

STATEMENT

on Parliament's Debate on Bill to Improve Food Labels, Menus

[For Immediate Release]

OTTAWA (September 18, 2006) — Bill Jeffery, LLB, national coordinator of the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, issues the following statement in response to today's debate in the House of Commons.

Canadians are entitled to know what is in the foods they eat, especially when it affects their health or pocketbooks. Nutrition information is now mandatory on many pre-packaged foods, but Bill C-283 would close ill-deserved exemptions from those regulations won by meat packers and huge restaurant chains. And the bill's ingredient labelling proposal -- similar to rules already in place in Europe, Australia, South Africa and Thailand -- aims to ensure that Canadians also see the amounts of key ingredients that are actually used in processed foods whether fruit, vegetables, whole grains, or fillers (like refined flour).

It is hard to swallow and harder to fathom why any elected official would want to relieve food companies of the duty to disclose the amounts of saturated fat in a pork chop, calories in cup of coffee, or vegetables in a can of soup. Yet, this morning, the Conservative spokesperson for the Minister of Health appeared more concerned about profits for a few massive food companies than ensuring millions of Canadians get useful information to protect their health and help save the nation billions in health care costs. It is irresponsible to continuously mouth the food industry's utterly groundless claims of prohibitive costs, or to feign protecting consumers from imperfect information by ensuring they, instead, have none. Today's debate showed that the bill has support from Liberal, NDP and Bloc Québécois MPs. (And the Bill's sponsor, Liberal MP Tom Wappel, reminded the House that at least one conservative Cabinet Minister supported the bill while serving as opposition health critic.)

Federal government scientists and economists now recognize the enormous burden of diet-related disease, and how significantly mandatory point-of-sale food information can reduce it, if visible prior to purchase. Every year, diet-related cases of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain cancers prematurely kill tens of thousands of Canadians and cost us \$6.6 billion in increased healthcare costs and lost wages.

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The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is an independent health advocacy organization with offices in Ottawa, Washington, D.C. and Dallas. CSPI's Ottawa advocacy efforts are supported by more than 100,000 subscribers to the Canadian edition of its *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. CSPI does not accept industry or government funding. *Nutrition Action* does not carry advertisements.