

Oral Questions

Their input will continue to be sought on a regular and daily basis.

My officials are in continuing contact with the presidents of the two tribal councils. I cannot commit that they will be at a meeting of government officials tomorrow morning, but after the officials of the five jurisdictions, that is, the two provinces, the State of New York, the U.S. State Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as our department, have met, there will certainly be immediate and ongoing discussions with the leadership of the Mohawk Akwesasne Tribal Council and the St. Regis Tribal Council.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): I have a question for the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds. This government has slashed agricultural support programs with a vengeance. The Canadian family farm is under siege. In the past year or so this government has announced drastic cuts in crop insurance, grain and flour, grain and crop advance payments, dairy exports and the Canadian Dairy Commission, just to name a few, for a total in cuts of about \$400 million.

Yesterday we got the shocking news of a dramatic drop in the initial wheat prices. Farmers are stunned. How does the minister responsible for grains expect farmers to stay on the land if this persists? How much more does he think farmers can take?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that while it is not good news, and we readily admit that and I know that myself as a farmer, the initial payments we announced yesterday for barley are actually increased over a year ago. They are down from what they are presently because we adjusted them during the year.

I would point out to him that these are initial payments set three months before the beginning of the selling of the crop which we have not even seeded, let alone harvested. Bearing that in mind, we are making sure that we are setting initial payments at a level when we can fully anticipate a final payment.

Having said that, the hon. member should also know that the projections in farm income fully took into account these kinds of numbers. We had circulated to farmers right across the country our anticipation of these kind of prices back in the early part of March.

So, if the hon. member is surprised today, he should not be because this is information that has been readily available to the farm community for almost two months.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the minister has been listening to what farmers are saying today. They are expressing deep, deep shock.

I want to remind members of this House what this minister said before he was in government, way back in April 1984. This is what he told the House:

I see no reason why the government should not have shown a little bit of faith in Canadian agriculture. It could have said we are going to guarantee that prices are the same as they were last year— We see grain prices reduced substantially—on a percentage basis 5 per cent or 6 per cent.

• (1430)

That is what the minister said six years ago. Why did the minister announce these initial payments yesterday that amount to a drop of 18 per cent? Does this indicate that the minister no longer has faith in Canadian agriculture?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, above all I think farmers expect this government to be honest and straightforward with them and this is exactly what we have done in letting them know what we anticipate final realized prices to be.

If he wants to quote from farmers let me quote from a farmer from the province he and I both come from, from Oak River, Manitoba, who says: "I do not think anyone should get too excited—" and he is referring to the prices I announced yesterday. "I don't ever remember the initial price as staying at the same level as the current price," said Tom Smart of Oak River.

So if he wants to talk about farmers, they understand what is going on. They understand the kind of support that this government has provided. We have stood by the Canadian Wheat Board and kept them selling in a deficit position as compared to the party he supports which took us right out of the world market in the LIP in the early