

### Supply

The minister has announced that his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings, will hold consultations with the industry on the way we should use the large amount of money still available.

Cuts in agricultural spending take into account the improved financial outlook for the agricultural industry, the new discipline imposed by the new general agreement on international subsidies and the difficult fiscal situation of the government.

Interestingly enough, while the official opposition condemns us because we allegedly make deeper cuts in eastern Canada than in western Canada, others accuse us of doing just the opposite. Critics take the elimination of the WGTA subsidies out of context and ignore the \$1.6 billion compensation payment. The official opposition does the same with the 30 per cent reduction in the milk subsidies and forgets about factors that will cushion the impact of that reduction and the government's commitment to the national supply management system.

The 19 per cent cut in the agriculture department budget is exactly the same as the average reduction in all federal departments. In other words, the budget cuts at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada represent about 4 per cent of the total cuts of \$7.2 billion proposed in the federal programs review. The fact that the AAC expenses represent approximately 4 per cent of the total federal expenses is not a coincidence.

We had some difficult choices to make given the critical situation of the debt and the deficit. All the budgetary changes reflect the need to materialize the government's vision of the agri-food sector in Canada and the need not to let the deficit jeopardize our future.

Our vision is based on financial security and the vitality and viability of that sector. Only a continuing and sustainable growth of the rural regions and the urban areas will make this materialization possible. This government's priority is to implement the necessary framework to help that sector find new markets, create jobs and ensure its own development.

An investment in the agri-food sector is an investment in growth for all regions of Canada—whether from the East, the West, the North or the South.

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for his balanced speech that looked at both sides of the issue. I would like to ask him a very important question.

I suspect—if he disagrees with me, I will not be upset in any way—that the motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois today was just to score political points, to try to play one part of the country off against another.

• (1725)

They did not sincerely believe that one region had been treated more or less favourably than another, they simply wanted to get one region to play off against another. They have

been unable to look at the situation and this issue in a balanced way. As I said earlier, I will not be upset in any way if my colleague disagrees with me. I would like to have his comments, sincerely and honestly.

**Mr. Bertrand:** Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Saint-Boniface for his question.

I sort of agree with what my colleague has said. It is true that our government was faced with very tough decisions to make and I sincerely believe that the decisions the Minister of Finance had to make were very difficult for all regions in Canada, whether in the East or in the West. I believe that the cuts that have been announced in the past or that will be in the future are fair and legitimate. I can hardly understand why the Official Opposition is trying to set the East against the West.

[English]

**Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I wish to take the last couple of minutes to state my disapproval of the motion being put forward by the opposition.

I am surprised that my colleagues in the agricultural sector of the Bloc Québécois would actually put together such a motion. I know and work with them very well in our committee. I am surprised that they are trying to suggest to the House and to the Canadian people that those areas of the budget related to agriculture are anything but fair to all areas of the country.

Everyone in the agricultural community recognizes that we require fairness in dealing with our debt and deficit situation. That part of the budget prepared by the Minister of Finance dealing with agriculture certainly was given a great deal of input by the minister of agriculture. They tried to deal in a fair and equitable manner with the areas of supply management and the western grain transportation issues.

One disappointment I have had since becoming chair of the standing committee on agriculture has been hearing hon. members in the House claim that one part of the country is getting a better deal than another part. I also was disappointed that a number of commodity groups and farm organizations spend too much time arguing over who got what rather than working and pulling together not only as commodity groups but putting together different aspects of an organization to help Canada in our commitments to export trade.

It will be in the export sector that agriculture and rural Canada will find the jobs in the future. The government has made a large commitment to exports. I feel that if the different groups get together and if the Bloc Québécois put aside its partisan political interests, it would want to co-operate with all Canadians to make sure that Canada's agricultural products are exported around the world.