

• (1710)

The purpose of the legislation is quite clear. I want to assure people who are contemplating running for office that that would not make them ineligible for programs. I can particularly speak about western agriculture with some authority. We must take advantage of various available programs, and even then it is very difficult to make ends meet. We are involved in a cost-price squeeze, a vice ever tightening. Until such time as sanity returns to the international market-place and we can once again look to it to provide us with income, it is incumbent upon Governments, particularly the federal Government, to provide some limited support to producers.

The wheat from my farm should be sold for the same price at the local elevator as that of everyone else. There is simply not enough there, so out of necessity we must look for a special government program such as the Special Canadian Grains Program or other programs which are funded jointly by producers through a levy and the federal Government. It is unfortunate that at present we must look to Government for a good portion of the money required to keep our operations viable.

I want to assure everybody who is running for office wherever they happen to be that if a government program were put in place that benefited their particular class of agriculture, they would be entitled to share in it without any problem whatsoever.

This is the reason I introduced this Private Member's Bill. I am looking forward to comments from other Members in the House to see whether or not they agree with me or whether they have other suggestions to put forward at this time.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in second reading debate of Bill C-257 standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Gottselig).

A little later an amendment may be presented to the House suggesting that we refer the matter to a parliamentary committee and withdraw the actual Bill. I think that would probably be the best way, if such a motion is forthcoming a little later as I understand could be the case.

The suggestion of the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw is a good one in many respects. We do not want people in the agricultural community to be discouraged from running for public office. I certainly would not want that. I am not a farmer, but I represent a large and very fine agricultural riding. I could argue that it is the finest, of course. However, if some day my constituents wanted to present someone who was a farmer, I would not want the person to be unable to enjoy the privilege of running for public office for the mere reason that he is a farmer.

The present situation, as we know, does not preclude anyone in any occupation from seeking public office. However, as the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw quite rightly pointed out,

Senate and House of Commons Act

financial constraints on the agricultural community are such at present, particularly in the grains and oilseeds sectors, that it is necessary to seek government assistance because of international pressures on agricultural commodities, namely, the price war between the EEC and the United States of America. Actually it is a subsidy war in which they insist upon bombarding each other with tax dollars to try to regain what each one feels is his rightful share of the market.

In amending the present Senate and House of Commons Act we do not want to create a situation which would prevent contractors and so on from receiving what is normally known as contracts with the federal Government. I recognize that under the Hon. Member's Bill contracts for public works would still be excluded. Nevertheless, there are other kinds of contracts which could potentially be carried out by Members of Parliament or concerns in which Members of Parliament have a share if we pass the Bill as presented to us now.

The long and the short of it is that I support what the Hon. Member is trying to do. I support his initiative in trying to create a situation which will not unduly discriminate against people who work actively in the agricultural sector from seeking public office. In my opinion we need more people in the agricultural sector to sit in Parliament. We should not do anything or create any circumstance which would make it unduly difficult for them.

Having said that, I hope we receive an amendment a little later which will refer the subject matter to a parliamentary committee for action.

In retrospect perhaps it would have been better to have a motion before the House rather than a specific Bill. However, it does not matter at this point as long as the concern is aired in the House and is referred to a parliamentary committee. Some have suggested that perhaps the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedures should deal with the issue. Perhaps the committee charged with looking at the new conflict of interest Bill after it has been passed at second reading could also look at the topic. Many of the issues with which that parliamentary committee will deal concern the conflict of interest of not only cabinet Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, and so on, but indeed every Member of the House and the other place. In my opinion it would be an appropriate occasion to discuss the issue at that point as well.

I am offering it in terms of a suggestion. I am not married to the principle that we should absolutely discuss it at the same time. However, my reason for raising it is that if we refer it to another parliamentary committee it could have a tendency to go on the back burner, whereas the conflict of interest Bill will probably be discussed in the very near future by a special legislative committee of the House. Therefore, that would enable us to discuss the topic, which the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw brought to our attention, in an expeditious manner to ensure that at the next election, whenever it comes, the potential problem could already be solved.