

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River):** Mr. Speaker, I am extremely happy to have a chance to speak on this bill. I had hoped to be able to speak on second reading, but it ended fairly abruptly last week. It was with some pleasure that I realized I would have a chance to express a Saskatchewan perspective on the question of forestry.

It may come as a surprise to many members of this House and the people of Canada, if like my esteemed colleague from Prince George—Bulkley Valley, they have not visited the forests of Saskatchewan or flown over or driven through southern Saskatchewan, have the perception that there is not a tree in Saskatchewan. I know there are trees in Saskatchewan. I have planted about 2,000 of them on my farm. My family now has to look after those trees and they know that there are trees, at least on that patch of ground.

It is a little recognized fact, and one of the problems that the Saskatchewan forest industry faces, that 46 per cent of the land area of the province of Saskatchewan is in forests and 20 per cent of that is commercial forests. If you contrast that with 40 per cent in agriculture you realize that the commercial forests are half the size of the agricultural portion of Saskatchewan.

In my constituency of Prince Albert—Churchill River, 90 per cent is forested. It is a major issue in half of the geographic area of Saskatchewan. Through the years, it has been very difficult for that fact to be recognized, especially in our own province. Forestry is the second leading industry in Saskatchewan; 10 per cent of the gross provincial product comes from the forestry sector, both direct and indirect. In 1985, \$290 million and probably more now, of income to the province was generated by the forests. As well, 8,000 people are employed in the forestry sector.

What happens in forestry is very important to the people of Saskatchewan, although it admittedly has not been a leading player in the forestry scene in Canada historically. Since agriculture is so dominant in Saskatchewan, that tends to be the leading economic debate. The population of the forested areas is sparse, therefore it does not have the numerical or political representation on the federal scene. It is a mere 6 per cent of the forests of Canada, and although it is a very significant land area and income generator that often does not get recognized.

It was, however, recognized by my predecessor, a former member for Prince Albert, the Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker, who took a major initiative in this country by bring in the ARDA program in the late 1950s as an attempt to bring to life the economy of those communities that relied both on agriculture and forestry. That was a pioneering step, one which we should re-examine and perhaps consider reintroducing. In the context of the new department, some of those ideas might well be brought back.

I personally became involved with the forestry sector in Saskatchewan in 1982 when there was a major forestry congress in Saskatchewan. It was a very successful congress. The Saskatchewan Forestry Association, the industry and the unions, the IWA, the CPU, felt it was time that we as a sector in Saskatchewan took a hold of the situation, put our views on the record, analyzed what we had, and charted a common game plan.

At that time, the first round of FRDA agreements were in the process of negotiation and a large part of our intent was to create some kind of vehicle for input into that process. It turned out very well. The awareness within the province jumped to another level. Coupled with the activities that occurred as a result of that FRDA agreement, in many ways forestry has experienced its best seven years in the history in our province.

• (1740)

I would very much like to second the motion of my colleague for Prince George—Bulkley Valley that public information be a significant portion of the new department. It was an amendment that was adopted. I think activities like the forestry congress to launch the new FRDAs—and hopefully there are FRDAs—or to acquaint people with the activities of this department might well be a route to go. A congress like that every five years or so in every province is an excellent way to get the sector in thinking on the same wavelength.

FRDA had a funding level of \$28 million, \$14 million from the federal government, \$14 million from the provincial government. It did some significant things. In firefighting, it allowed the development of a computer and a detection system that Saskatchewan did not have before. They purchased inventory and new equipment, trained people, and so on.