the end of the year.

On the question of whether this particular announcement by the government would be a prelude to a policy of compassion for victims of failed public policy, that I would like to see established indeed. I would welcome it. We should compensate parents of vaccine damaged children and compensate thalidomide victims. This ought indeed to be a policy of government—if I might paraphrase the Minister for Health—if he would like to have the confidence of the public to follow our national public health policy.

In conclusion, I welcome this announcement although I feel it is not quite adequate. Any government of the day has a moral responsibility to assist victims of national health policy. The story for AIDS victims is not yet complete. The Government of Canada must take steps to alleviate the suffering of all individuals who become victims of this disease. It would then be consistent with our philosophy of universal health care that all people with diseases, as with AIDS, deserve similar assistance.

I urge the government to develop more quickly a comprehensive strategy on how to help all people with AIDS since only such a comprehensive national strategy will lead to the development of a unified and more effective national response to the AIDS/HIV epidemic, a response which will ensure access to drugs and treatment for all people with AIDS.

Again, I welcome this announcement. I had hoped that it would be more, but in the spirit of Christmas, we give credit as well.