

Government Orders

I am afraid that the government, by rejecting this amendment, creates the impression among farmers that, yes, indeed, agriculture programming is highly political.

The previous member who spoke wanted to make some partisan comparisons. Some may be valid and some may not be. The farming community is becoming cynical about politicians and the basic willingness and good faith of governments to come to their assistance.

• (1620)

I think if the farming community was to become aware of what is happening, it would again reinforce the cynicism that farmers have about governments because what they see is the provincial governments and federal government protecting themselves but nobody protecting the farmer.

The minister might reconsider Section 4 which allows him to set the terms and conditions. If a particular province does not want to contribute 25 per cent, the minister can say under this legislation that, no, we are not going to be part of this agreement and thereby force every province to contribute 25 per cent. The ability to do that is there even if the minister accepts the hon. member's motion.

The minister makes the point that it is his intention, as long as this government is in power and he is the minister to sign 50 per cent agreements, but he might not always be the minister and government priorities change. When you talk to members privately, there are a lot of decisions not made by ministers. For example, the Minister of Forestry has made commitments all over this country about his commitment to reforestation. The Minister of Finance says, "Well, that is not possible. There is not that kind of money".

In future years the Minister of Finance might say to the Minister of Agriculture, "Sorry, buddy, there is not this kind of money available, we are cutting back on the federal share of crop insurance". There is not much that minister could do about it.

If the polls persist and the Conservative's arch enemies, the Liberals, came to power and decided to make some amendments, that could result in a change. You never know. If farmers are going to feel protected through this and the government is keeping faith with them, there has to be a statutory provision. It just cannot

be an agreement. It cannot just be "take my word for it today". Farmers need a statutory provision.

It is possible to meet the minister's objectives by accepting this motion. I urge him to reconsider it and have his members support Motion No. 5, the motion put forward by the hon. member for Mackenzie.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am not an agricultural or constitutional expert, but I want to say that the minister brought up the word "Constitution". He talked about the fact that we try to make constitutional agreements. I think what is concerning not only the farmers of this country but people in general is that over the last period the government has basically been on a retreat from national governance, whether it is VIA Rail, unemployment insurance or the Post Office, it has been unloading everything.

As a result, this is a situation here where farmers could face the same exposure. The minister said, "We want to have a 25-25 split with the provinces. But, technically speaking, he is exposing a disadvantaged province because if it cuts back by 5 per cent, then basically what he is saying is that the federal government is going to take its lead from that province. If that is not the case, I stand to be corrected.

When we have so many youths leaving the farms, with bankruptcies and bank managers refusing lines of credit day in and day out, I do not think this is a time for the federal Minister of Agriculture to be in any position where he will have to retreat on something as fundamental as crop insurance.

So I follow other members in this House and ask the minister to make this a statutory requirement.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, just to reiterate what my colleague, the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds said, the wording in this particular piece of legislation is really the same as it was in the existing legislation. The hon. member asked me to keep faith with the farmers. I am keeping faith with the farmers consistent with the legislation that has been in place for the last 20 years; the same principle, same wording, same thrust. What is so different about the wording today compared to the previous legislation? That is what this debate is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): On the same point of order, the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood.