

Oral Questions

long-term economic importance of the NRC must be maintained and enhanced.

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SUPPLY AND SERVICES

CF-18 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE CONTRACT—
WINNIPEG CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, the Council of the City of Winnipeg passed this resolution unanimously:

That the Council of the City of Winnipeg convey to the Prime Minister and Government of Canada this city's profound anger and regret over the Government's decision respecting the CF-18 maintenance contract, and its dismay at the undermining of both the public tendering process and the principle of orderly and equitable regional economic development.

That sense of betrayal has only been compounded by the revelation yesterday by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Masse) that it was a sheer political choice made last August. At the same time the people of Manitoba and the Bristol contractors were being misled by Conservative Members of Parliament for Manitoba that everything was all right.

People from Winnipeg are part of Canada too. They are part of the national interest. They want a number of questions answered. They want to know why that crass political choice is not being revealed, together with the documents, so that we know exactly what is going on with this Government, and the people in Winnipeg can feel that they share in the proper development of this country.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

PROPOSED EXTENSION OF PATENT RIGHTS

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. I had the honour of bringing in the current drug price legislation in 1968. At that time we had among the highest drug prices in the world. Since that date we have had among the lowest drug prices in the world.

The independent inquiry appointed by the previous Government recommended that, in order to encourage more research and jobs in Canada, the patent protection be extended for four years. The Government has extended that period from four to ten years. Why did the Government choose to give two and a half times more protection to the pharmaceutical companies in order to get those jobs in research than the independent

inquiry suggested? Was it not because there was pressure from the United States as one of the prices for free trade negotiations?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the right hon. gentleman is correct that in the 1960s drug prices in Canada were above the United States. In the 1980s they are below the United States, even where there is no generic competition. The Patent Act has nothing to do with that fact. The market has changed.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andre: A great many things have changed since 1968 of which the Hon. Member should be aware. If the Opposition would be so gracious as to allow Parliament to examine this Bill and look at the clauses it will be amply demonstrated that the benefits of what we are proposing are of an overwhelming nature. They will restore to this country vigour in the research and development area, which apparently every Party wants in general but not in specific.

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHETHER UNINSURED WILL BE PROTECTED

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister stated that the price of drugs would not increase as a result of this Bill. At the same time, however, he had earmarked \$100 million for the provinces to protect them against price increases.

Does he really think Canadians are so naive they don't know realize what the real reason is? And didn't the Minister protect sick Canadians who are not protected by drug insurance plans?

• (1120)

[English]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is not the naivete of the Canadian public about which I am concerned; it is the naivete of the Opposition. Every drug now on the market, brand name and generic, will remain on the market. Whatever market forces are establishing price will continue. That simple, elementary economic lesson should be comprehensible even to the Leader of the Opposition. There will be no increases in those drugs. In terms of the drugs in the so-called pipeline in the future, time in Question Period does not permit an answer to that.

Mr. Axworthy: You can't answer it.

Mr. Andre: Let us introduce the Bill. Let us look at that in committee. Let us examine it. I am sure, if the hon. gentleman is fair minded, he will find out that in fact the prices will be very reasonable and the benefits will overwhelm any minor costs that might be there.