

Oral Questions

Mr. Andre: The fact is there will not be any rise in drugs on the market now, and in terms of the future we have all kinds of safety mechanisms—

Mr. Gauthier: We don't trust you.

Mr. Andre: —to ensure that consumers are not affected badly by this legislation.

[*Translation*]

PRICE OF GENERIC DRUGS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mrs. Thérèse Killens (Saint-Michel—Ahuntsic): Mr. Speaker, the Minister is telling us that prices will not go up.

Does the Minister know that the multinationals sell their valium for \$80, whereas the same product is available from generic drug companies at \$2.31?

How can the Minister justify his decision when we know that, if this legislation is passed, an ulcer treatment drug called Zantac which sells for \$89.69 will never be available as a generic drug which would cost only \$9?

• (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, the drugs—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: Who's on drugs, Harvie?

Mr. Andre: —about which the Hon. Member speaks will remain on the market. There is no change in terms of those particular drugs. The savings that she talked about will remain for consumers. It is simply false to suggest that there will be an increase.

I also remind the Hon. Member that, on average, it takes 11.5 years for a generic drug to be brought into competition with a brand name drug. We are proposing a 10-year exclusivity period. On average, the period of exclusivity will be less than what it is now for competitive generic drugs.

UNITED STATES POSITION ON PATENT LAW

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. One thing Canadians do know is that at present we pay 20 per cent less than do the Americans for drugs. That is fact. Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that at the "shamrock shuffle" President Reagan asked that this item be placed on the Canadian agenda, that Special Envoy Yeutter complained about Canada dragging its feet in terms of changing our patent law, and that last spring when Vice-President Bush was here he also urged the Canadian Government to change this law in order that multinational American drug companies could gouge Canadian consumers the way Americans are gouged at home?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party should be aware that drug prices in Canada, where there is no generic competition—and this involves the innovative drugs—are 20 per cent less in Canada than in the United States. It is as a result of the difference in the market here and not as a result of the patent law that this has resulted in savings to Canadians. The Hon. Member should not make that jump, which is illogical if he were to look at the facts.

With respect to who is pressuring us, since 1969 the whole of the industrialized world has been criticizing us for having patent laws that are out of step with the rest of the world.

MULTINATIONAL DRUG COMPANIES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister admit that the leading voices for change to this legislation are the multinational drug companies? Will he admit that the pressure did indeed go on with the former Government and that all consumer and all pensioner groups—all those concerned with keeping drug prices down in Canada—are completely opposed to what the Government is trying to do?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the leading proponents of restoring patent protection for inventions in this very important area are members of the academic community, the young scientists who want to work at research and development in Canada.

Mr. Orlikow: That is nonsense!

Mr. Riis: Talk to Frank Oberle.

Mr. Andre: I invite the Leader of the New Democratic Party to accompany me to the academic institutions which I will be visiting as we announce major new research and development investments. I invite him to talk to any professor of pharmacology—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Hon. Member for Oshawa.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to go to every campus in Canada right now after what the Government has done to research and development in this country. I will go any day with the Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Minister. Canadian consumers would have to spend \$650 million more as a result of the action of this Government, so why such an unfair measure?