

*Private Members' Business*

for products mainly because we have allowed companies to get away with it.

In certain industries, it is far more excessive than others. It is just common sense. We are being taken to the cleaners by this multiplicity of middlemen, of middle agents who add their percentage on top of the other percentage which means that we really, in effect, pay much more than the United States.

I believe if you ask the consumers from Cape Breton or the consumers from British Columbia, or particularly the consumers of Quebec that they would say: "When we go down south to Florida, one of the benefits we see is the difference in prices." We understand that there are some differences because we have perhaps a better, perhaps, social program in Canada. We have to pay for that. We have higher taxation. We have transportation and perhaps a shorter growing season as well.

All of that taken into account, it does cost us a great deal more for certain products and a satisfactory answer has never really been given to us.

Let me just tell you in the automobile field which I am most familiar with, it is not a question of Lincoln Continentals only. It is a question of the prices with the basic manufacturers' suggested retail price being basically the same in Canada as in the United States, once you add in the different things dealing with taxation as well as the question of transportation and those basic items.

As you get into those vehicles as they are sold by the dealers with the added equipment, you get into a labyrinth of price variations with which you would have a great deal of difficulty trying to discern what the real price of the automobile is. The United States has an act called the Monroney Act. It is interesting that we do not have federal legislation, as the United States does. That is not Mulroney but Monroney. The Monroney Act in the United States came about in the 1950s and required a sticker on every automobile sold so that the consumer could see basically what the prices are for equipment and everything else. This act, which applies in the United States, meant that cars which were transported from the States to Canada had that windshield sticker. However, these stickers were systematically removed in Canada so that the dealers and other middle suppliers could put on whatever price they felt necessary. Obviously that is unfair. Obviously that works against the interest of the consumers.

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I think that a Royal commission could go into each one of these areas where we are really getting gouged and look at the extent to which we are getting gouged. As a result of a number of commissions that we held in Quebec dealing with automobile insurance, we actually had automobile insurance rates go down. I understand that for a certain period of time in Ontario, as a result of hearings being held, some of the automobile insurance rates went down. It is a case, as some people said, and as I believe, of the light being shone upon the practices of these insurers in the province of Ontario.

I believe a Royal commission on prices would have a salutary effect. I think it is important. It touches the lives of every single consumer.

[*Translation*]

I can tell you that as a consumer advocate in Quebec for the past 20 years and as my party's critic for consumer issues, I have always been intrigued by the difference in prices between the United States and Canada. I never felt the difference was justified in the case of cars or car repairs.

In the United States, there is a federal law, the Monroney Bill, that obliges U.S. automobile manufacturers to provide a label indicating the base price. We don't have that here. In fact, most vehicles imported from the United States into Canada have this label on the windshield but labels are routinely removed because first of all, there is no connection with the Canadian price and second, Canadian and Quebec consumers would start asking embarrassing questions about the gap between U.S. and Canadian prices.

I think the Private Member's Bill put forward by the hon. member for Windsor—St-Clair is very sensible, in that it demonstrates that we, as Canadian consumers, are being exploited to the nth degree. I think we should find out once and for all how badly we are being exploited, and I think this would have a salutary effect in two ways. First of all, with a Royal commission of inquiry we can ask people, producers and consumers, to appear before us, which, because of all the publicity, may force producers to lower their prices.