

Government Orders

particular crop year to be eligible for a pay-out; that is positive.

The range of available crops has been expanded; that is positive. The pay-outs are more predictable and that is the one thing that farmers, right across this country, have been asking for. They want some predictability brought into the system. When the grain farmers go out on the land in the spring, they want to know what they are getting into. It does not have to be completely detailed, but they must have a strong idea of what their return is going to be come the fall, come harvest. I think that is very reasonable.

Also, and this is another positive aspect of GRIP, the 15-year moving average of prices provides more support during long periods of low prices compared to a five year average of prices.

I want to point out those positive aspects of the bill.

As you might expect, we have spoken in recent weeks and months to a lot of farmers. There are concerns out there. There are concerns of the producers and, of course, there are concerns of our own.

Let me point out one as a parliamentarian. It really has to do with this legislation which, in effect, side-steps Parliament. It really makes Parliament irrelevant because this is enabling legislation, the kind of umbrella legislation which gives the powerful Minister of Agriculture—and I would hope that his successor will be powerful as well—or, if you will, the Government of Canada, great leeway, power to bring about agreements with the provinces and bring about agreements with producers. We in this Chamber are pretty well reduced to nothing.

In effect, what we are doing with this legislation—and we are going to have to discuss this further—is giving the government of the day a blank cheque, an open cheque. Here is the legislation, do with it whatever you will and you can consummate an agreement with one province, two provinces or three provinces and you do not even have to come back. That is a concern to us and it is a concern that has to be brought up at this time because we feel this sense of responsibility as parliamentarians.

There is another concern that we have, because under this bill, the government is trying to get away with murder. It is trying to get away with murder by off-load-

ing huge costs on to the provinces and on to the producers.

I think that as we look at these agreements, there is going to be an unbearable strain put on some taxpayers and some producers. Let's take a look at an example with respect to the GRIP agreement as it applies to the province of Saskatchewan.

Federal premiums will be increased only 8 per cent. Farmers' premiums will be increased 35 per cent. However, the provincial premium will go up a whopping 355 per cent. That is a lot of money. That is an enormous strain to be put on taxpayers in the province of Saskatchewan.

I was talking to a gentleman just today—and this is a man who knows a lot about GRIP, a lot about NISA, and about farm safety net programs—who feels that there is no way that the province of Saskatchewan could sustain this kind of premium, sustain this kind of agreement, for very long. So that is a concern of ours.

When we say that there is going to be a strain on the province of Saskatchewan—which there will be—I doubt whether that is going to be of any great concern to Mr. Devine, the premier there. That is something that he wants and he wants it badly, because there is going to be an election in the wheat province this year. Not only is he using GRIP as a way of advancing his political interests in the province of Saskatchewan, but he is also looking for some kind of deficiency payment. I would think that he will be getting his deficiency payment some time just before the provincial election in Saskatchewan. How much it will be, I don't know.

When I look at the budget, I notice a provision there for approximately \$1.3 billion for agriculture. It is not going to be enough. We have GRIP, NISA, the third line of defence, the deficiency payment, which will have to come some time this spring; we have a deficit in the Wheat Board account; we have a deficit exceeding \$1.1 billion in the WGSA. I don't know where the government is going to get all the money. When I look at the budget, when I look at the accounts, there is not enough there.

Another concern we have is that there appears to be an effort on the part of the government to hold a stick over the heads of producers, and the stick really says this: You sign up for GRIP or you are not going to get a deficiency payment. At least, that is the threat. I think that is unfortunate. I would hope that farmers would feel