

past, I suspect that there may be more farmers using it with the limits raised. There are some useful things about the bill and I hope that members will agree it.

We are not trying to rush it through unduly, but I think it is important to proceed with it as quickly as we can. Opposition members make the point that we should have had this done by the end of June. Perhaps they have a point there, but this is not the end of June. That is hindsight.

This is the beginning of October. The sooner we get the bill through, the sooner cash advances will be available to producers. I would ask the members of the opposition to use the reason they give for opposing the bill, that it is so important to farmers, as the reason to pass the bill so that farmers can have cash advances as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, the longer we wait, the more marketing there is going to be and the less use in the present crop year that farmers are going to be able to make of the bill. Again, to the extent that the opposition is simply opposing for the sake of delay, that is the responsibility of the opposition.

I would hope the opposition will see fit to pass this bill as quickly as possible so that farmers can have cash advances available to them as soon as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Algoma on a question or comment.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, we have just listened to the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds. It must be one of the most pathetic defences that I have ever heard from a minister on a bill being brought in. He is not only trifling with the opposition that there is to this bill across the country; he is misrepresenting what the bill is and the importance of the existing program.

I would just like to point out to the minister that on Monday of this week, October 2, 19 major commodity groups met in Winnipeg. They are calling upon the Prime Minister of Canada to withdraw the bill, to obey the law of Canada and to provide the interest free cash advances. Which of these groups does he not agree with? There is the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, the Western Barley Growers Association, the Alberta Pulse Growers, Focus on Inputs, Keystone Agricultural Producers, the Prairie Canola Grain Grow-

Government Orders

ers Council, and the Manitoba Canola Growers. He is from Manitoba himself. There is the Saskatchewan Canola Growers, the Alberta Soft Wheat Growers, and the United Grain Growers. These are all responsible farm groups calling on the minister to abandon this foolishness, this law that would take away cash advances. We are not just talking about \$22 million or \$25 million of interest assistance. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars of cash flow assistance to farmers not only to assist them at the time of harvest but to assist them in the returns.

If you look at Ontario Corn Growers, it estimates that for every dollar spent by the Government of Canada on interest free cash advances, the benefit to the growers of corn in the province of Ontario is some \$16. That is a cost benefit of 15 to 1. Surely even the Minister for Grains and Oilseeds would agree that that is a tremendous advantage. If that is what the government is trying to do, for every dollar that the government spent on support programs for farmers would return a benefit of 15 to 1, then no farmer in this country would ever have difficulty. Clearly this program is perhaps, in returns to producers, one of the best that the government actually has.

• (1140)

The minister says that the farmers have to bear some of the pain of deficit reduction. They are bearing \$500 million worth of pain. In my view these are the best spent funds that the government provides under government programs.

I would hope that the Government of Canada would withdraw this bill or let it die on the Order Paper, as the 19 major farm organizations and another dozen or so are asking it to do; obey the law of Canada and provide those funds interest free.

It should provide the cash advance money to the Wheat Board, to the corn and oilseed producers—all these producer groups right across the country—because that is what they are asking the government to do and it should listen to these producer groups. It should obey the law and provide the money now. We are not holding up this money. It is the government by not obeying the law of Canada and making these cash advance funds available right now interest free.