

Tuesday, 13 March 2007

Questions for Oral Answer

Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill—Level of Support in House

10. TAITO PHILLIP FIELD (Independent—Mangere) to the Minister of State Services: Is the Government confident it has the numbers in the House to pass the Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill?

Hon ANNETTE KING (Minister of State Services): I am working on that support, and I am hopeful it will be forthcoming.

Taito Phillip Field: Given the possible and likely loss of control to an Australian regime, and the publicly stated industry expectation of up to a 50 percent loss of business in the natural health products industry as a result of the introduction of this legislation—not to mention the loss of innovation in the industry—is the Minister not concerned that this bill will be passed without the New Zealand public's full understanding of the serious consequences this legislation may pose?

Hon ANNETTE KING: Unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to brief the member on what is in the bill. I am very happy to take the time to do that, because, unfortunately, I believe that some of the information the member has used is misinformation that has been peddled by some opponents of this bill.

Sue Kedgley: If the Government does not have the numbers to get the Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill passed, would it not be sensible to withdraw the bill now, before the select committee hearings begin, rather than go through a potentially embarrassing political process of having a Government bill defeated in the House?

Hon ANNETTE KING: I strongly uphold the democratic process, which allows the public to have a say. Although that member has spent a lot of time trying to keep this out of the public arena, I am pleased that all New Zealanders have an opportunity to make a submission on this bill, not just the people whom Sue Kedgley has arranged to send emails to everybody.

Taito Phillip Field: Is the Minister concerned that the Asian, Māori, and Pacific communities will lose their health freedoms to use a large proportion of their traditional remedies, medicines, and health products—I am aware there is a proposed exemption for Māori, but the **question relates to other sections of New Zealand society?**

Hon ANNETTE KING: That is a very good question because it is one of the areas where there has been misunderstanding. It does not matter whether a traditional medicine is Māori, Chinese, or Polynesian, **in terms of traditional medicine it is exempt from this bill.**

Hone Harawira: Kia ora, Madam Speaker. Is the Government confident that it has the support of its own Māori MPs to pass the Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill, given the major concerns raised by Māori that this bill directly threatens Māori cultural integrity and intellectual property rights over rongoā Māori and other traditional medicines, and the call from right throughout Māori society that all Māori MPs should oppose this bill?

Hon ANNETTE KING: I am confident of my Māori colleagues' support because, first of all, they understand what is in the bill, and, secondly, they know that it does not affect traditional Māori rongoā, and that is one of the pieces of misinformation that has **been peddled.**

Hone Harawira: Is the Government confident that it has the support of its own Māori MPs to pass the Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill, given the decision by Australian officials to oppose the inclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the bill and the rumblings emanating from within Labour's Māori caucus that they are uncomfortable about silently supporting the Government on decisions that clearly work against Māori interests?

Hon ANNETTE KING: I am confident of the support of my Māori colleagues, and I need to say to the member that the last clause that included the Treaty of Waitangi was put through by this member as a Minister of Health. It is a decision of this Government that Treaty clauses in overarching legislation of the past have caused a lot of difficulty in terms of interpretation, and that this legislation does not require it because under the way it works both Māori and Pākehā will be protected. This is what this bill is about—the protection of people's health. I have not heard members who oppose this bill ever talk about the safety of the public. They talk about caring for children, they talk about caring for communities, but they are quite happy for New Zealanders to have arsenic and lead in their so-called medicine, with no regulation at all.

Hon Tony Ryall: Can the Minister explain how she was upholding democratic principles when she ratified this treaty against the will of the majority of Parliament, and can she confirm that her Government's own official documents acknowledge that the number of natural health products available in New Zealand will drop by between 60 and 65 percent under this proposed Australian arrangement, restricting the number of products New Zealanders have and denying business to many innovators in this country?

Hon ANNETTE KING: I stand by the record of this Government in terms of a democratic process when it comes to this bill. We have spent many, many years consulting on this project—a project, let me remind this House, that was started by a National Government.

Hon Bill English: Yes.

Hon ANNETTE KING: Bill English says "yes", because he was part of it. When National went into Opposition it thought there were few votes in it so stopped supporting it. I remind this House that a treaty on food standards was signed in the 1990s. Parliament was never consulted—it was pushed through, and they talk about sovereignty! The food standards setting authority we have gives New Zealand one vote out of 10; that is the National Party record.

Hon Tony Ryall: I seek leave to table an official consultation paper that acknowledges the number of existing natural health products available in New Zealand will drop between 60 and 65 percent under the Government's proposal.

Leave granted.

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