

The Address

judging this government and all governments every day by their performance.

Over the past two years we have repeatedly invited other party leaders to debate this important subject. We have repeatedly asked them to place their ideas on the table for discussion, to help our industry plan for the future. Those invitations were never accepted. Now we see why. The ideas just were not there. The opposition party of yesterday, today's governing party, did not take the time to develop a well-reasoned agricultural policy.

To conclude, the Liberal red book is over 100 pages in length yet it has devoted a full four sentences to its agricultural agenda. That is all, four sentences. The throne speech did not even mention the word agriculture and I hope along with my riding's farmers that this does not reflect the priority that the government places on our own agriculture ministry.

It is especially unfortunate because the essence of real leadership is setting broad goals with the input of all the stakeholders, making public a detailed agenda to meet those goals and then pressing ahead with the plan. Our producers can run with the best in the world, but they can never win on an undefined course.

If GATT and NAFTA form the new rule book that farmers must take to the field in the next few years they will need the right equipment. Only stability, lower taxes, less red tape and an even chance in the marketplace will equip our industry, including the agriculture industry in Fraser Valley East, to proceed with confidence into the 21st century.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I quite enjoyed the remarks of the hon. member for Fraser Valley East and I found them very edifying.

I come from a riding that is mainly suburban-urban so I cannot claim to have the expertise on GATT and agriculture that he obviously does have. However, I do have to say that some of his remarks do not parallel the kind of reading I am doing on this issue. In my mind, he seems to confuse ice cream and yogurt with other dairy products.

My understanding is that in the GATT round at Geneva what was at stake was a question of either sacrificing all the GATT or preserving marketing boards and in fact what subsequently occurred is that a deal was struck at GATT which is still to be ratified basically putting a tariff regime on most poultry and dairy products.

• (1745)

What has happened here is that ice cream and yogurt failed at the GATT panel some years ago. Now the Americans have come forward and questioned the tariff regime that we would like to see on ice cream and yogurt. That is what is at question here.

Perhaps the hon. member knows something that I do not on this issue. As I understand it also from everything that I have read GATT takes precedence over NAFTA in every category involving this tariffication of dairy and poultry products, with the exception of ice cream and yogurt.

Given all these things, is the hon. member suggesting that the Reform Party's approach to agriculture policy over the last two months would be one where he would sacrifice, would do without the GATT agreement in favour of preserving marketing boards? That was the kind of choice we had. Is that what the member for Fraser Valley East would recommend?

Mr. Strahl: Mr. Speaker, some of the points the hon. member brings forth are valid in the sense that we recognized several years ago the inevitability of the GATT negotiations and the ruling on article XI(2)(c). That was never in question in the Reform Party. In fact we campaigned vigorously on it and took a lot of flak from members of the Liberal Party at the time which said that would never come to pass, that article XI(2)(c) was safe in their bosom.

Really that is what I am arguing about when I talk about order. Farmers were willing and are currently willing to live with the proposed tariffication rules of the GATT. However starting on December 29 and every week since I have asked the Minister of Agriculture for a legal opinion of even why he believes that the GATT ruling will supersede NAFTA because the Americans say otherwise. I have yet to receive a response to my request.

There again, that just creates more indecision and uncertainty in the farming community which is really only looking for that stability. Farmers are willing to work under the new rules but they need to know what the rules are.

Two years ago we proposed that the GATT negotiations should be successfully completed and that we should have negotiated the proper tariffication protection for our farmers at that time. We feel that had we proceeded then while we still had some bargaining chips in our hands we could have made a good deal for Canadian farmers that would have been negotiated rather than brought through the courts.

Really I am not arguing with the completion of GATT. My argument stems from the fact that it should have been planned. I think even at this late date if we can somehow assure our farmers that GATT will proceed, that GATT will supersede NAFTA, then they will proceed with confidence and do the investing, exporting and so on that brings prosperity to that industry.

Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, a thank you is in order. We have a new Speaker in the House and a new speaker team and hopefully we are entering into a new era in the House of Commons.