

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I find it strange that the hon. member has a concern that I met with the premier of the province of Saskatchewan.

This government and the ministers of this government meet with premiers as part of our responsibilities. He will recall that I met the premier of Prince Edward Island about a very serious matter within his province.

The premier of Saskatchewan wrote my colleague, the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, and myself on September 28 expressing his view of the shortfall. The hon. member knows the contents of that letter. It has been widely circulated. The premier of the province last night put forward a very strong case on behalf of agriculture in Canada, not just in Saskatchewan, but agriculture in Canada. We have met on other occasions and we will continue to meet to address needs of the farmers.

The hon. member knows there will be an announcement coming shortly and I advise him to wait. He knows what we have done in the past for producers, he has recognized that.

• (1430)

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, today on a Regina open line program, the premier was implying that a guarantee of \$5 for wheat for the next five years had been made. Will the minister give this House that same commitment?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): As the hon. member knows, I am not going to criticize the premier's arithmetic. The hon. member knows that at this time the GRIP, the assistance program that was designed by farmers, the provinces and the Government of Canada, a price of some \$4.15 a bushel was put forward.

* * *

PORT OF CHURCHILL

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the same minister. The minister knows that the

port of Churchill is issuing layoff notices as early as Friday of this week as almost all the grain that goes through Churchill comes from the province of Saskatchewan and for over 10 days over 10,000 tonnes of grain has been sitting at Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, instead of being delivered to the port of Churchill, which is almost completely empty. How can this government say it is trying to sell all the wheat that is out there?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): First of all, I do not know of the vessel availability for the port of Churchill. If the NDP would just be quiet we could try and discuss this because it is important to farmers, if it is not important to the hon. member from Edmonton.

What we have now is a work stoppage in Thunder Bay. To my knowledge, we do not have vessels in Churchill. I say to the hon. member, and I know members from the Canadian Wheat Board district will agree, the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board is to maximize returns to the producers. The Canadian Wheat Board has done that very well in the past and will continue to do it.

I suggest to the hon. member if there is a reason, it may be that returns are not being maximized according to his suggestion, but in the way the Wheat Board has been doing business over the last number of years.

* * *

GATT

Hon. Ralph Ferguson (Lambton—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations is entering a crucial phase. Canada is at a difficult crossroad. We will be facing strong international pressures to abandon our position in support of article XI, which allows for effective supply management programs in dairy and poultry.

Will the minister assure the poultry and dairy farmers of Canada here today that the Canadian government will not be part of any GATT agreement that fails to maintain, enhance and strengthen article XI of GATT?