

Clean Air Act relating to acid rain control. In view of the fact that the memorandum of intent, signed between the two countries last summer, committed both countries to enforcing existing environmental regulations vigorously pending completion of a more formal accord, does the minister not view those actions as a breach of the spirit if not the letter of the memorandum of intent signed by the two countries last summer?

Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, I do not think that the assumption which underlies the hon. member's question is accurate. There have been some press reports of a desire to separate consideration of the Clean Air Act proposals from the acid rain agreement proposals. Whether that is in fact the intention of the United States administration, and whether there are moves to do that in Congress, are things that I hope will become clear to me in the course of my discussions on Monday. Neither is it yet clear, even if such an action were to be taken, whether such action would make it more difficult or would be helpful in terms of the acid rain discussions.

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AGRICULTURE

HOG STABILIZATION PROGRAM—PAYMENTS MADE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I should like to address some questions to the Minister of Agriculture regarding the administration of federal payments to farmers. As the minister knows, the value of these payments, particularly in periods when interest rates are as high as they have been, is of most use when they are made promptly. This has been a problem for the department on a couple of occasions. The program that I want to mention first is the hog stabilization program which was announced last May. In November the minister said that the payments would be out before Christmas. A number of producers still have not received payment. Will the payments be completed by March 31 and, if not, how many will still be outstanding at the end of this fiscal year?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, as of March 20, 1981, 26,871 applications had been received; 25,630 had been processed and paid. To date, payments have amounted to nearly \$40 million under that program.

We are still receiving applications from producers from different parts of Canada, as many as 200 per month. They did not all come in last May, they were coming in by several hundreds or several thousands each month. As late as December there were 500 new applications. It takes time to process these to make sure that they conform to the guidelines put forward by the comptroller and the auditor general.

Some of the receipts that farmers produce and some of their bookkeeping leave a lot to be desired. If the hon. member has

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any influence with them he could suggest that they should not write illegible receipts on the back of match boxes and expect the stabilization people to make payment on that kind of document. This leaves a lot to be desired and has made things difficult.

Some of the payments to producers have been as much as \$20,000. We have to be doubly sure what we are paying. We recognize that there is inconvenience to some farmers because of the high interest rates and their need for the money, but we have to be doubly sure that we are spending taxpayers' dollars in a proper fashion.

HERD MAINTENANCE PROGRAM—REQUESTS FOR RETURN OF PAYMENTS

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I would remind the hon. minister that most hogs are sold through computer sales techniques under marketing boards. The tapes were available to the government and it could have requested them. That would have helped handle the bulk of the program.

My follow-up question should probably be addressed to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, but the Minister of Agriculture is also partly responsible for the herd maintenance program on the prairies. It has also had its share of administrative problems, first in determining who should receive payments, then who should be rejected, and finally, the newest wrinkle, which of the people who have received cheques should be asked to return them. How many producers have been advised that they should return their cheques, and for what reasons?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, in reply to some of the comments that the hon. member has made, I am sure he is aware that payments to piglet operators do not go through computers. This is where we had some of the greatest difficulty. There are also sales between producers and the small entrepreneurs in the slaughtering business, etc., who do not use the big computer system. The provinces do not all use the same system for keeping records and this makes things difficult. No payment has been made on hogs for ten years but we know a payment will have to be made for the year 1980. This will be easier because the system will be much better.

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The hon. member talked about the payments under the herd maintenance program. From the applications which have been received, I believe 23,000 farmers have been paid. Criteria have been set down, and they are adhering to the criteria as closely as possible.

The hon. member also asked how many people who were improperly paid and have been requested to return the cheques. If I understand the figures correctly which were given to me, around 100 farmers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have done so. I do not have the exact figures in front of me,