

reduced commitment of the federal government to those important national programs.

I can cite quite a few other examples, Mr. Speaker, and I know you are aware of examples yourself, but I do not want to stray too far from the substance of Bill C-48 now before us. The bottom line, however, is quite clear. In this, as in the other circumstances, the government is abandoning or beginning the abandonment process of the Canadian people and of the programs that bind them together.

The one other clear example that I cannot forget to mention in all of this is the post office. As the post office critic for the New Democratic Party, it is a subject that I am very close to. There is not a single person in rural Canada who does not know that Canada Post, with the support of the government, is abandoning rural Canada. More and more post offices are closing and more and more postal services are being provided by the private sector in areas where the federal presence is desperately needed.

The ability of Canadians to look to their government for leadership, direction, assistance and guidance is being taken away by this government, slowly and without much fanfare. When Canadians are in trouble, they will soon have nowhere to turn because this government is removing itself from taking responsibility for helping Canadians to determine their own future.

I know that that is the Conservative government's way. Get government off the backs of the taxpayers, we have heard in the past, reduce government to a level where it is insignificant. And when Canadians need the help of their government, it is not there to provide them with that help.

The Conservative way does not work because with the reduction of support has gone the increase and the cost of the government. Our national debt continues to grow, the burden on the taxpayer continues to escalate, as the support from the government diminishes.

• (1750)

I find that shameful. Bill C-48 before us today outlines this very well and fits into that big picture which I think we all detest. What this bill proposes at the outset is to

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again reduce the federal government's commitment to crop insurance and, therefore, its commitment to agriculture and the people of rural Canada.

If passed, and I do not doubt that it will pass because of the majority of government members, the legislation will reduce the federal cost sharing from 45 per cent to approximately 27.5 per cent. In so doing, it increases the provinces' costs on the crop insurance program. It is a move that could result in the farmers themselves shouldering a greater percentage of the costs of the crop insurance for two reasons. One is the way the program is designed and the second is that the additional provincial financing burden will show up later in reductions in revenue sharing for smaller communities and rural municipalities across the country.

Those concerns were outlined quite clearly by the National Farmers Union in a brief to the government committee studying the bill. I want to quote briefly from that National Farmers Union brief:

The last federal budget indicated the amount to be spent on crop insurance for 1989-90 would be reduced by \$90 million and a further \$110 million decline was projected for the 1990-91 fiscal year. This reduced federal commitment, which would equal the share of the crop insurance premiums paid by provinces to a maximum of 25 per cent, would create inequalities among provinces and producers. Adding costs onto provincial treasuries will hurt poorer provinces, and result in disparate programs available to producers in different regions.

Under current wording of the proposed legislation—federal contributions would be governed by annual loss claims. Enrolled producers will need to pay their full share of premiums but the federal and provincial governments would pay their respective shares into the provincial plans only if circumstances dictate. We anticipate there may be years in which the producer share would represent well over 50 percent of funds collected by their respective crop insurance programs. The funds could conceivably be depleted every year and farmers could well be confronted with rate increases which might otherwise not be the case.

The NFU is recommending the federal government's financial commitment to the crop insurance program be increased to cover two-thirds of the premium costs. Producers would pick up the other one-third of the premium expenses, with the provinces assuming the administration costs associated with the program.

The recommendation is one that has a great deal of support throughout the agriculture industry and this government must address it. Even with the amendments so far accepted, this legislation is not going to assist the