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Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

ORAL QUESTIONS

Medical Isotopes

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, last week, the government announced that all activities at the Chalk River laboratories will stop for an indefinite period. The government does not know if it will be two months, eight months, or something else.

For the 5,000 Canadians awaiting diagnosis every day in Canada, this is a “catastrophe”, as one expert, Dr. François Lamoureux, said yesterday.

What will this government do to assure Canadians that this will be the last isotope crisis?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his concern on the issue. Indeed, it is serious.

AECL informed us last week that it would not be restarting the national research universal reactor. As a result, we do have a shortage in medical isotopes at the moment.

The government is working in two ways.

First, we are seeking to ensure global supply. This is a global issue. We are working with our counterparts in four other countries in order to increase global supply.

Second, we are working to manage the shortage that we currently have. The Minister of Health is reaching out to the provinces and the territories. She is speaking with them about triage, prioritization and alternate methods.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, Canada last failed to supply the world with medical isotopes 18 months ago.

The Prime Minister's response was to scapegoat Canada's nuclear safety regulator.

Now we have the Prime Minister's hand-picked new minister, new executive at AECL, new nuclear safety regulator and over \$300 million invested in Chalk River. The end result is things are worse, an indefinite shutdown, 5,000 Canadians put at risk every day.

What is the government doing to ensure this never happens again?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in December we released a statement indicating our five point plan to deal with contingencies in case of an unexpected medical isotope shortage. We have put those five steps into play, and I highlighted those previously.

As well, I think it is important to point out that in 13 years five Liberal cabinet ministers had been privy to the information regarding this reactor and the five cabinet ministers did nothing.