

ernment, and the federal government, with the federal government paying 50 per cent of the premium and the provinces, in most cases, paying the administration costs of the crop insurance scheme.

If this is to be upset, with a significantly larger share being transferred on to the producers, surely we ought to know about it, if that is what the government is intending. And if it is not intending to do that—which I sincerely hope is the case—then we should have that assurance now, and there seems to be no better opportunity than when this bill is going through this chamber.

I realize that in Bill C-41 there is not a large number of amendments. Its main purpose is to repeal the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. And while it is not stated in the bill, there will be an assignment of the moneys remaining in that account for research, or some such purpose. And I am not complaining about that, either.

I do think that we should have a reply to the questions that Senator Argue raised yesterday, and particularly a reply to his question dealing with the future of, and the prospects for, the all-risk crop insurance scheme that is in place now, a scheme that has been so highly accepted by the producers involved.

**Hon. R. James Balfour:** Honourable senators, I thought I made it clear in my remarks that it was generally accepted that the existing crop insurance scheme in force in this country was a highly satisfactory one and, if anything, more satisfactory than the former PFAA scheme, which we are now giving a decent burial to.

I thought Senator Olson's choice of words was quite appropriate. He said "rumour and speculation." Honourable senators, I feel no obligation to address a question based upon rumour and speculation, and certainly not at this time. When policy initiatives in the agricultural field are proposed in the future, we can then debate them.

If Senator Olson or Senator Argue, or anyone else, cares to have a special debate on agricultural policy as it now exists, we on this side would be happy to respond. But I do not feel motivated to respond to an inquiry based upon rumour and speculation.

**Senator Olson:** Honourable senators, may I ask a question?

Given that we are having a debate on precisely the matter that we wish to discuss—namely, the crop insurance scheme which is the substitute program for PFAA—it could not be a more appropriate time for the sponsor of the bill, the spokesman for the government, to provide answers to the questions that have been raised. I do not see why we should be required to set up a special inquiry to debate precisely what is in front of us now.

The rumours and speculations are getting to be more and more valid. The sponsor of the bill has said that he does not need to respond to rumours and speculations. But some of the facts are starting to show. There has been a \$90 million cut in the Department of Agriculture since this government took office. That is probably something in excess of 10 per cent of that department's budget, or approximately that much. There

are indications—and I could go into the detail of it—that it is going to be more. Is crop insurance going to be one of the victims, too?

This government talks about a user-pay philosophy. Does that mean that producers are going to be asked to pick up a larger and larger share of the cost of what is now in existence? At the moment we have an actuarially sound premium of which 50 per cent is paid by the producers and 50 per cent by the federal government.

On the basis of the user-pay philosophy of this government, is that going to be increased? Or is the federal government going to continue to honour the contractual arrangements that have already been set in place?

We worry about that a little bit. We know what happened to the promises made to the pensioners. Broken. With every week that goes by, promises are broken, and these things that I have referred to as rumour and speculation turn into facts.

That is the question. I do not think Senator Balfour can simply dismiss it. We are having too many instances where rumour and speculation are used to see if the kite will fly, with the actual announcement coming sooner or later. It has already happened with the Department of Agriculture in some respects.

My question is: Is the crop insurance scheme going to be one program to which the user-pay philosophy will be applied, with the producer's share going from 50 per cent to some higher level?

**Senator Balfour:** Honourable senators, if my response does not satisfy Senator Olson, I am afraid that that is his problem, not mine.

**Senator Olson:** Oh! We have—

**Hon. Jacques Flynn:** On a point of order. Is the honourable senator going to speak three times on the motion for the third reading of the bill?

**Senator Olson:** If Senator Flynn does not want to hear any more from me, then under the rules I am obliged to sit down, and I am—

**Senator Flynn:** Well, do it.

**Senator Olson:**—and I am ready to do that.

**Senator Flynn:** Then, do it!

**Senator Olson:** It is amazing that we have bills going through on second reading—

**Senator Flynn:** Do it!

**Senator Olson:**—and the sponsor doesn't even reply to one question. That is amazing.

● (1450)

**Senator Flynn:** Do it, then. When you say that is the rule, follow it.

**Senator Steuart:** Under the rules you would have to be ordered to sit down eight times.