

# Medicine for all dies with government

By Dominik Kurek  
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Local members of an Oakville-based grandmothers group, which support their counterparts in Africa, are disappointed with the fall of Canada's government and subsequently Bill C-393.

The bill, which was passed earlier this month by the House of Commons after seven years of legal battle, has died on the order paper with the Senate after the fall of government.

Also known as Medicines For All, the bill reforms Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR) to better allow generic drug companies to produce patented drugs for export to countries with public health problems. The passage of the bill would have cut the government red tape and would have allowed for the export of cheap life-saving drugs to places such as sub-Saharan Africa that are severely affected by diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

"It's a real travesty. This bill was passed in the House of Commons by quite a large majority and by all the parties getting together to pass it through," said Lorraine Green, a member of the grandmothers' group oomama. Oomama has been front and centre throughout the entire process advo-

cating for the passing of the bill.

CAMR was initially passed in 2004, however in the time since its passing, only one order of one drug has been sent to one country.

In 2007, an NDP MP presented a private member's bill, C-393 that would simplify the legislation. According to Green, Canada's largest generic pharmaceutical manufacturer has made the commitment that, if CAMR is simplified, it will produce a lower-cost children's version of a key AIDS drug for export to developing countries.

"This bill meant so much to so many people, especially in the third world and the developing countries," Green said, a recipient of the ATHENA Oakville award in 2010. "There are actual names and faces of those who will now lose their lives because of this."

After the fall of government last week, C-393 was among about 40 bills to expire along with hundreds of pieces of legislation.

However, Green said the Senate had all the answers it needed and could have passed the bill after the House of Commons approved it on March 9.

"They had already done all their due diligence on the bill. Nothing had



Lorraine Green

changed on the bill. It wasn't necessary for them to go through it and examine it word by word. They could have passed it very quickly but they chose not to," she said. "The bottom line is, after nearly seven years of waiting for Canada to deliver on this pledge to help get affordable medicines to Africa and other developing countries, the world is still going to have to wait and people will die unnecessarily because too many senators did not have the courage to do the right thing."

She added the bill could have been passed very quickly but wasn't because

of undue politicking by the Conservative Party and because of interference from Industry Minister Tony Clement.

Last week the New Democratic Party accused Clement of inappropriately using his influence to stall the bill in the Senate. The Toronto Star reported a leaked note he sent out to Conservative senators.

The memo states: "If C-393 is passed, Canada's CAMR will be out of step with our international trade obligations. And if current patents are threatened, the patent holders will leave Canada seeking shelter in countries which value patent protection. The loss to Canadian R & D will be significant."

"That was extremely disappointing because it had easily passed through the House of Commons," said a fellow oomama and its founding member Bev LeFrancois. She added the organization was full of hope after the bill had passed in parliament, all to be dashed in an instant.

"I would challenge Tony Clement on his letter and I hold him responsible," she said. "When you consider the amount of time, effort, money paying for lawyers, in seven years to try and save lives in Africa, this is extremely

disappointing and I really do question the government on its behaviour."

LeFrancois added it will be the little children, those who do not live past the age of two, that will be the ultimate casualties of the death of this bill.

For the bill to reappear it will have to go through the same steps it has already gone through at the House of Commons.

"This bill is a casualty of the erosion — as far as I can see — of democracy in our parliament," Green said.

"It's a bill that would not have cost the taxpayers any money and in fact, it would have made Canada's foreign aid dollars even more effective."

Green said the grandmothers' group is not giving up on the bill and intends to make it an election issue, adding that it has already received support from Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff.

"All we can do, throughout the election, is present the question to all persons that are running in the election to see where they stand," she said.

"We're not giving up yet. We may have lost this battle but the war isn't lost yet. It's been a long fight but not only the grandmothers have waged but a lot of other partners that have worked with us."

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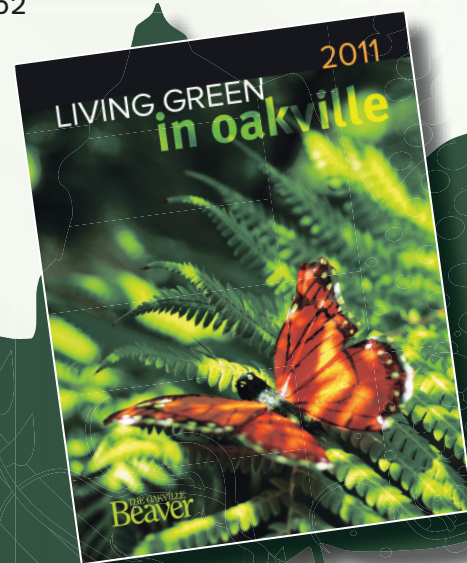
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