

Government Orders

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to be standing here today to talk about a very important issue for all Canadians and for the people of Kenora—Rainy River.

It is a shame that we have to enter this debate in such a hurry, and the hurry that I talk about is that of course we are dealing with the same situation with which we deal with most controversial bills in this place, that is with the threat of closure.

Bill C-91 is an issue that the Conservative government has brought forward to deal with the extension of patent protection for brand name pharmaceutical manufacturers. I might add that it is at the expense of Canadian consumers.

There was a lot of discussion in this place this morning as to what the facts are. Maybe we can just look at some of the facts. There is no doubt that the government has the right and the responsibility to negotiate on behalf of Canadians. It is true that we live in a very global, competitive market and have to be prepared to negotiate agreements with the rest of the world.

The question is: Has this government been a good negotiator? Let us take a look at the facts. Not too long ago, we debated in this place the North American free trade agreement. We debated in the 1988 election and previous to the election the free trade agreement with the U.S.

Those debates were based on whether in fact Canadians were getting a good negotiated deal. Again, the question has to be asked if indeed that is a fact. I want to look at some of the facts just to put on the record what we are getting with Bill C-91. Of course, what we are getting is an extended amount of patent protection for pharmaceutical manufacturers; up to 20 years. A lot of members opposite believe that bringing us in line with other countries is a good thing.

First of all, we have to look at the differences between one country and another. Canada, of course, is a very unique country. There is the fact that we have some large issues that we have to deal with. Of course, there is our geography and our demographic situation. It is because of our distances that health costs are sometimes much higher than in other countries, or potentially can be.

What we have in Canada is a very different system, a national health care system that reflects the unique needs of Canadians. We simply cannot say that we are

the same as everyone else because if we were, we would just have one state in the world. We would not be different than another country on the globe.

We would be all the same and have the same kinds of regulations, the same kind of environmental protection. That is not the case at all. It seems though that the ideology and the belief of the Conservative government is that we are all the same and should be treated as such.

Let us take a look at what is going to take place with Bill C-91. The drug products affected by Bill C-91 will average 7.2 years of extended patent protection. Beginning in 1993, Bill C-91 will cost Canadians \$7.5 million and by the year 2000, the added cost of Bill C-91 will be \$455 million annually.

The cumulative costs of Bill C-91 from 1993 to the year 2000 will be \$1.7 billion and by the year 2010, the cumulative cost from 1993 will be \$4 billion. The question is in this negotiated system that we are talking about: What are we getting for the \$4 billion that we are giving the large pharmaceutical companies? Are we getting more jobs as was suggested in 1987? No, we are not getting more jobs. Are we getting more research and development? Maybe so. The suggested amount of research and development because of this patent protection, the added amount of time that will protect these big pharmaceutical companies which, by the way are 85 per cent foreign owned, is an estimated total of \$500 million.

• (1210)

What we hear on the one hand is that Canadians, as consumers, are going to give up roughly \$4 billion out of their pockets for higher drug prices because now what we are talking about is going from the Canadian system to a level playing field similar to the American system. It is a fact that Americans pay 62 per cent more for prescription drugs than the average Canadian citizen. If we were to follow that through, that means by the year 2010 we will be on a level playing field with the Americans. Our drugs should rise proportionately to the point where we will be equal to the Americans as far as the price that we pay for drugs.

The question has to be asked in this place. That is why we are debating this, not because we are the loyal opposition and we disagree with the legislation. It is our responsibility as members of Parliament, to put the facts before the Canadian people so that they can decide whether the legislation that the government is presenting today is a good piece of legislation for the good of all Canadians.