

Business of the House

Honour would find unanimous consent for the House to deal with the Bill introduced yesterday by the Hon. Member for LaSalle (Mr. Lanthier), Bill C-259, an Act to extend the term of a patent relating to a certain food additive.

The Hon. Member for LaSalle will rise on the motion for second reading to explain the purpose of the Bill. Then it would be our intention to have the House deal with the remaining stages of the Bill without debate, so that it could be sent to the Senate this evening.

In order for the Hon. Member for Hull—Aylmer (Mr. Isabelle), whose Private Member's Motion is up for debate this evening, not to lose the full benefit of one hour of debate, it is our suggestion that the time for the debate on his motion be extended by whatever time it takes to deal with Bill C-259 at all stages.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: It being 6 p.m., pursuant to order of Friday, June 12, 1987, the House will now proceed to Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

[English]

The House has heard the terms of the proposal of the Government Deputy House Leader. Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS--PUBLIC BILLS

[Translation]

PATENT EXTENSION (ASPARTAME) ACT

EXTENSION OF TERM OF PATENT

Mr. Claude Lanthier (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works) moved that Bill C-259, an Act to extend the term of a patent relating to a certain additive, be read the second time and, with unanimous consent, referred to a committee of the whole.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking Hon. Members for granting us this unanimous consent and for understanding the very essence of a debate that is not a debate in the controversial sense but which could have been, and whose purpose is to observe the principle of equity with respect to the intellectual property of a company. I greatly appreciate the co-operation we have received, as expressed in this unanimous consent, from the two opposition Parties, the NDP and the Liberal Party. I also wish to thank my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party for their show of confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore welcome this opportunity today to introduce a Bill that will extend by five years the Canadian

patent on the food additive aspartame, more commonly referred to as nutraSucre or nutraSweet, in English.

First of all, I should say that the case of aspartame is unique. The sale of aspartame was first approved by the U.S. Government in 1974. However, before it was put on the market, approval was withdrawn because of concerns about the safety of this product. The situation in the United States forced the Canadian authorities to be careful not to expose Canadians to any undue health risk. In 1981, after a complete and complex investigation, the Searle Company was finally authorized to market aspartame in Canada. Searle, after having had only six years to reap the benefits arising from its patent, is asking today to have the patent extended by five years, to compensate for the time during which its product was kept off the market due to circumstances beyond its control.

The Searle Company has already obtained an extension of the term of its patent for aspartame in the United States, Great Britain, South Africa and Australia and filed applications for an extension in New Zealand. If a five-year extension were granted in Canada, Monsanto Canada, the parent company of Searle and NutraSweet, would invest \$10 million in a new plant located in the beautiful constituency of LaSalle. This pilot plant would create about 30 new jobs and pave the way for improvements in manufacturing processes and for the development of new technologies which Searle could apply throughout the world. Monsanto has indicated that this measure would eliminate imports from the United States and create export opportunities to European markets, and lead to a search for possible export markets in Asia. This measure is consistent with the objectives of our Government to promote technological innovation and reduce the dependency of Canada in the field of science and technology.

So that there can be no confusion about the nature of aspartame, I would like to underline once more that this product is a food additive and not a drug. It is the only low calorie sweetener which can be added to food products and beverages in Canada. It is widely used by diabetics and the weight-conscious. It is important to understand that it is not a drug. Generic product manufacturers can obtain a license at any time to produce and market equivalent products. Consequently, consumers will soon be able to find equivalent products containing aspartame or its equivalents at very good prices.

Let me repeat that this Bill is a special answer to a unique problem. Searle has had to face exceptional circumstances surrounding the initial marketing of its product, and it is normal that Canada now extend its period of protection as it certainly did not benefit from the 17 years of protection its patent should have provided under the 1932 Act.

It is in the interests of this government and of all Canadians, especially Quebecers and LaSalle residents, that fair protection be given to those who put their scientific knowledge at the service of consumers. It is in this spirit that we should give our support to this Bill.