

Supply

However, I make the point again which I made earlier. This is such a serious and severe situation in southwestern Ontario that it cannot be the responsibility of a provincial government alone.

It must be the responsibility of both provincial and federal governments. At this stage the federal government, witness the recent letter of September 18 from the Minister of Agriculture, does not seem prepared to move.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The five-minute question and answer period has expired and we will resume debate for 10 minutes.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, after listening to the minister's remarks, I think there is something that must be clarified for the people who are watching this debate today.

The minister made a comment in his speech that the government cannot vote for this motion because it considers it to be a motion of non-confidence. I think it is important to review some of the history and some of the detail for people watching this debate today.

The motion before us now is almost verbatim a motion that was passed unanimously by the Standing Committee on Agriculture at the end of August. That meeting came about as an emergency debate on the agricultural situation. At that time we had representatives from most of the farm groups across the country calling upon this government to take some action with respect to the third line of defence.

In that spirit, and after listening to the various groups, there was a unanimous vote by the members of the standing committee. The standing committee, as you will know Madam Speaker, is made up of all three parties. As a matter of fact, the majority of the committee are Conservatives. They saw fit to vote for that motion.

I am surprised that the minister stood in his place and said that the member for Mackenzie is trying to play petty politics. That is absolute nonsense. That is hogwash. The fact is it is the minister who is playing the politics here. We came to this House with this motion in a sense of fair play and openness, hoping to highlight the problems that are being felt in agriculture and looking for support from the government, particularly when its

own members on the standing committee had voted for this motion.

When the minister rises in his place and says it is politics on our part, that is hogwash. That is nonsense, and it is simply not the case.

The McGrath report was a report by a committee of the House of Commons dealing with parliamentary reform which made its report in 1985. I would like to refer to page 106 of the McGrath report, paragraphs 40 and 41 where it says:

In keeping with the desire to make the House more relevant to Members and to the public, your Committee believes that matters of confidence in the government should at all times be clearly subject to political determination. Motions of no-confidence should not be prescribed in the rules but should be explicitly so worded in the text of the motion itself by the Member presenting such a motion.

Paragraph 41 goes on to state:

Your Committee notes that the Standing Orders, as presently worded, declare to be 'no-confidence' those votable motions which are moved by the Opposition on allotted days.

Today is an allotted day, Madam Speaker.

We repeat that a question of confidence should be expressed in precise terms in the motion, and not prescribed as such by the Standing Orders. Previous Speakers have indicated that determination of what is, or is not, a question of confidence is not a matter for interpretation the Chair. We agree that this expression ought not to be used in the Standing Orders to predetermine the nature of a motion.

In other words, prior to 1985 it was stated in the Standing Orders that on any allotted days—and this is considered an allotted day—a motion put forth by the opposition would be considered a vote of non-confidence. Therefore if the government voted for the motion the government would presumably fall.

The whole McGrath report was not adopted by the House. However, portions of it in essence were in that in 1985 the Standing Orders were amended by removing the no confidence reference. That was removed in 1985. There is no mention of no confidence in the Standing Orders with reference to allotted days. The fact is that the determination of whether or not a motion is a matter of confidence or non-confidence lies with the government. It is not in the rules. It lies with the government. It is the minister of grains and oilseeds who has chosen, on behalf of his government, to make this a non-confidence motion. No one else, certainly on this side of the House, believes it to be a non-confidence motion. For the minister to stand up and say that he is required or that it