

Patent Act

I am somewhat ambivalent about having this opportunity to speak to Bill C-22 which has now returned to the House of Commons for the third time.

An Hon. Member: Do you have a new speech?

Ms. Mitchell: Despite the fact we do not agree with the Senate action, and I think it is unfortunate that we did not take some of those steps proposed a couple of years ago to control the Senate in this regard, we must say that we continue to oppose the Bill.

As everyone knows, the Bill will give 10 years of exclusive monopoly to the manufacturer of new, innovative brand name drugs. What do we get in exchange? The companies say they will put \$1.4 billion into research and development, creating an estimated 3,000 jobs. They also say this will encourage new discoveries and act as an incentive for manufacturing drugs in Canada. The Bill also provides for an independent drug prices review board. It sounds good when you hear it, but it has no teeth so it is not really that meaningful.

The Bill also provides for a review by the Government after four years and by a parliamentary committee in the tenth year. By then, of course, consumers will have paid a considerable amount of money that they would not have had to pay under current legislation. The opponents of the Bill estimate this kind of monopoly will prevent consumers from obtaining lower cost generic labelled drugs which, in many instances in the past, have been about half the cost of brand name drugs. It is no wonder that people right across Canada are concerned about this Bill. It is not just opposition Parties, or the Liberal Senators who to some degree are playing games. I have heard from senior citizens in my riding, health organizations such as the B.C. Health Coalition, and petition after petition after petition has been presented from people opposed to this Bill for very legitimate reasons. They feel it is a life and death matter. If they have to use prescription drugs, they want to be able to afford the cost. That cost will probably double under this legislation.

I know many people on this side of the House have mentioned these points before, but we are concerned that drug prices will increase at a time when the strain on health care budgets is also increasing. In British Columbia we hear all the time about the escalating costs of health care. Unfortunately, the Government of that province sees a solution to that problem in establishing a two-tier medicare system. We find that completely intolerable. They want to have private hospitals for the rich where people will not have to wait and will have all kinds of luxuries. Then they would have a poorly financed ordinary system for everyone else.

Realistically, we do have a real problem with the cost of health care across Canada. The results of this Bill will mean that hospitals are going to have to pay a considerable amount more for drugs they are giving to their patients. It also means that Governments with pharma-care programs will have to pay a lot more. Certainly I hope most provinces have some

coverage for low-income people and our seniors at least. It is too bad that it is not a universal program. Of course, the cost of drugs will also go up for consumers.

I feel particularly concerned about the people with chronic medical problems who require prescription drugs on an ongoing basis. I do not know how people on limited incomes and who suffer from diabetes, epilepsy or arthritis and who require regular prescription drugs, can afford those drugs right now. In fact, many of them cannot. Yet under this new plan it will be a terribly worrisome problem for many such people. As a result, many may not have their prescriptions filled. If they do not have pharma-care or some other coverage, it is quite possible that some will do without. That of course means a risk to their health.

The other criticism we have, and I will document this a bit more in a minute, is that there is real skepticism across the country about the great promises of lots of jobs and lots of research and development. It sounds like a real case of bribery so that the pharmaceutical companies will have a monopoly here as they have in the U.S.

We hear from the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre) that he thinks this is just great. Those of us opposing this Bill are opposing job creation and research and development. It is no wonder that we on this side, and I think a great many people outside, particularly our viewers, wonder if this is not another scam of the Conservative Government. We have heard statement after statement contradicted later and it is very hard to have any trust in what the Government is saying. We know, of course, that the pharmaceutical companies have a vested interest in this matter. Their spokesperson is Judy Erola, the former Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs under the Liberals. It is no wonder the Liberals are not speaking very strongly against this Bill tonight.

● (1650)

People are also opposed to this Bill as it relates to the so-called free trade deal. We call it the "Mulroney free trade deal". We have heard many statements in the House and have seen statements in the American documents about the free trade deal which make us very skeptical about what was happening behind our backs, about the footsie which was being played with the Americans. The documents which we saw certainly seemed to indicate that this had been discussed as part of the free trade negotiations. If you believe completely in an open border, it is understandable that you would expect multinationals to come into Canada and take over in the same way as they do in the United States. That, of course, is what the Government wants.

Some people make the argument that generic drugs may not be as safe or effective as brand name drugs. This point has been refuted and I will document that in my subsequent remarks.