

Government Orders

When I was the mayor of my small community before entering federal politics the government of Quebec, which governs municipalities, forced us to balance our budget every year, and I am grateful to the government for that.

A municipality is not allowed to have a deficit, but it can have a surplus. So in the beautiful municipality of Garthby, where I was the mayor, every year we had a nice little surplus. People were happy, and told us they were proud of their town council.

My colleague of Blainville—Deux—Montagnes, behind me, was also the mayor of his municipality for a number of years. He understands very well what I am talking about.

However, if you want a surplus you must do what you have to do for it. When it was time to say no, we said no, and when it was time to increase taxes, we did so. I would never have taken a mortgage on my house to buy food for my family. No one can afford the luxury of borrowing week after week to buy food. Yet, that is what my colleagues across the way are doing. Even worst, the Trudeau government did not know how to count. Unfortunately, the Conservatives were in power for nine years. They wanted to make up for lost time, and we did not stop them.

I was saying that municipalities have an obligation to present balanced budgets. Maybe the government should also consider passing a law which would force it to table balanced budgets. Since to have enough you must have a little more, municipalities used to set property taxes a little higher than they normally would, in order to have a little 1 or 2 per cent surplus, which is quite reasonable.

• (1040)

Consequently, we are not opposed to the amendments put forward in Bill C-75. However, we object strongly to maintaining overlap and duplication, whether they are in the federal government, in the federal machine, or between federal and provincial jurisdictions.

A moment ago, I spoke of the existence of two departments of agriculture for the dairy industry, one for industrial milk, and one in the government of Quebec for fluid milk. It does not make sense.

In closing, I can assure my colleague, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, that despite all these small flaws, we will vote in favour of this bill at third reading. This will accelerate the process. Yet, we will do so without much enthusiasm, because it is not in the interests of our farmers, in the long term. In the short term, it is not that bad.

I extend an invitation to my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, to visit Quebec. His is probably not as busy as his boss, and he could come to explain this bill. For my part, I will explain it to the farmers of my riding. They do not know very much about this measure. It is incredible how often we have to explain to our constituents measures that are taken by the

federal government, but that people are totally unaware of, especially in agriculture.

I spent a week in my riding, and when I meet farmers in my capacity as agriculture critic, which I have been for seven months now, I like to ask this trivia question: "Who is the Minister of Agriculture in Ottawa?" Only rarely do I get the right answer.

Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): There is none.

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac): According to my colleague from Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, there is none. He is not totally wrong, because in Quebec, our Minister of Agriculture is Marcel Landry. It is Marcel Landry, and not the Minister of Agriculture whose name I will not tell, because the House of Commons Standing Orders prevent me from doing so. Therefore, I am not contributing to his promotion in Quebec.

All kidding aside, the parliamentary secretary should come to Quebec, and I would bet my bottom dollar that, out of ten farmers, not one would be able to give the name of our Minister of Agriculture in Ottawa. Quite often, those who can give it say it wrong and only give his last name.

Farmers in our province are much more attached to Quebec than to Ottawa, and I must say that I am proud of it. I am very proud of it. And the day will soon come, I think, when our farmers will understand that it would be so simple, instead of having three options for borrowing money—two of them being federal—, to at least combine them. It would be cost effective. This would be a good way to save \$25 or \$30 million without it hurting too much.

The other day, I was listening to the Minister of Finance say to his colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot: "Give me some areas where I can make cuts, where I can save some money". I am giving you one, the farming industry. Combine these two possible options for borrowing money. You will save at least \$25 or \$30 million. Taxpayers would be thrilled. Also, farmers would save time and effort. Instead of having to check which one would be best, they would have to see only one. The ideal solution for our farmers would be to keep only one of the two, the Quebec one: the Société de financement agricole du Québec.

• (1045)

Thank you for your attention and, in concluding, I would like to mention that we will vote for Bill C-75, because we cannot do otherwise.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I assure the House that in Saskatchewan farmers do know the name of the agriculture minister but their faces are not glowing or smiling when they think of his name.