

*Supply*

bears that out. Another Minister is the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski). His work affects the commodity and agricultural industries and, again, I find that he is a listener. We have a serious problem in our area with the number of places which do not have rail service. As a result, some of our farmers are trucking their products 50, 60 or 120 miles to the rail head. I have had a hearing with the Minister of Transport about this issue and I am confident we will have a program which will show the Minister is interested and concerned about this problem. I am confident that in the next little while we are going to see some action.

The third Minister I want to mention is, of course, the Minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Mayer). Several times since the election I have had to go to him with problems which in some cases were unique to the Peace country, and in other cases not necessarily so. However, what really impressed me is that each time he was aware of the problem, understood it, and immediately sat down with me and tried to work out some kind of solution to meet the real needs of farmers in that region. Those three men have really been of great assistance and help to us and I think their actions give the lie to the motion which has been put before the House today.

I want to pause for a few moments now and talk about the drought in the Peace country this spring. During the summer, as soon as the House adjourned, I immediately started to travel throughout my riding. I went to as many of the agricultural areas and communities as I possibly could. I averaged some three or four meetings a day with farmers. It became very obvious that we were facing a crisis in that part of the world. Conditions were spotty; some parts of the region had reasonable crops, others had none at all. Often enough those divisions ran right down a fence line or quarter line. It was a very serious problem. What was even more frightening was that for parts of my region this is the third and fourth year that they have suffered some sort of weather problem. Whether it be drought, rain or snow, something has always prevented farmers in my area from harvesting good crops. I have to admit that, after travelling around my riding, I ended with somewhat the same kind of feeling which many of my farmers had, one of panic and desperation because the situation was so serious. What I found impressive, though, was that when I got on the phone to the Minister of Agriculture and said we have a problem out here, it was not long before we saw him out there personally looking at the problem our farmers were facing. He was out looking at the farms, the crops, looking at what the grasshoppers and drought had done. He was there and he was concerned. What did he do when he got back? The first thing he did was to ask the Hon. Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Gustafson) to form a task force to have a good look at the problem. I have had the privilege of working very closely with that Hon. Member because I was later asked to join that same task force. I can tell you that he went out there, looked at the problem, studied it, listened to the farmers, taken what he heard and put it together in a package which can be worked with, and that is the kind of message which was delivered to

the Minister of Agriculture. The approach has been very tenacious and sensitive. That is important because so many of our farmers have felt for so long that they have not had a sympathetic ear here in Ottawa. They have not had someone who understood the problem or cared about them. The Hon. Member for Assiniboia is a farmer himself, he talked to these people, listened to their concerns, and I think that in itself gave a number of our farmers some confidence.

As the house knows, one of the first things to come out of that task force was the announcement dealing with help for our cattle producers. Of course, that help has been significant. Now, of course, we have had a slightly different problem come up and that is why I want to talk for a few moments now about the harvest. I have to admit that it has been kind of a frustrating experience for me this year to be talking in the spring and summer about a drought and then do a complete turn and start talking about snow and rain and cold conditions. However, that is what has happened in the Peace country. We have gone from one extreme to the other. What little bit of crop we had cannot now be harvested. We are faced with a situation where farmers cannot harvest the crop that does exist. That creates problems for not only our farmers, it also makes it very difficult for the task force to get a handle on the extent of the damage. When I am asked what kind of crops we ended up with in the Peace Country I cannot say. How can you give figures when the crop cannot be harvested because of the snow and rain? We have some very serious problems. My confidence comes from watching the Minister of Agriculture over the last year. I know that he is listening and that we will not be ignored. The task force has been doing its work and I am very confident in the announcement that I know will be forthcoming in the near future. It will respond to the needs of farmers. It will consider the conditions they are faced with and it will not be the hollow rhetoric that we got before from the Minister with the green hat and some of his colleagues.

● (1600)

I want to touch on the record of my Government because it has certainly made agriculture a priority. Agriculture has become an important priority on the table of the Government. We are trying to solve a number of the very serious problems that exist today. I would first like to discuss briefly the abolition of the capital gains tax. This morning in the opening of his remarks the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) seemed to pooh-pooh that. He said it is great if you are getting out of agriculture but it does not do much good for the people who want to stay on the farm. However, as I understand it, the average age of farmers in Canada now is 55. In other words, there are a large number of farmers who want to retire and sell much of their farms to the younger generation. Therefore, this is a very significant program because it will allow those individuals the opportunity to retire and put some money in their savings accounts to provide for retirement, which opportunity was not available to them until now. For the Leader of the Opposition to pooh-pooh that provision shows that he has obviously not been paying attention to the real concerns of farmers.