

else they wanted. It could be used by the municipalities to cover such cases as the grasshopper infestation that I have mentioned. The experts are now saying what they said last year. Last year, when there was a severe outbreak of grasshoppers in my municipality, they said it would be worse this year. And it was. This year it spread through more municipalities and it was more severe. They are saying that next year it will be worse again, that it will be a real problem across the entire west, given certain weather conditions.

A fund of the kind I have mentioned, used with flexibility, could help look after farmers whose crops have been badly damaged by such outbreaks. I wish to thank members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture for supporting that resolution in principle. Many of them were Liberal members, many of them were not even from the west. I wish to thank them, but I was disappointed about two things: first, that the Conservative party should have opposed the use of the PFAA emergency fund, which I found to be unbelievable, because some of them come from the dried-out areas of western Canada and should know of what use that fund has been; and, second—and I intend to be very blunt because I was most annoyed about it as a whip—when the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) said that the passing of this piece of legislation to reduce premiums to farmers had been held up because of the Conservative party, he was perfectly right because that is exactly what happened.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1800)

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, some question has been raised about why I did not rise when third reading of the bill was moved today. I did not think that I needed to rise. I thought the bill was urgent and that it had waited long enough for passage through the House. The provinces have indicated that they passed their legislation in accordance with this legislation, and did so in good faith because I told them that I thought this House was full of reasonable and responsible members, that the legislation would pass and that they could count on it being passed so they could run their budgets accordingly.

Let me just go over the budgets to indicate just how much it means to the provinces. Take, first, Nova Scotia; the amount is not large, \$23,000. The amount for the province of Ontario is over \$2 million, for Manitoba over \$2 million, for Saskatchewan over \$4 million, for Alberta over \$4 million. So that is what it amounts to. The hon. member for Annapolis Valley (Mr. Nowlan) referred to it as a minor bill. I said, Mr. Speaker, that it was a small bill, and it is. It is small in content and should not take 13 hours of debate. I can think of other legislation that went through this House, for the veterans of this nation, just like that. That is the way this bill should have gone through for the farmers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whelan: I sat in this House, as the officials sat in the gallery at different times, waiting for this measure to be passed. We asked time and time again for unanimous consent of the House, and the measure would not have

Crop Insurance Act

taken five minutes if hon. members had really been serious about what they had said about agriculture. I am not ashamed of one thing that I have said to the mushroom growers of this nation, because they are part of the agricultural scene. What is more, you do not pick them off the ground, you pick them off the trays using ladders, lift trucks, and so on. The hon. member from Annapolis Valley should visit a mushroom plant some day and then he would know what he was talking about.

Mr. Speaker, I had a speech prepared dealing with the recommendations of the committee which I said were good recommendations at the time, and I still think they are. I met with the provincial ministers of agriculture and discussed the very suggestions that had been made by the members of the committee. As I say, I said they were good at the time and I meant it.

In fact, what I should be doing now, instead of wasting my time, is attending a cabinet committee meeting and discussing three agricultural proposals that have been put before the committee. If hon. members want to make politics out of this, then I will make politics also every chance that I get; let me tell hon. members that. I will tell the farmers of this nation that this bill should have been passed straight away, just like that. I am not going to take this sort of guff as Minister of Agriculture. I can put on the table a long list of the things I have done to benefit agriculture, to improve the livelihood of the farmers.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whelan: This insurance bill is just one little step in the direction I think we should be going to help the farmers of this nation. The meetings that we will have with the ministers of agriculture for the provinces and the farm organizations of Canada, which I and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) have announced, will be discussing many of the things that the serious members of this House want for agriculture.

It really makes me mad sometimes to come to this House and listen to what some politicians and people in the media are saying about food. I appear in defence of agriculture at every opportunity that I get, and I try and get across the facts if I can. I do not use the House as much as I should. But these people say that I have no right to go out and talk to the public. I have every right to do so as Minister of Agriculture responsible for part of the food production of this nation. We have ten provincial ministers of agriculture who are just as responsible.

When there are different programs in different provinces, provinces that are rich and others that are not so rich, for producers who are competing for the same markets, it is a big challenge for a Minister of Agriculture to try to stabilize agriculture in this nation. That is what the meeting to be held on September 27 is to try to do. We have been working on this matter for weeks to formulate something that is realistic and will constitute a program for the consumers and producers of this country so they know what food is going to cost them.

If I had talked last spring, or the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) had talked last spring, about what we were going to do for the wheat farmers of the nation, hon. members opposite would have accepted our proposals readily. Ever since I have been a farmer I have