

Mr. Manly: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that the New Democratic Party missed its opportunity to speak in the usual round of debate this time. The Member was present, rose, but was not recognized. I would urge that the New Democratic Party be recognized at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will tell the Hon. Member that the Chair always does its utmost to be fair to all political Parties and that the order of speakers in the House is not open to dispute. I will advise the Hon. Member, however, that the representative of his Party will be the next speaker following the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say what a great privilege and pleasure it is for me to have the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Speech from the Throne. I would like to utilize this early opportunity to join with all of the previous speakers and all of the Members in the House in extending my sincere thanks and congratulations to the Speaker and to yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that these are very difficult jobs. Certainly if the past few days are any indication of the future, and I am sure they are, I want to congratulate you both on doing an excellent job.

I would like to congratulate all of my colleagues on both sides of the House. I would like to congratulate those Members who have been my colleagues in the past and who have sat in the House of Commons over the years, some longer than others. I want to extend a special word of congratulations to the newly elected Members of Parliament. I think they are in for an experience of a lifetime. I am sure that they will enjoy their stay here and I certainly wish them well.

I would like to indicate as well my intentions of personal co-operation and support to all Members of the House. Once again I am not just speaking to my colleagues on this side of the House, but to my colleagues in the other two Parties as well. If they have carefully read all of the mail which they have received up to this point in time, they will note that I am not only extending a verbal commitment to work co-operatively in the interests of the agricultural industry across the country, but I have also put that commitment in writing to them. I have also undertaken to put that commitment to you in writing. In addition, we are in the process of circulating to all Members of the House a notice indicating whom they might contact within my ministerial office, both on the exempt side and the ministerial side, in an effort to speed up their inquiries. I want the record to show that I have taken that step.

● (1430)

This is not my maiden speech in the House of Commons, nor is it my maiden speech as the Minister of Agriculture, because I had the good fortune to occupy the portfolio of Minister of Agriculture during a very brief time in 1979.

However, I hope you will allow me to take this opportunity to say a few words in that regard. I am entering my thirteenth year in the House of Commons. I have spent some 24 years in public office, the first 12 being in various elected capacities in

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my community, the constituency of Elgin. I want to take this opportunity to extend to the people of Elgin my sincere thanks and gratitude for the tremendous degree of support I have had from the great people of the City of St. Thomas and the people of Elgin during the past twenty-four years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wise: Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne has pointed out many challenges that we will face in this session of Parliament. In particular, it has focused on the tasks that lie ahead for a national reconciliation, economic renewal and social justice.

I would like to speak briefly today about what those challenges and those directions mean for the agri-food industry in this country. I know that Members of the House appreciate the important role that the agri-food sector plays in the economy and in the traditions and social fabric of our nation. We are talking about an industry that generates one-sixth of all economic activity in Canada, an industry that is a key to the further economic development of every region of this country. It is an industry with retail sales of nearly \$60 billion, an industry that exported about \$10 billion worth of products and generated a trade surplus of about \$4.3 billion in 1983.

It is an industry that directly employs some 1.4 million Canadians and accounts for almost three million jobs, if one counts all the services used by primary producers and all the services used by processors, distributors, and indeed retailers from coast to coast.

Food has always been so plentiful and cheap in this country that many Canadians overlook the fact that our agri-food industry is a big business. Many people are not aware of the fact that it is a big business that, I regret to say, faces some very big and serious problems. These problems include low and declining farm incomes, stiff competition in export markets, and soil degradation.

No one can deny that the industry has problems that must be resolved, but the industry also has opportunities for growth. Our Government is pledging to revitalize and strengthen the agri-food sector so that those opportunities are not lost to Canadians.

We have already taken the first necessary steps in that direction. Last week the economic and fiscal statement by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) included a number of initiatives that will benefit farmers. They will benefit food processors and agri-food businesses across the country. First among these improvements is the three cent per litre fuel tax rebate for gasoline and diesel fuels purchased for off the highway use. This decision will be a big help in bringing down production costs, improving farm returns and keeping the Canadian food and agriculture products competitive on the world markets. I might say that as a result of the decision of the Minister of Finance, we are essentially delivering approximately \$100 million into the hands of Canadian food producers.