

Federal Sales Tax on Drugs

the original motion. Maybe the simplest thing would be to put the question, if the House is ready.

Mr. Saltzman: If the motion to adjourn is not in order, I should like to continue addressing questions to the government.

Mr. Forest: The hon. member has already spoken on this matter, and I do not see why the question cannot be put now, unless there is someone else who wishes to speak on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the right, under the standing order, to conclude the debate. If there are no further contributions I am certainly prepared to recognize him for five minutes pursuant to Standing Order 48, I think it is. I would point out to him that if he speaks now he will close the debate.

Mr. Saltzman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still cannot understand the government's position. I cannot understand what there might be in the analysis of the information it has acquired which could be considered as confidential. I am not asking for figures regarding specific costs. I am interested in finding out what has happened to prices of various drugs since the removal of the sales tax. Surely, this information cannot be considered confidential. The public is entitled to know what has happened to the tax money. If a tax amounting to 11 per cent is removed from a drug and the benefit is not passed on, the price must eventually be paid by the general public. There is no point in giving these companies a bonanza. We heard a great deal about the benefits which would follow this move. We were told that if the sales tax was removed, drug prices would go down. However, there is no clear evidence that the removal of sales tax has had any such effect. Indeed, drug prices seem to be rising.

It is regrettable that the government is not prepared to be frank with the House and tell us what has happened. Either the department has collected a great deal of information and made no use of it, in which case the entire exercise has been worthless, or else it has the information and is withholding it from members of this House. In either case, the government is to be strongly criticized for its stand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? All those in favour, please say aye.

Some hon. Member: Aye.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Those against, please say, nay.

Some hon. Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my view, the "nays" have it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): On division.

Motion (Mr. Saltzman) negatived.

COMBINES

REQUEST FOR COPIES OF STUDY BY ECONOMIC COUNCIL OF CANADA

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo) moved:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all reports and studies undertaken for the Economic Council of Canada review of Canada Combines and Anti-Trust legislation.

He said: Again I appeal to the government to make this information available, particularly since there is a strong possibility that the pertinent legislation will be reviewed. It would be very helpful in the course of an examination of the government's proposals if we had the benefit of some of the background information which has been provided. Again, I see no reason why the government should not be more co-operative in this regard.

In looking over the wording of my motion, I see it calls for copies of all reports and studies undertaken by the Economic Council in this field. I realize that the word "all" is unlimited in scope; it was used only in the absence of a suitable alternative. I could not have used the word "some" for instance; it would have been too indefinite. I hope the government will not reject our request simply because the word "all" is used.

I should like to make it clear that I am quite prepared to be accommodating in the sense that if the government says it is willing to make the significant information, or précis, our outlines available to me, I would be happy to accept that kind of response rather than insist that everything which has been done be presented—though I still believe it would be highly desirable that all this information should be disclosed. However, if that is too formidable a task I would be happy to accept an undertaking by the government that sufficient information will be made available to prove satisfactory in meeting the objectives of the motion before us.

Mr. J. E. Walker (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): I am pleased to recip-