

on April 28, 1975. I wish to quote briefly from his remarks in that debate. At page 5272 of *Hansard* he said:

We recognized that the income of the farmer was our fundamental objective in dealing with the problem in the grain industry.

At page 5273 he said:

As the pattern of past income levels has shown, these amounts will be paid out to the prairie farmer in such a way that he will receive the money he needs in the years he needs it most.

I would emphasize the last phrase "in the years he needs it most". He further said:

In this bill we have introduced the protection of the prairie region grain farmers on the basis of net cash flow. Net cash flow is the cash remaining when the gross receipts for grain have had subtracted from them the cash costs of producing grain in that year. This means that the plan will be sensitive to changes in the cost of production as well as changes in receipts where based on volume.

Finally, at page 5274 he said:

We have in this program, and in the others to which I referred earlier, added forms of assistance to those farmers, to help assure them that their incomes may be adequate. We have done this as part of the Government's over-all policy of attempting to make sure that farm incomes are adequate. We want to ensure that the farmer obtains a reasonable return for his labour in agriculture from two sources, from the marketplace, and from the Treasury where required, because we are convinced that our agricultural production is important at home and abroad.

To summarize what the Minister said, this Bill is based on income being the fundamental objective, pay-out in the years when it was needed most, and that the farmer would receive a reasonable return for his labour.

This program has been in place for some nine years. It has not served the purpose for which it was set up. Despite the pay-out in 1978-79, producers, and I think the majority of them, have been unhappy. As I talked to the producers in my constituency, I would say that the vast majority of them, if given the opportunity, would opt out.

Why are the producers unhappy? I would suggest it is because this Act has not served the purpose for which it was designed. At the present time grain producers in western Canada are in very serious trouble. Grain prices are depressed, have been for two or three years, and there is no relief in sight. Input costs, whether it is for interest, farm fuel, fertilizer or farm machinery, have increased to such an extent that the farmer has little, if any, money in his pocket.

No payment has been triggered under this Act since 1979. The argument made by the Government, and by the two Ministers who presumably are responsible for this Bill, is that the formula in the Act has been such that it would not trigger a payment. There is no question about that. That is correct, because there is a formula that is used and the formula has not triggered a payment. The Government and the Minister responsible have known this for several years.

We on this side of the House have been telling the Minister and the Government, week after week, month after month, year after year, that changes have to be made in the formula. But our pleas have fallen on deaf ears. The Government was too busy spending its time developing legislation to get rid of the Crow rate, increasing further the input costs of the farm-

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ers. Government Members were busy dealing with the national energy policy that caused massive increases in the price of farm fuel and fertilizer. Of course, Mr. Speaker, few if any Members on the Government side understand or appreciate prairie agriculture.

● (1400)

I suppose that in the back of the minds of the Cabinet Ministers was the following: "We do not have any seats from the Prairies, they have not voted for us; therefore we will punish those people on the Prairies. We will not change the Act". Over the last two or three years many of my constituents have asked me when I thought that a payment would be made under the Western Grain Stabilization Act. I answered them by saying: "You tell me when there will be an election and I will tell you when there will be a payment," and that is precisely what has happened. An election is in the offing and the Government has said to itself: "We have dealt badly with those people in western Canada over the years but if we put some money in their pockets now, they might forget what we have done in the past and suddenly vote for us". That, Mr. Speaker, will not happen. They cannot pull the wool over the eyes of the western grain producers.

The Hon. Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Gustafson) recited at length the questions that have been put to the Minister over the past couple of years regarding changes to the Western Grain Stabilization Act. It was interesting to hear that recital because, despite the pressure that was put on Government Members, it was not until the Speech from the Throne which was given on December 7, 1983 that the Government made any mention of making any amendments to the Bill. What the Speech from the Throne said was this, and I shall read briefly:

The maximum for advance payments for grain will be increased. Amendments will be introduced to the Western Grain Stabilization Act to make it more responsive to the needs of the producers.

That was merely a teaser, Mr. Speaker. Nothing happened. Amendments to the Act were mentioned in the Speech from the Throne but the election was not quite close enough. Members on this side of the House continued to prod the Government. We got another teaser on April 25 of this year when the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Minister of State for the Wheat Board from the other place held a joint press conference in Winnipeg. They said that they were going to bring in amendments to the Western Grain Stabilization Act to do certain things, one of which was to ensure that there would be a payment to the prairie farmers this year.

Mr. Schellenberger: We asked them to bring on the Bill but where was the Bill?

Mr. Neil: As my hon. friend said, we asked them to bring on the Bill. They said they had those amendments so the Bill must have been ready. We did not see the Bill at that time and it was not until May 11 that we finally saw first reading of the Bill, and it is not until today, May 25, that we are seeing second reading. In the meantime the Government said: "We have a lot of other Bills that we want passed and we want