

Oral Questions

On January 14 of this year the minister indicated that his government intended to provide drug manufacturers in Canada with longer periods of patent protection.

The comprehensive Green Shield report clearly states that: "Further extensions to patent life will result in continued high levels of increases in drug costs for Canadians".

My question for the minister is simple. When will the minister come clean with Canadian consumers and tell them that the true cost of increased patent protection will be higher drug costs for all Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I was not in the House yesterday, and someone else pointed out that the study published a few weeks ago was not based on the same figures. The Green Shield study was not based on the same figures as the studies by our own Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. There was no criticism of what was done here in Canada.

The study simply mentioned—and I think this is important—the current trend among physicians to use more expensive drugs, new products coming on the market and the simple fact that more and more drugs are being prescribed every year. Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about the fact that Canadians are paying increasingly higher prices, and that is why the Minister of National Health and Welfare had a meeting in January with his provincial counterparts. In fact, he will meet them again by the end of this month. With the co-operation of the provinces, we will be able to keep prices under control as much as possible.

• (1440)

I am, nevertheless, very pleased that as a result of our controls, the price of patented drugs has increased below the rate of inflation since we adopted Bill C-22 in 1987. I think that is a significant achievement for this government.

[English]

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, the Green Shield report has completely discredited this

government's previous commitment to price stability for prescription drugs in Canada.

Will the minister assure Canadians that there will be no changes to drug patent policy until there is a full parliamentary investigation into the rising costs of prescription drugs in Canada today?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to the impact of Bill C-22, and perhaps I may recall a few figures that were released since the people in the other place objected to Bill C-22 in 1987. Since then, pharmaceutical companies have announced significant investments, including \$270 million in Montreal, at Merck-Frosst. I have a few more here I would like to mention: Boehringer, \$135 million over a five-year period; CIBA-GEIGY, \$225 million over a five-year period—

[English]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for York West.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister. On October 6, 1986, his colleague the government House leader who was the minister responsible at the time said in this House: "In fact, any impartial examination of the new legislation would show that there will be absolutely no increase in drug prices as a result of this legislation".

I ask the minister why has this government once again broken its word to Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, when we tabled Bill C-22, we made it clear that we would have a board that would control increases in the prices of patented drugs. The hon. member knows perfectly well that the federal government exercises control over patented drugs through the patent system, while non-patent drugs are a provincial responsibility.

We submitted a report, and frankly, I am surprised this is the first question we have had on the subject in five years. Every time we tabled reports in the House, I waited patiently to answer questions, because in each case, the price of drugs increased less than inflation. That is what happened during the past five years. In