

Oral Questions

statement. I should tell him that I was congratulated last night by one of his colleagues in the Liberal Party for the position taken by the Government. It was the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis. It indicates that he at least believes the position Canada has taken in this circumstance is an appropriate position. I hope there is some unity on this question in the Liberal Party.

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PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

AMENDING LEGISLATION—POSITION OF SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Last year the Government said that senior citizens across the country supported it in its attempts to reduce the deficit by reducing old age pensions. Yesterday the Minister indicated to the House that senior citizens were being confused by opposition politicians over the drug patent legislation. Is the Minister seriously suggesting to the House and to Canadians that the senior citizens with whom I met in the Atlantic provinces in the last three days, and the organizations of senior citizen groups from across the country with which I met this morning, are confused when they say that they totally understand the Government is pushing them to the wall and that, if it goes through with the legislation, drug prices will increase?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity to read again from the comments of a responsible individual who has looked at our proposed legislation, Dr. Philip Seeman, head of the Pharmacology Department of the University of Toronto. He said: "Senior citizens are being seriously misled by politicians who tell them prices will sky-rocket or their provincial drug plans may be cut, but they are being denied goods which could improve their life". I am seriously suggesting that senior citizens are interested in more research on Alzheimer disease, cancer, arthritis, cystic fibrosis, and all other diseases which so affect quality of life. We have a package which will do it in a way that provides enormous net benefits to Canada. This is why I think seniors and all Canadians should be in favour of it.

Mr. Young: That from a Government which just slashed millions of dollars from research.

COST IMPACT RESEARCH

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same Minister. Is the Minister trying to tell Canadians that senior citizens and their organizations have not conducted detailed research into the cost impact of the Bill on seniors, disabled Canadians, Canadians with young families, and particularly provincial Governments? Is he really trying to tell us that these senior citizens are confused? That is insulting.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, over 85 per cent of Canadians are covered by drug plans and 95 per cent of senior citizens. A professor from the University of Ottawa wrote:

As a Pediatric Clinical Pharmacologist, I have been acutely aware that many pharmaceutical substances are not available in Canada as licensed products for children as a result of previous patent and licensing policies.

I applaud your efforts in this regard and feel that your new policy is both appropriate and a step forward for the Canadian pediatric population.

In other words, for children. Is the Hon. Member seriously suggesting that Canadians are opposed to better drugs sooner for Canada's children?

Mr. Young: What about the seniors?

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CANADA POST CORPORATION

RURAL POST OFFICES—EFFECT OF BUSINESS PLAN ON WOMEN EMPLOYEES

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister responsible for Canada Post. He knows that the Government's plan to close thousands of rural post offices and to fire 9,500 postal workers will devastate much of rural Canada. Is he aware that 80 per cent of these postal jobs are now held by women? Would he consider withdrawing a plan which discriminates against women in rural Canada?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept the premise of the Hon. Member's question. There is no question about closing rural post offices. The business plan contemplates passing over to the private sector small post offices in communities, over a 10-year period. It will mean better service and more locations for Canadians. This is what it will mean. As for the business plan, I am informed that the committee just completed its hearings this morning. I shall await its report to the House before I comment any further.

Mr. Foster: The committee did not complete its work; it was cut off with closure by government Members.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER POSTPONE CLOSURES

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister prepared, on behalf of the Government, to postpone the closure of rural post offices and the firing of 9,500 postal workers, many of whom have worked from 20 years to 30 years, until after the next election so that rural Canadians can vote on the whole matter?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, the people of rural Canada have voted. They voted on September 4 for better service, a formidable cause. This is what we want to give Canadians. When the committee reports to the House, the