

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. In Canada we have too few farmers now; we need to commit ourselves as a nation to a strong and vibrant farm community that is based on family farms being there not only in this century but into the next.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the third reading of Bill C-98, the legislation which provides authority to the federal government to enter into negotiations with the provinces on matters pertaining to the protection of income for farmers.

The legislation does not refer to the present farm financial crisis of trying to support a \$22 billion agricultural debt. It merely enables the federal government to enter into agreements with the provinces in matters relating to farm income. Farm people have grave fears about the future of their income stability and although this legislation proposes to establish the now much talked about but confusing GRIP and NISA programs, this legislation contains none of the provisions which will guide the administration of these programs. What GRIP and NISA really are is described only in the agreements to be signed with the provinces and in the regulations yet to be seen.

In other words, with this legislation in front of us, what we are being asked to do is to write a blank cheque for the government to fill in the details later. The crisis on the farm and the future of the prairie family farm, as well as the future of the agriculture industry itself, are much too important at this time to sign that blank cheque.

I have given a lot of thought to this since Bill C-98 was first introduced in the House on March 4, and I must now say that I cannot support it at third reading. For reasons I will explain in a few moments, I cannot support GRIP and NISA in their present forms. Therefore, I cannot in all fairness consent to legislation which allows the federal government to sign agreements which would set these programs in place.

There is a much more immediate financial need that must be addressed, as well as the long-term interests of agricultural sustainability and viability that we must discuss. The government's discussions and consultations which led up to the creation of GRIP and NISA included matters relating to the present crisis and the potential long-term problems in the industry. This government should be bringing legislation dealing with these matters before us instead of Bill C-98. This bill will not save one single family farm from foreclosure in 1991.

• (1750)

Bill C-98 ignores this crisis which is driving families from rural Canada in greater numbers than ever before. This trend must be stopped and reversed. In doing so, ideas presented in GRIP and NISA programs must be significantly changed.

A number of these changes were presented by the opposition in amendments earlier this week, but many of them were rejected by the government whose agricultural agenda is obviously much different than mine and that of the people I represent in Saskatchewan.

Since February 26 when the finance minister tabled his 1991 budget, farmers have been looking at one line in the minister's speech. That one line indicated that \$1.3 billion in additional spending had been earmarked for farmers in need.

It is almost five weeks later, and still there is no word on the exact nature of that \$1.3 billion. In my speech at second reading and again at report stage in this House, I urged the Minister of Agriculture to talk to the finance minister and get that money released immediately for spring seeding.

The prairie pools, the National Farmers' Union and others say there is a deficiency in agricultural support in excess of \$1 billion. That must be made available for the seeding, or seeding is in jeopardy.

Today once again, I say to the minister: Stop playing games. Release the money and do not tie it to the yet unapproved GRIP because there are many producers in my area who will not sign up for GRIP but who are desperate for immediate assistance.