

Government Orders

What is \$18 an acre? The spray for crops costs \$5 to \$10 an acre. What does that \$18 really mean? In that portfolio farmers will have to pick up the major cost of shipping their produce to the coast by rail. They will pay 100 per cent of that in the future.

Within a year the farmers will not be dependent on the federal government for the transportation allowance. Farmers are willing to buy that and accept that responsibility but it does not hurt government when phasing out a program like that to have some type of transitional support system. It has done that and I commend the Liberal government for taking that specific position on this matter.

Although the Crow benefit, the Western Grain Transportation Act, will have an effect on western Canada, we have to look at transportation on a broader base. The government must give some leadership there as well.

When the free market system goes into transportation, the government will have to assure Canadians and assure the western farmers that they have access to alternate routes by which products can be shipped into a variety of markets in the world. That must be looked at.

I raised the question with the minister of agriculture as to whether there were any impediments that would prevent western Canadian farmers from shipping their grain through the railway system or the port system of the United States. I asked whether we could use the Mississippi River to ship our grain if that were a more expedient, more efficient and less costly way of doing it.

• (1720)

The minister has assured me there are no impediments and that we will be able to do that kind of thing. I ask that the government ensure that will happen because we farmers in western Canada will look at innovative ways by which we can market our produce. We will look at the means by which we can come up with different crops. We will diversify our agriculture. That is a spinoff benefit of terminating the western grain transportation allowance and also the Crow benefit. That is a spinoff benefit which will be there. It will restructure agriculture.

It is unfair for a member of the House to say that western farmers should not have any type of transitional compensation to make the adjustment over the next year or two. It is certainly unfair when that member sits in committee and talks about tax expenditures of over \$300 million which are specifically targeted at a group within his province, when other Canadians do not have access to those kinds of tax expenditures. It seems to be an attempt to speak in two different arenas. There is one arena here but there is another arena back home that wants to hear those kinds of political words.

We cannot support the amendment of the hon. member for Kamloops. It is a rather traditional approach to what has happened in Canada with respect to transportation. We think changes are needed and we are prepared to support them.

We also oppose vehemently the comments and the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot which ask the government to terminate the benefits to western farmers.

That is where we stand. We believe that under those circumstances we can clearly and with good conscience vote as we feel is right.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put in my two cents worth on the report stage motions. It is not a loonie, it is two cents worth today.

An hon. member: A double loonie.

Mr. Taylor: The member wants to hear about the double loonie. I am very pleased to have aroused some interest from members opposite. It is a pleasure to know they are listening at such an important time.

The report stage motions before us relate to Bill C-76, the budget implementation bill. The amendment put forward by my colleague from Kamloops, which was seconded by me, proposes to eliminate those sections of Bill C-76 which deal with the government's proposal to remove the Crow benefit. That is the benefit that applies to western Canadian farmers for the movement of their grain from farm gate to port.

I have been engaged in this debate for quite some time. The constituency I represent is rural and relies heavily on agricultural income to survive. The constituency which I have represented for six years has been engaged in the debate over the future of the Crow benefit for quite some time. My constituents have advised me frequently and constantly of the need to retain the Crow benefit.

Through the motion which is before the House today, I ask members to consider eliminating these sections from the bill in order that we can study in greater detail the future implications of this very rash move which the government has undertaken.

• (1725)

The minister of agriculture will recall that at the beginning of this debate I asked the minister to withhold the sections of the bill, the intention to eliminate the Crow benefit, until such time as we did investigate the full implications of this move on the prairies.

I put forward that proposal before this debate began and here we are at report stage, prior to third reading, and the government has not indicated any understanding of the implications of what the elimination of the Crow benefit will mean to the prairie economy.

The argument comes down to the fact that for each elevator point on the prairies those communities will lose \$1 million in income currently in those communities. I have previously used Glaslyn, Saskatchewan, a community of about 350 people, a