

Oral Questions

colleagues and I will be attending the first sod-turning before October 30.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE**WESTERN DROUGHT—GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE**

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Considering that the Government is willing to spend \$1 billion on the Canadian Commercial Bank fiasco and considering the desperate situation that is facing thousands of farmers in western Canada because of the worst drought since the 1930s, which is driving many of them to welfare and off their farms, can the Minister tell us when he will announce a program to assist the grain growers of western Canada? Can he tell us when funds will be put in the hands of the grain growers so that they may be compensated for this situation?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's question and I know that, if he takes the time to check the record, he will find that there has been more action taken by this Government in the past eight months than was taken by the previous Government in the last eight years. He will also realize that we have had a team on the scene in western Canada chaired and provided with great leadership by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Assiniboia. He will know that shortly after that, within about a 10-day period, a report was given to us and we responded by providing \$48 million through Phase I of the Government's commitment to action with respect to the very serious drought condition in western Canada.

I hope to receive a report prepared by this same excellent federal-provincial committee within the next two weeks with reference to other actions that we may take with respect to the crop—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

REQUEST FOR DIRECT PAYMENTS TO FARMERS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Minister did not answer my question. He has been procrastinating not only on this matter but on the matter of tripartite red meat and many other issues. When the Minister makes a decision about drought compensation for the western grain sector, I wonder if he will ensure that the payments are made directly to the farmers so that the benefits will not be grabbed off by the provincial Governments as occurred in Saskatchewan with the assistance that was provided for the livestock producers.

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member had the patience, he would find that when we make a decision with reference to the crop loss aspect of the matter, Phase II, we will be dealing as fairly and equitably

as we did in the first phase with respect to the livestock contributions.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance and concerns the devastating drought in western Canada and the fact that the Minister has not spent one cent to help western grain farmers. Can the Minister explain to the House and to western grain farmers how the Government can find millions of dollars, courtesy of "Billion Dollar Barbara"—

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Nystrom: —to bail out foreign bank depositors, without finding a single penny to help western grain farmers suffering from a devastating drought? Can he explain that to the House?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, that observation is completely inaccurate and erroneous. If the Hon. Member would look at what we have done in the last eight months he would find that the total amount of action that we have taken amounts to something in the vicinity of \$1.4 billion in the hands of Canadian farmers—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wise: The Hon. Member will certainly recall our commitment to amend the Western Grain Stabilization Act so that we could make an interim payment, and my colleague, the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board, amended that Act and indeed placed in the hands of western farmers—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. That is both a long answer and a speech.

SITUATION OF GRAIN FARMERS

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question was put to the Minister of Finance as he controls the purse strings. I would like to know from him why the Government has not spent one penny to assist the western grain farmers. I know the Government has spent a few peanuts, like \$48 million for the cattle producers in the West, but why has nothing whatsoever been spent on western grain farmers while millions of dollars are spent bailing out the big shareholders and depositors because of the collapse of the Canadian Commercial Bank? Explain that to the ordinary farmers.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, first let me remind the Hon. Member that there are a number of farmers who deposited in and borrowed from the Canadian Commercial Bank and the Northland Bank. That is one of the principal reasons why the Minister of State for Finance did what she did. The second reason why I did not answer the first question is that my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, has so many things he has to say that he did not have an