

The government can talk until it is blue in the face, which of course is kind of natural for it, about jobs created in this industry, but so far it has not lived up to its promise, let alone those of someone else. In 1987 the government made a promise and it did not deliver. Today Conservatives stand in the House making another promise.

Should we be surprised that Canadians are a little sceptical. Would you not be, Mr. Speaker? I know you are a non-partisan person sitting in the House of Commons and you are able to look at this in a truly objective and completely detached fashion which I am sure you always do in your capacity as a Speaker.

But say, Mr. Speaker, that you were a Tory and that this was the situation. How could you possibly believe in that hypothetical situation what some of these ministers are saying. Obviously you would have great difficulty, as I do and as all my constituents do, in believing what those Conservatives say.

Mr. Speaker, if you think my colleagues and I are alone here in believing this, if you by any chance think that we might be slightly partisan in our approach here today, well far from it. I know that would be the last thing on your mind in any case.

Let me read what *The New York Times* of November 16 says in an article under the general heading "Business Day". This particular story is entitled "Canadians See Rise in Drug Costs". This article was written by Milt Freudenheim. I want to read a few little extracts from it which should make some of these Tories across the way cringe just a little bit.

Canada's success at delivering drugs at costs lower than those in the United States is an important feature of its medical system, which has been a model for many health policy experts seeking to contain soaring costs in the United States. Medical costs are about 28 per cent lower per capita in Canada than in the United States, although spending on health care has been rising there, too.

• (1710)

We have lower health care costs in Canada on a per capita basis than they do in the United States, largely because of our prescription drug program, which this government wants to do away with. What are we to conclude from that, other than that the government

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wants to increase the cost of health care in Canada? It is going to do that, of course, at the expense of the taxpaying public, and at the expense of the provincial governments.

I want to read from a little further on in the same text. It mentions the burden of changing our patent legislation, and it says:

Extending the patent life of drugs is likely to cost consumers immediately and also add to the burden on the government health plans which are already under economic pressure. Compared with hospital and doctors' bills, prescription drugs are a relatively small, though rapidly growing expense.

Even in the United States people are lauding Canada's generic drug system. However here in Canada the government wants to do away with it.

[*Translation*]

I do not say that there is no room for both industries in Canada, because there surely is. Besides, the conventional pharmaceutical industry has nearly 90 per cent of the Canadian market and certainly has its place. I am not one of those who want to make life harder for them than it is. I think that we must have an approach that is sensitive to the needs of Canadians who often use generic products which save them money.

As I just said, the United States or at least some American journalists praise our present system which the government opposite is ready to dismantle. About 15 or 20 minutes ago it introduced in this House a closure motion to cut short the debate which should take place.

If we review this whole issue, we see that compulsory licences are not new in Canada. They have been around since 1923 but perhaps they were not used so much then. In 1960 a royal commission of inquiry recommended that patents and compulsory licences be granted for pharmaceutical products.

In 1960 a Conservative government was in power. Three years later, the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission recommended abolishing pharmaceutical patents. After that, in 1969, we had amendments to the Patent Act authorizing compulsory licences in Canada. From then on we had the tools to give us pharmaceuticals at prices that if not reasonable were at least more reasonable than they might otherwise have been.