

Oral Questions

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Privatization and Regulatory Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the hon. member, who has been attacking the Minister of Finance, apologize to him. We all watched the debate between him and the Minister of Finance with great interest and we know very well who clearly won that one—the Minister of Finance, hands down. The Liberals do not have any alternative to the goods and services tax.

The only thing they have done is to open a phone line and have people from across Canada pick it up and say: "I am against it." The Liberals do not say what they are for. They have no ideas. They are bankrupt. They are living back 20 years ago.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds.

It is a poor situation in the country when decisions about what crops will be planted and the future of tens of thousands of farm families depend upon what happens in a meeting between bankers and politicians.

Nevertheless, since that is the situation in the country, can the minister tell us what it was that the Minister of Agriculture and the Premier of Saskatchewan told bankers yesterday in Toronto?

What form of assistance can farmers expect? Will it be loan guarantees? Will it be cash payments? Will it be a targeted program? Will it be universal? How much money are we talking about? Most of all, when can farmers expect to know how much money they will be getting, and when will they get the money?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, it is a difficult situation in a good part of the prairies. There are areas that are not nearly as difficult as some of the areas of southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba.

I was at the meeting last night in Toronto with the Premier of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, and our Minister of Agriculture. It was a very good meeting.

We are looking for ways to work together with the industry. We believe that all of us are part of it: the federal government, the provincial governments, the banking institutions, the chemical companies, the machine companies—everybody. We are looking for ways to get through this difficult period because we believe that there are going to be some better times ahead. We believe we are going to make progress at the GATT and see an improvement in prices.

Our record in terms of supporting farmers I think is pretty significant as far as the government is concerned. The Minister of Agriculture has been saying, as have many of the rest of us, that we are there to work with the provinces in this case to have some support as quickly as we can. We are well aware that spring seeding is just around the corner.

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the same minister. He knows very well that farmers cannot plant consultations and that you cannot use press releases as collateral.

The Minister of Agriculture clearly promised that money would be in the hands of farmers before spring seeding and the minister knows that seeding starts by the end of April in many areas in the south. Farmers are making their planting decisions now.

Therefore, can the minister say precisely when the government will announce its program and when farmers will get their money? Can he give farmers an answer? They need to know right now.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, I know exactly what the member is talking about. I have farmed all my life. I have had a permit book for something like 35 years. He does not need to tell me when farmers need money.

The record of the government in terms of getting money to producers is very impressive. One of the first things we did as a new government in 1984 was to amend the Western Grains Stabilization Act in order to get cash into the producers' hands. We are aware of that, and we are working with the farm community, the provinces and the industry to develop a plan that is going to work and be of significant benefit to those areas that need it the most.