

Government Orders

If you get an answer of yes to those three fundamental questions this is bad legislation at this particular time for Canada where we cannot afford to add one more cent to the cost of living of all Canadians. Why would this government propose this legislation at this time?

Mrs. Dobbie: Mr. Speaker, I can understand it if the hon. member has concerns about increased costs. We all do. This is a time in our lives when money is tight and we are all concerned about the future. The government is no less concerned about this.

One of the initiatives we have undertaken is to give new powers, broader powers, to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. Let me just give an outline of some of the things it will be able to do to ensure that prices are kept very reasonable according to all the criteria we can find to make sure that prices do not rise inordinately.

The legislation gives the board the power to better influence introductory prices when drugs are patented. It can authorize the board to order price reduction or penalties which could compensate for past excessive prices and deter excessive pricing increases. That means it can roll back the prices if necessary if it sees a particular innovator taking advantage of the new opportunities that will be out there because he has the full protection of his original patent. It can also provide for fines and imprisonment for failure to comply with the board's order and that is extraordinary. We do not just lightly set prices that are going to be against the regulations that are set down by the new board and under its new regulations because to do so could land you in prison.

These are all measures the government believes will help to keep prices down as much as possible. Of course that gives the board orders the same force and effect as orders of the Federal Court.

I respect my hon. friend across the way. I know he would not make comments he had not thought through carefully. He is quite right that there will be some increase in prices and that is something we have looked at and contemplated. I will share with him the information that we have been able to research after a great deal of careful consideration.

What is being projected right now is that the increase in cost of purchases by pharmacies and hospitals—I think

they are the groups we are concerned about right now—of all prescription and behind the counter drugs due to the removal of compulsory licensing is predicted to be 0 per cent in the first year, gradually increasing to less than 2 per cent annually by the year 2000. It is a very small increase.

Mr. Raymond Skelly (North Island—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, in the previous speaker's comments about the business of extended patent protection for the pharmaceutical companies, one of the things she said was that the opposition was frightening Canadians, that she was extremely upset about that and that our task here was to frighten Canadians.

It is important for the member to know, especially after the referendum debates and all the meetings each one of us attended, that Canadians are mad as hell. They know exactly what is going on and all they want is a chance to get at that government for betraying them. Closure is no problem today because this is the way that government operates. Canadians also clearly know they are going to have to wait one year to get these guys and then they are going to get them.

British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have all taken action because of rising drug costs. They claim those rising drug costs are due to this government's patent protection and the virtual monopoly in those drug areas that this government has given. They will give an even more extended monopoly when it goes to 20 years through patent protection. We are going to get situations like deinsuring more and more drugs so that people have to pay out of their own pockets and user fees so people pay out of their pockets. We are going to find that large deductibles on pharmacare programs will nail people over 65 and young families. But they know that and they are ready for it. They know they have only one more year of it. Believe me, they are upset and concerned. They want a clear chance to deal with this government through an election.

Mrs. Dobbie: Mr. Speaker, first the Liberals did it and now the NDP is doing it. They are trying to use facts and figures that really are not factual to scare people on fixed incomes and seniors and people who are concerned about anything that has to do with health care and any increased costs.