

Western Grain Stabilization Act

ing some of the other options which have been proposed and I hope that they will do so at committee stage.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me clear up some of the confusion unfortunately caused by some Hon. Members of the House regarding the amount of money that producers have received from the Western Grain Stabilization Program relative to the amount of money they have contributed by way of levies. Total pay-outs to producers since the inception of the program have been \$368 million, although as of today the fund reached \$900 million because of government contributions plus interest, as I already indicated. The total levies paid to producers from 1976 until the end of the first quarter of 1984 have totalled about \$365 million. A pay-out of \$300 million for 1983-84 under the proposed amendments would mean that producers will be about \$300 million ahead in terms of pay-outs relative to levies since the start of the program in 1976. While the fund will still have over \$600 million in it, and I hope Hon. Members followed all of those numbers which were quite simple—

Mr. Neil: You did not talk about interest on their money.

Mr. Pepin: Yes, the interest is included. I remember referring to an amount of \$224 million. Let me emphasize, as I have said before, that interest is being paid on the producers' levies and on the Government's contributions.

I have an additional announcement to make. My friends are waiting for that one, Mr. Speaker. The Government recognizes the serious cash shortage currently faced by farmers. There is no doubt that the approximately \$300 million will be welcomed by producers when it is paid. I have already indicated that under the new system it would be paid some time at the end of fall and perhaps in November. However, we have no doubt that the pay-out will occur, and while several factors like space available, quotas, etc., will affect the ultimate size of that pay-out, we want to get money into the producers' hands as soon as possible. Therefore, at report stage the Minister of Transport will present an amendment providing for an interim payment prior to July 31.

Mr. Neil: Does that mean an early election?

Mr. Pepin: No one knows when the election will take place.

Mr. Malone: You want to bet?

Mr. Pepin: If my hon. friend knows when the election will be, I would gladly receive his confidential information. However, it would be a one-way street because I could not tell him when the election will take place.

Mr. Malone: Right after the pay-out.

Mr. Pepin: There are so many factors involved. Therefore, the Minister of Transport will bring in this amendment at report stage. This will be a one-time provision intended to deal with the fact that no payment has occurred for a number of years and to recognize the producers' immediate need for cash. While I cannot tell Hon. Members the exact amount today, it

is anticipated that approximately one-half of the total pay-out will be made this summer.

There it is, Mr. Speaker. The changes which the Government is proposing to the Western Grain Stabilization Act through this Bill will, in my view, make a sound contribution to the efficiency and sensitivity of the program, qualities which were lost to some extent because of changing circumstances. I explained those changing circumstances to my hon. friends in great depth and I am sure they are already quite well aware of those circumstances.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Len Gustafson (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I was pleased to see the Hon. Minister, who is the former Minister of Transport, speaking so passionately on behalf of the farmers and also on behalf of the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board, who cannot be in this place. We did notice the absence of western Members on that side of the House. In fact, I suppose we did notice the absence of Members in general. In addition, the Minister said that he was speaking for the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), who is obviously out campaigning for the leadership of the Liberal Party. The expressions in the Minister's speech were well made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): Order, please. It has been mentioned by the Chair previously that no reference should be made to the presence or absence of Hon. Members. The Chair let the general comment go but I would caution of the Hon. Member not to refer to the specific absence or presence of any Member in the House of Commons.

Mr. Bosley: Or general to those who are specifically absent.

Mr. Gustafson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was referring generally to the three Ministers who are not here who are responsible for this Bill and I was complimenting the former Minister of Transport because he has always occupied a sort of soft spot in the hearts of many farmers. This is particularly so, Mr. Speaker, regarding the Minister's work related to transportation. It is too bad that we cannot say the same thing for the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy), who is not here to introduce this Bill and in fact is out campaigning for the hon. person from Bay Street who was just recently appointed director of the CPR and Seagram's. The farmers have a great deal of concern about whether, should he become the Prime Minister of Canada, he would fight for the best interests of western farmers or not. There is certainly a great deal of concern about that.

● (1250)

Bill C-33 has been of great concern to the Conservative Party. I am pleased to see that the Minister introduced today an interim payment, because the farmers certainly need the money. We called for that and I believe this Bill would not have been brought to the House if it were not for the Conservative Party.

Some Hon. Members: Right on.