

Food and Drugs Act

What is the proper vehicle for the job? Promising suggestions have been made by the food industry, the allergy associations, and others. Our task is to take Bill C-289 and improve it in order that Canadians with food sensitivities will receive the type of protection that they deserve.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this debate this afternoon. I believe that this is the third day we have had the opportunity to speak to Bill C-289 presented to us by my distinguished colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps).

The Hon. Member for Hamilton East has proposed this Bill to us for very good and proper reasons. As our colleague from the Conservative Party stated moments ago, we know that there are a number of people in Canada who suffer from drug and food allergies. Sometimes these allergies can range from a minor inconvenience, and on other occasions they can be deadly.

I have a daughter who has allergies. In her case it is something that could be considered minor. She is allergic to cats. However, if she is beside a cat for any longer than five or ten minutes, her face swells to such a point that she is almost unrecognizable. It only takes a matter of a few minutes, but obviously it does something to her system that makes it such that she cannot be near that type of animal.

● (1410)

We understand that for a little girl it is sometimes difficult for her to understand why she cannot go near an animal, especially when it is an animal that kids generally like. I have had to deal with that myself. However, the parallel is not totally just, of course, because in the case of my child, I do not think that what she has could be deadly. Mind you, if she were in the presence of such an animal for a long time, it could have probably more serious consequences, but it is avoidable because it is not an allergy to something that she physically ingests. In the case of people who are allergic to certain foods, of course, the matter is even more serious.

When I was a member of the legislature some years ago, one of my colleagues had a secretary whose daughter was allergic to peanuts. I remember seeing the young lady. She was 16 years old. She otherwise felt fine, and she was fine. She went for dinner at someone's house one day and unfortunately consumed a dessert or something that contained peanuts. She died at about 16 years of age.

I heard last night a television report of similar incidence where a young man of 17 or 18 years old died. He was allergic to nuts. In his case, he ate an apple turnover which contained ground hazel nuts, ground walnuts, or something like that, at a fast food restaurant. It was enough that it killed him. So foods that certainly would not do any harm to most of us can be deadly if ingested by some people, if those people are allergic.

My colleague is asking that restaurants label the food that they serve. I must say that there are provisions of the Bill that I am not totally comfortable with. The main thrust of the Bill, particularly as it pertains to legislating the fast food chains—and I am speaking here of McDonalds, Burger King, Harvey's and Arby's and other such restaurants—to put on their packages the products that are inside. It surely is not all that complicated. If someone can put the word "Whopper" on a cardboard box, one should also be able to put underneath the word "Whopper", "this package contains—" and then describe the contents. Surely that is not unreasonable because those foods do come in packages and there would be very little additional cost.

In the case of smaller restaurants, of course, that would be an onerous task. One cannot ask the local mom and pop restaurant to start giving a list of what is contained in their bacon and eggs and this sort of thing when you buy breakfast there. Under this Bill proposed by my colleague, the way that I interpret it, particularly as it pertains to the franchise restaurants, the Minister would have the authority under regulation to designate which chains would have to comply with the regulations. For instance, the Minister could state, well, chain X, McDonalds—that is a very large chain—can obviously afford to do this, so that one shall be designated as one of the chains that will have to comply with this rule, and so on, and describe the other restaurants which prepare packaged hot food, have a limited menu and sell food in large quantities.

That does not seem to be very complicated. There may be provisions of the Bill which would have to be deleted as they pertain to smaller stores. We can do that in the parliamentary committee. I would suggest that my colleague from Hamilton East, who is a very reasonable Member of Parliament, would probably be most co-operative if another Hon. Member proposed that kind of an initiative.

The Member for Hamilton East has a very good idea here. We should not think that she is the only person who feels that way. We know of Canadians who have had the misfortune of losing family members, we know of people who have died tragically and needlessly as a result of eating foods to which they were allergic.

Over recent months my colleague has received petitions, which I have in front of me in this folder and which she intends to table in this House in the days to come. She now has 4,000 signatures of people wanting this kind of legislation. They are coming in at the rate of hundreds every single day from people supporting this kind of initiative.

I trust that Members will not use up much more time in this House and that at the end of today, or before, they will allow this Bill to go to a parliamentary committee, where we will amend it if that is necessary in order to ensure that it does not create any hardship for small business and so on. I do not want that to happen either. But let us do it now. Let us send it to a parliamentary committee today. If we could protect the life of only one young person in this country—and I know that there