

[Translation]

**Mr. Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to challenge a point which worries me considerably. The minister has just said that the same act applies to all industries. I do not believe it is so. I should like to ask the minister to kindly check the matter.

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[English]

## HEALTH AND WELFARE

### ALLEGED HEALTH HAZARDS IN IMPORTS OF PEANUTS

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. One of the assistant deputy ministers in her department, namely, Dr. A. B. Morrison, head of the health protection branch, said on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television program last night that six shipments of peanuts and peanut products have been seized because of aflatoxin mould, a by-product which he called one of the most potent cancer-causing agents known to man.

In view of that statement, can the minister confirm the fact that these seizures were made? How significant are these procedures? Are they just spot checks, or is there something here which we should be really concerned about?

**Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to confirm the seizure: that fact was just brought to my attention by the hon. member. As the House knows, we monitor regularly shipments of peanuts to Canada and stop those which do not conform to the rules. He referred to a problem where mould which causes cancer of the liver can develop on some peanuts. I am certain there is no reason to warn Canadians of any particular problem at this point. I want to conclude by indicating that peanuts are still a provider of vitamin E, which is a sexual energy vitamin.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Nystrom:** Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the very virile Minister of National Health and Welfare. Apparently, a CBC television reporter went out and bought six or seven package of peanuts at random.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Nystrom:** Apparently, the television reporter bought six or seven packages of peanuts at random and showed them to Dr. Morrison on the television program. On examining these peanuts visually, he said publicly he would only eat one or two of the samples.

● (1127)

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Nystrom:** If this is the case, I should like to ask the minister why this screening mechanism does not work, as one

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would suspect if the head of the health protection branch who is making these decisions for Canada, on examining six or seven samples, came to the conclusion that he, personally, would not dare eat more than one or two of them because of the possibility that aflatoxin, which is a carcinogen, might be in them.

**Miss Bégin:** We do not as yet have one inspector for peanuts, Mr. Speaker. I just want to confirm, and I am now in a position to do so, that there is no reason to warn Canadians of any particular danger in relation to the purchase of peanuts. I have just received confirmation of that.

It may well be possible that some packages in shipments have not been identified properly. I do not know what the problem is with respect to Dr. Morrison not eating peanuts, but there is no reason to warn Canadians of a danger.

**Mr. Nystrom:** Mr. Speaker, Dr. Morrison is quoted by the Canadian Press, in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* this morning, as saying when speaking in Guelph on Wednesday:

—he will not eat peanuts or any other nuts that taste stale, are misshapen or are discoloured because a micro-organism linked with cancer could be present. The organism, aflatoxin, will cause cancer in about 15 species of animals—

In light of the concern of the deputy minister of the Department of National Health and Welfare, I would like to ask the minister whether, because of the assistant deputy minister's concern about the possibility of a carcinogen, the department is considering a warning in order that the ordinary people might be aware of the possibility of this deadly carcinogen, particularly as we have just finished the Halloween season during which many people may have purchased peanuts and other nuts.

**Miss Bégin:** Mr. Speaker, I want to reaffirm that we have no reason to warn Canadians of a danger at this time. We have had regulatory mechanism in place for 15 years. We work in close relationship with our U.S. counterparts. If they find any signs that shipments do not conform to norms, we are informed immediately, and vice versa. We are confident that the system in place is really sufficient to assure safety to Canadians.

### NUMBER OF INSPECTORS TO GUARANTEE SAFETY OF PEANUT IMPORTS

**Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca):** Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of the grave danger that aflatoxin poses to human health, will the minister give us her unequivocal assurance that her department has a sufficient number of inspectors to guarantee to Canadians that all peanuts or peanut products, such as peanut butter, are indeed safe at all times? If not, could the minister tell us what action she is planning immediately to ensure that the deficiency is corrected?

**Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the