

*Adjournment Debate*

The problem is if you send for the able walker through the mail, are you supposed to send a doctor's prescription along with the cheque? That is considering that they went to the doctor. Nobody seems to know the answer.

The GST consumer information office feeds the same line. If the medical device is prescribed by a doctor, it is tax free. If it is not, the tax must be paid.

These people are supposed to protect the consumer's interest. Can a simple answer to a simple question like the GST and how it will be applied to a device of this nature not be explained to the seniors? For example, if they order through the mail or over the telephone, how are they going to send the prescription? These are answers that Canadian seniors deserve to have.

The way the GST will affect non-prescription drugs is costly. The GST will be applied to non-prescription drugs such as Aspirin, Ben-Gay and Sudafed, all of which many seniors take to care for common ailments.

The case of Aspirin is much more dramatic than others. Many senior citizens are on what is called Aspirin therapy to help prevent the reoccurrence of heart attack. With the GST, the cost of Aspirin, according to the information office, is expected to rise by 2.3 per cent. In order to avoid paying the tax, many people, including seniors, will go to the doctor to get a prescription.

What this will do will be to add to our medicare costs. It will also add to our provincial drug plans. It will add costs to both which, in the end, will be more of a cost to the seniors, and all Canadians.

What the government should be doing is exempting all medication, both prescription and non-prescription drugs, from the GST. Something that this government should also be doing is helping seniors on fixed incomes escape poverty. Almost 40 per cent of all single senior Canadians live below the poverty line, and this government is doing very little to help them.

The last time Old Age Security and GIS were increased above inflation was over six years ago. Now, for single senior citizens, the gap between poverty and the maximum income available from OAS and GIS is over \$2,000.

The goods and services tax is nothing but a burden to the Canadian senior citizen. The difference in when the goods and services tax is applied and when it is not applied will cause a major confusion.

Requiring a prescription to avoid the tax will lead to increased costs to the health care system and to the provincial drug plans, which I explained before will in the end cause more cost to the senior citizen. The senior citizens are the people who made this nation what it is today, and this is unfair.

In response to my question, the minister spoke of seniors and said: "We are listening to them and trying to help them fill their needs." If the minister were listening and trying to fill the needs of the senior citizen, she would contact her colleague, the Minister of Finance, explain the great difficulties that this is going to place on the senior citizen and ask the Minister of Finance to axe the GST.

**Mr. Patrick Boyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is very unfortunate that the hon. member has discussed this subject in the way that he has. I listen to him and I hear there is a core of concern that he obviously feels for low-income Canadians and a concern for senior citizens in this country. In that, I think he is no different than any other member of the House. He is mischievous to an unnecessary degree in analysing and making the statements the way that he has.

• (1850)

The whole effort here is to take an existing tax of 13.5 per cent, lower it to 7 per cent and do in the process a spreading out to everything else so that it is fair for all Canadians, and that includes seniors. Within that, the government has decided no, there must something further done. There are two responses that it has taken that show exactly that it has been listening and has designed a very fair system.

The first thing the government did was make some exemptions. Basic groceries were exempted as well as services like Meals on Wheels. Those that are served in nursing homes will be tax free. No tax will be charged on most health and dental care, hospital and nursing home care. There will be no tax on prescription drugs and medical devices. Eye glasses, contact lenses and hearing aids will also be tax free. No tax will be charged on residential rents, municipal transit, ferry services, legal aid services, loans and other financial services. I mention those because all of those are the types of things that senior citizens in particular are buying. This is one of the