

The Address

I want to bring the attention of the House to a matter of great concern for the people who live in B.C.'s beautiful Fraser Valley.

Most Canadians can take satisfaction in the successful conclusion of the recent GATT agreement. The Reform Party believes that much of Canada's future prosperity is dependent upon the security of our export markets. To the extent that the Liberal government has secured this access we commend it. Consumers and western grain producers will benefit. Lowering import barriers will allow in turn our high quality Canadian products into more world markets.

However, in any deal there are winners and losers. I want to express the concern of my constituents especially in the poultry and dairy sectors. They were the losers at the GATT table. They were left swinging in the shifting wind by this deal, uncertain of their future. Many of these hard-working people have invested heavily in land, buildings, equipment and livestock. Most have purchased the right to produce at great cost. However the value of their quota could now drop drastically. It depends on the American response to the proposed Canadian tariffs.

What if the U.S. challenges our tariffs under the NAFTA agreement and wins? It is going to try. Promises that everything will be fine made by the agriculture minister last week in the House ring hollow compared with the stirring election promises that they will go to the wall for our producers in the GATT negotiations. A poet once said that a promise made is a debt unpaid. Many farmers are counting on the government for an IOU given during the election, the promise of a secure future. Many are concerned that a lack of foresight yesterday and wishful thinking today may spell disaster for their system tomorrow.

It is not just a system we are talking about. In Canada, it is an \$8 billion a year industry. It is a way of life for 100,000 families who stand to be stripped bare by the global market. They feel they have been left naked by a government spending too much time promoting its much ballyhooed infrastructure program and not enough time tending to the bread and butter businesses that actually generate wealth in this country.

Does the Liberal government have a plan for agriculture? As of last week, we still could not find out who in the Liberal caucus was a member of their own agriculture committee. It is unsettling when a simple request for information from the minister a month ago not only went unanswered but unacknowledged. Worse, we hear that officials in the agriculture department admit there is no contingency plan if Canadian tariffs should fall under a NAFTA ruling.

The Reform Party has had a detailed plan for over three years now. Let me share with this House just a few of the principles from our agricultural program that should guide this government in the months ahead.

The first is summed up in just one word: Order. For all its flaws, supply management ensured a stable, orderly production climate and the government must now work to ensure that the transition from a managed to an unmanaged environment will be orderly. Because of the long cycles of crop yields and livestock renewal, predictability on the part of the government is essential to the farmer.

The throne speech repeated the second important principle and I quote: "The government will assist Canadian companies to translate improved market access into greater export sales". Access to markets is the key to future prosperity and for that we support the successful completion of the GATT negotiations. What we do not need is another level of bureaucracy to grind this search to a halt. Let aggressive companies search out new markets and develop new value-added products.

The third and final principle is the most important. Although the Liberal government expressed a vague intention a few months ago to reduce agricultural input costs, the House will note that Preston Manning delivered a keynote address on this subject over three years ago. Input costs, especially input costs caused by excessive taxation levels is one cost area we can control within Canada.

• (1740)

We envisage a day when the government assists our industry to compete by eliminating the interprovincial trade barriers—recent agreements are a step in the right direction—and by pushing aside antiquated regulations that impede our producers, restrictions that our neighbours to the south do not suffer from, a time when the government levels up the north-south playing field and lets our industries score the goals for Canada.

Our farmers are among the world's most efficient, but even the best farmers cannot overcome taxation levels and costs that are higher than those faced by their American counterparts. The elusive level playing field will never be possible until the government cuts federal spending resulting in a lower level of taxation for all Canadians, including farmers. Our producers can do the job but the government must supply this tool of competitiveness.

Reformers were talking about this for years and marketing boards, farmers and small businesses throughout my riding are in agreement on this issue. They have repeatedly urged governments at all levels to reduce taxes and cut the red tape that impedes growth, to get out of their pockets and off their backs so they can do what they do best: create jobs, create exports, and create wealth for my riding, for all of B.C., and for all of Canada.

We have talked for years about this subject but it is time to actually do something. The Liberals have a clear majority in the House but it remains to be seen if they have the will to push through on these reforms. I remind the minister that the Canadian people are reluctant to accept talk any more. They are