

Adjournment Debate

of tobacco use. In fact, a recent survey on selected causes of preventable death indicated that tobacco was number one far outweighing traffic accidents, suicides, AIDS, homicides, fires, accidental poisoning and undetermined deaths. The relationship between tobacco use, health care costs and indeed the life and death of Canadians has been shown clearly.

I would appreciate hearing what the government proposes to do in terms of the health of Canadians and whether Canadians are going to have a Minister of Health who advocates both within the cabinet and this House of Commons for the health of Canadians and takes that responsibility seriously.

In view of the fact that in the next couple of years we will be undergoing a very comprehensive review of health care and health care costs, it does not augur well that we have a Minister of Health who would not stand up for the health of Canadians, but chose to be evasive and not to answer the questions on this issue.

• (1835)

Ms. Susan Whelan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I am to respond to the question of February 1 and that is what I will do.

Research indicates that at least 38,000 die each year as a result of tobacco related diseases. These deaths reflect smoking behaviours of more than two decades ago when the risks of smoking were less understood.

Even now more than 100,000 children and teens begin smoking every year in Canada.

Enough is known about the hazards of smoking that we can predict with gruesome confidence that one in four of these young new smokers will die prematurely from conditions like emphysema, heart disease and lung cancer.

Tobacco deaths are preventable and even one preventable death let alone thousands constitutes a tragedy. This is unacceptable.

Canada's national strategy to reduce tobacco use has gone a long way toward reinforcing the idea that smoking is no longer

cool for youth and a lot less socially acceptable among adults than once was the case in this country.

This strategy has proceeded on a broad front with federal legislation restricting cigarette advertising and requiring strong visible health warnings on the product package, with health promotion campaigns aimed at encouraging young people to think twice about starting to smoke and to break free from social pressures to start smoking, and with federal legislation to raise the age at which people may legally be sold tobacco products to 18.

Tobacco smuggling is a serious threat to Canada's strategy against smoking because it is making cigarettes available to young people through illicit channels.

Unless we put a stop to smuggling we will find it increasingly difficult to keep tobacco out of the hands of young teens, which is the very purpose of the sales of tobacco to young people act. With this law we expect Canada's retail sector to take a responsible approach to ensuring tobacco is not available for sale to young people but to make it work to control tobacco access by young persons.

The tobacco market has got to move above ground where we can see it, where we can manage it, and where our programming can have its full effect.

Canada leads the world in taking a comprehensive strategic approach to reducing the toll of sickness and premature death caused by tobacco smoking. We have no intention of forfeiting this lead. The government is committed to implementing innovative programs and legislation to maintain the momentum of our national strategy to continue to reduce addictions to tobacco in Canada and to continue to prevent tobacco related deaths.

I want to inform the House that it is the government that sets tax policy in this country.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: In accordance with Standing Order 38(5), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.37 p.m.)