

*Government Orders*

office has taken in about 3,500 claims. This will not be a year that farmers will soon forget.

In response to the farm community's plea for support, the Minister of Agriculture last week said no. He said the government's finances were worse than those of the farmers. Yesterday the Minister of Finance brought out a mini budget which showed an increase in the year's projected deficit from \$22 billion to \$34 billion. Despite cuts and decreases in spending, this government's policies continue to expand the debt. The Saskatchewan farm community says it does not like to see this federal debt growing. Indeed, every farmer on the prairies has a piece of a growing national debt of their own, a farm debt that has built to \$24 billion.

These are the most difficult times that farmers and their communities have faced. If it is this government's policy, as it is mine, to keep prairie farms producing and to keep farmers on the land, then this is clearly not the year to abandon them.

If it is the government's intention to drive the deficit up further, as the Minister of Finance said yesterday, then the farm community of western Canada must have a piece of it. At least then we will have something to show for our efforts. We will have farmers farming and we will have a more stable economic base in rural communities, where we continue to rely heavily on the health of the farm economy for survival.

At present the federal deficit is rising but we have nothing to show for it except higher unemployment, more bankruptcies, more people on welfare and long line-ups at the food banks.

• (2130)

We have been through this before in Saskatchewan. From 1982 to 1991 the Conservative Party governed our province with cutbacks in government programs, increases in taxes and the privatization of revenue generating Crown corporations. In the end we were left with no increase in the quality of life, nothing to show for the activity and a huge deficit that will take years to handle adequately.

If it is a Conservative Party policy to run up huge deficits without leaving anything behind then I want none of it. At least when farmers, small business owners

or home owners incur a debt they have a tractor, a building or a house to show for it when it is done.

It is time for this government to show some real leadership on farm and rural issues, take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and develop a long-term policy for agriculture that takes into account revenue and yield shortfalls. It is time to have a full-fledged serious debate in this Chamber about the future of agriculture in Canada.

This means we have to throw out the Gross Revenue Insurance Program, GRIP to us on the prairies, and start over. GRIP is clearly an inadequate program with administrative hassles, headaches and costs that do not have to be there. We need a program that looks at incomes. We need a program that takes into account the cost of production on the farm. Both these matters have been put on the table for discussion by New Democrats for years.

It is time the federal government got serious. It is time the federal government took its responsibilities seriously, recognized that this is a matter of federal jurisdiction, and acted in the interests of western Canada and therefore in the long-term interests of all of Canada.

In response to the minister's mini budget, delegates attending the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool meeting today passed the following motion that I would like to read into the record:

THAT the federal government immediately address the crisis economic situation facing Saskatchewan agriculture in the following ways:

- a) stop downloading their responsibilities upon the province and farmers
- b) provide third line of defence funding
- c) cancel their plans of changes to the WGTA and their planned reductions in the Crow benefit amount of \$726 million as outlined in the *Economic and Fiscal Statement* of December 2.

That motion was carried by 100 per cent of the delegates at the convention today, and I agree 100 per cent with them.

Financing disaster shortfalls has always been a federal government responsibility. Any farmer who had to participate in and endure the drought program of three years ago knows full well that Ottawa was responsible for that mess no matter how essential the revenue was for farmers.