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Press Release

Trojan Horse Legislation Undermines Decade of Public Consultation

Biochemist and author Lyle MacWilliam says Bill C-51 heralds a return to old problems

VERNON, BC, MAY 1, 2008—"With the tabling of Bill C-51, the Harper government has undermined a decade of public consultation and ignored the expressed will of millions of health-conscious Canadians," charges nutritional expert, Lyle MacWilliam. The biochemist and former Canadian Member of Parliament assailed the Harper government's omnibus bill that amends the outdated Canada Food and Drugs Act as a Trojan horse that will destroy 10 years of hard work by thousands of stakeholders in seeking to ensure that Canadians have ready access to safe and effective natural health products.

"Right from the start, the resounding message from both industry and consumers was that the government must separate natural health products from regulations governing foods and drugs. Instead, it has quietly introduced a new definition of therapeutic products that treats vitamins, minerals and herbal products as if they were drugs."

MacWilliam, who was part of a team of experts that developed the regulatory framework for Health Canada's new Natural Health Products Directorate, argues that the relative safety of vitamin, mineral and herbal products does not require the level of regulatory oversight required for much more risky

For Release 9 a.m. EDT, May 1, 2008

pharmaceutical products. “There is much in the proposed legislation that is entirely appropriate for the drug industry; however, I’m afraid that the regulatory burden imposed on our natural products industry in attempting to comply with the proposed legislation will be far too onerous,” said MacWilliam.

“One of the principal recommendations our advisory team made almost a decade ago—and one that was accepted by the government of the day—was the creation of a new regulatory environment for natural health products (NHPs) that was distinctly separate from food or drugs and that would allow Health Canada’s Natural Health Products Directorate to play a leadership role in preventive health,” said MacWilliam.

“What saddens me most is that the Harper government has squandered an unprecedented opportunity to establish Canada’s Natural Health Products Directorate as an agent for change and a catalyst that could propel Canada toward a new, wellness-centered healthcare paradigm. MacWilliam said.

“Instead, they have just wasted 10 years of effort and millions of taxpayers’ dollars to return to yesterday’s problems.

He cautioned that several other seemingly innocuous changes introduced through the Bill C-51 could make it unnecessarily difficult for manufacturers to obtain product license approval and for natural health practitioners to practice their profession. MacWilliam also raised the concern that foreign governments and international organizations could influence the development of future regulations through a loop hole provided in the proposed legislation.