

*Oral Questions*

Furthermore, last week I gave the health ministers the assurance that everything would be done to guarantee a reasonable price, and that is what we did after Bill C-22, a bill the hon. member severely criticized, but in the final instance the hon. member must admit today that the government was right. Canadians know we will apply the same procedures.

As the minister of health, I do not expect prices to increase beyond what is reasonable.

[English]

**Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the minister.

I am surprised that the minister is not concerned that under the current rules the generic drug industry has saved the Canadian health care system \$1 billion a year, \$1 billion which is so badly needed by the health care system in this country. The provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and British Columbia have already commented that this legislation will cost them hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

The government says it does not have choices in health care. The government does have choices in health care. It is true that the generic drug industry has helped keep prices to the consumer down.

Why does the government insist on supporting multinationals instead of those most vulnerable in our society, the sick and the elderly who need to have reasonable drug prices?

**Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada supports research and development. It is a little different from what she said. Second, I will give her real figures.

Listen to me. The difference between the drug industry, the pharmaceuticals, the innovative drugs and the generic drugs is about \$300 million a year; \$225 million is for off-patent drugs which will continue tomorrow as today. It means that we have \$75 million and half of that \$75 million is covered by the health care system. It means about a \$30 million increase for all the provinces in Canada.

Do you not believe, Mr. Speaker, that we need to encourage research and development of drugs in Canada for that \$30 million? I believe it is a very good deal for Canadians.

[Translation]

**TRADE**

**Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for International Trade. Ten days ago, the President of Mexico announced in Rio that he would seek to conclude not only a free trade agreement but also a common market with Brazil.

What would the effect of such initiatives be for Canada in its agreement with the United States and Mexico?

[English]

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade):** Mr. Speaker, our first objective is to complete negotiations with Mexico and the United States to complete a North American free trade agreement.

If following that there is interest from other countries, whether it is Brazil or Chile, which are two countries that have indicated some interest in this, then that is a step we could contemplate at that time. Our first objective is to complete the negotiations with the United States and Mexico.

**Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is not responding to my question. On the other hand, he is being consistent.

Two weeks ago the Prime Minister was unable to comment on how new country accession would occur within the North American free trade agreement. Three weeks ago the Minister for Science was not aware of the significance of Chile's initiatives with the United States and Mexico. Latin American governments are on the move and it is very clear that this government has lost control of the agenda.

So that Canadians might better judge the Mexican agreement, will the government undertake to provide them, prior to signing NAFTA, with a paper setting out its trade agenda for all of Latin America, if indeed, it has one?

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade):** Mr. Speaker, I am quite happy to respond to my hon. friend's questions when he has a question to which I can respond. When he asks hypothetical questions, it is difficult to come up with a response that will meet his requirements.