

Borrowing Authority

some kind of discussion going and some kind of consensus in terms of what should be done with the Crow rate. Essentially, we have three ministers of the Crown taking different attitudes on the same issue.

The minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board spoke to the western agriculture conference about two weeks ago, and said that the ballgame was back in the producers' court. He wanted to see the producers arrive at a consensus before the government did anything.

I would argue that if the government would show an example, and if it could arrive at a consensus—keeping in mind that I have just referred to the position of three ministers very vitally involved and they are all different—then maybe they could go to the producers and tell them to arrive at a consensus because the government had done so. It seems to me very presumptuous for the minister responsible for the Wheat Board to castigate producers by saying that nothing will happen until the producers arrive at a consensus on this very emotional subject. It is an issue which is very much imbedded in western Canada in terms of its economic history, in terms of its political history and in terms of its settlement history. He asks the producers of western Canada to arrive at a consensus when, in fact, the three ministers responsible cannot do so.

These are the kinds of things which I think deserve some attention on the part of the government. As far as the federal government is concerned, leadership is essential. I just went through the arithmetic to point out that there should be some onus, if the federal government is taking some of its responsibilities seriously, to settle this issue, because it will result in a net benefit not only for western Canada but for the whole country.

I could go on and talk about the stupid things we have been doing with Mirabel. I understand that the subsidy Mirabel needs to remain in operation is something in the range of \$1 million a week. It costs us \$50 million a year. The Minister of Transport is shaking his head. Am I too low? Is it higher than that?

Mr. McKenzie: It is \$52 million.

Mr. Mayer: I was giving the minister the benefit of the doubt, since I like to round off my figures.

● (2130)

It was indicated in a press release just this past week that the government intends to disassemble and sell off some of the land surrounding Mirabel. If it had been handling things in a business way, it would not have bought all this land for which it no longer has a need. The money spent on this land could have been spent toward the infrastructure about which some hon. members have talked this evening. Such expenditures would have returned dividends to the country, perhaps to the extent that the government would not be asking for all this borrowing authority.

I understand that because of the price of gasoline in Canada, people are crossing the Canada-U.S. border to buy

gas at our cheaper rates. Before Christmas, I travelled to North Dakota where I spoke to some farm equipment dealers. I learned that farmers with hundred gallon tanks under their pick-up trucks were crossing the line into Canada to buy our gasoline at roughly 50 cents per gallon cheaper. Some hon. members have constituencies close to the United States border and are aware of this situation.

Mirabel is another case in point. As I understand it, several foreign airlines land at Mirabel simply to refuel. They do not unload or pick up passengers or freight.

Mr. Pepin: That is no longer.

Mr. Mayer: It seems as though Canada is trying to become the Santa Claus of the world. I do not know how we can continue like this.

Mr. Pepin: It is much better than a Crow rate at Mirabel.

Mr. Mayer: If we are spending money in the Crow rate, at least it will be used to get some of our products to world markets thereby earning foreign exchange or allowing us to trade for Japanese cameras or whatever. But to allow foreign carriers to land at Mirabel to take on gasoline which is subsidized by the Canadian taxpayer is setting Canada up with its 22 million population as the Santa Claus of the world.

Mr. Pepin: It is not true.

Mr. Mayer: I hope this practice has stopped. The information which I had is that this was occurring before Christmas.

Mr. Pepin: Do not believe everything you hear.

An hon. Member: It is a white elephant.

Mr. Mayer: The hon. member has referred to a white elephant. If the government had been spending our money wisely, it would not be going through the process of getting rid of the surplus land around Mirabel.

I would like to say a few words about a couple of programs of the Department of Agriculture which have been in operation over the past year. I see the Minister of Agriculture is present in the House. I know he is aware of and has been concerned with the Agricultural Stabilization Act as it applies to hog producers. The abbreviation for the Agricultural Stabilization Act is ASA. We all know that ASA stands for acetylsalicylic acid which is aspirin. The way in which this act has been administered has given many producers a big headache.

For example, some producers who lost money in the previous fiscal year ending March 31 have sent in applications to the Department of Agriculture which, as I understand it, will not be mailing out some of those cheques until this March. This means that some of the producers who were counting on that money will have waited one year before receiving payment. If the producers looked after their hogs in the way the government is administering this plan, most of the hogs in this country would be dead and there would be no need for the plan because the producers would be out of business.