

*Western Canada Drought*

able to benefit. These financial contributions, Mr. Speaker, demonstrate the federal Government's commitment to ensuring that the agricultural sector in Canada remains a viable and profitable industry. I am pleased to point out that today, the Minister of Agriculture announced the last payments provided under the Crop Disaster Assistance Program for Western farmers. This means that the balance of \$64 million will be paid shortly to the farmers, a payment that covers an area of over 21 million acres. Farmers will be able to face the current crop year with more assurance and, of course, a better cash flow.

The Government has been able to face emergency situations whenever they arose. But of course, Mr. Speaker, ideally we need a permanent solution to the funding problem in case of disasters. This is why the federal Government has been making concerted efforts with the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Under a new crop insurance program farmers will benefit from additional coverage without having to pay a premium for 1986. The purpose of this is to eliminate the need for special assistance and set up an over-all assistance program. This is included in the third phase of a drought program recommended by the task force.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, drought conditions have had devastating effects on Canadian agriculture, but steps have been taken to lighten the financial burden of producers. They are beginning the crop year with hope while getting ready to minimize the disastrous consequences of future natural calamities.

Mr. Speaker, ever since the Conservative Government took office in September 1984, several measures have been taken to help the farming community in both eastern and western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I must confess to being very proud to belong to a Government which has decided to give priority to agriculture in our economy and to help needy farmers. However we know that agriculture is now in a transition period, and I am sure that more concerted efforts on the part of the provinces, the federal Government and all agricultural interests will go a long way towards facing up to the challenge of the future.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, in 1985 the American Congress passed legislation which may very well have an impact on our farmers.

When there is a drought or a disaster or, for instance, when as in recent days, the weather is unsettled... We heard a while ago that very strong winds are expected in the Ottawa Valley. I hope the farmers in the Petite Nation area and in the northern part of my riding will not be hit by that storm because we know how important this is and the crop insurance programs, and their various schemes are not that good for helping farmers. They want at the end of their crop year to reap benefits from their crops.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate.

I know that I only have ten minutes but I would like to say as a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, that I often meet with farmers in my riding. Besides, during the forthcoming months I intend to have action taken on behalf of the apple producers in my riding who came to ask the Minister for monies under a program. Of course, I entirely support them.

In 1983, there was a drought in my riding and no help could be provided. I am pleased to see that as far as the drought in the Prairies is concerned, our Government has already taken action.

[English]

**Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House requests the production of papers regarding the drought in western Canada, papers that were supposedly produced by the Hon. Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Gustafson) and presented to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in order to determine the drought payments to be made across western Canada. The effect of this was acceptable in that farmers did receive some drought payments, but there are a great many people who are not particularly satisfied with the payments that were made. Several thousand of them have appealed the decision to make the payments that were made.

It is our understanding that the recommendations that were made to the Prime Minister and Cabinet regarding the drought payments indicated the need for larger payments than the ones that were made, but that is hearsay. In fact, we have become a little suspicious. After all the stonewalling that has gone on about producing these papers, we wonder if the Hon. Member for Assiniboia ever did write a report. We have no indication that he did. Obviously, the study should have culminated in a report, but after a while we become a little suspicious if we do not see some evidence that the report was ever written. Perhaps there is nothing to table.

Many years ago when the Liberals were in power, we were not promised too much regarding freedom of information and we did not receive too much.

● (1810)

For many years a great parliamentarian, the late Walter Baker, as a member of the Conservative Party when it was in opposition, campaigned in an attempt to establish the basic concept of freedom of information. He worried that perhaps we would get too much information, that we would be flooded with information, and that we would not be able to use it well. It seems as if the late Walter Baker did not realize that his own Party would be the obstruction in the possibility of obtaining too much information.

When it was in opposition, the Conservative Party promised to move very quickly into the area of freedom of information. Many past Members spoke eloquently in an attempt to convince the former Liberal Government that it should move in that direction. It is somewhat disappointing for Canadians