

South Saskatchewan River

tive party as to the need for this national development. It reads:

Irrigation development is essential if we are to stabilize agriculture in Saskatchewan and the principal project proposed in the province is known as the South Saskatchewan river development. We ask your support in urging the earliest possible commencement of construction on this project. The farmers of Saskatchewan have maintained a constant struggle to overcome the uncertainties of rainfall in the area that could be served by this project.

In large parts of southern Saskatchewan there is recurrent drought. It is so recurrent that in eight of the past nine years Prairie Farm Assistance Act bonuses have been paid in several rural municipalities. There are some who will criticize me for requesting that this work be undertaken now because it will mean a large outlay by the state. I have never in this house advocated the expenditure of moneys unless the project be self-liquidating and will return national dividends. I do not believe that a member's duty is to be continuously asking the government to build this, or extend that work, in his constituency and I have never followed that policy.

In the interests of Canada, undertakings such as the recently announced Canso project, the trans-Canada highway, and this project are necessary, not from a provincial viewpoint alone but in the national interest.

I refer once more to this letter. It says:

The farmers of Saskatchewan have maintained a constant struggle to overcome the uncertainties of rainfall in the area that could be served by this project. A dam on the South Saskatchewan river near Outlook would provide water to irrigate over half a million acres. Each acre of irrigated land helps to stabilize the agriculture on 20 acres of adjoining dry land. The average size of farms in this area today is 480 acres, under irrigation the average farm is 120 acres, so the farm population would be quadrupled. Urban populations would show a corresponding increase to provide services for the farmer on the irrigated land.

The area proposed for irrigation development has required drought relief in the past 25 years of \$43 million and the Prairie Farm Assistance Act payments in the period of 1939-47 of \$14 million or the staggering total of \$57 million and this does not include road building or public works relief construction.

Those figures indicate the value and the necessity of this work being undertaken in the national interest.

I proceed now to refer to another portion of the letter which reads:

It is essential that the economy of Saskatchewan be diversified. We cannot maintain a sound economy if all our farmers are to depend entirely on wheat. Fluctuations in income due to unstable climate and prices have caused depression and hardship in the past. Under irrigation we would have diversity of production such as livestock, sugar beets, peas, beans, alfalfa and coarse grains.

These are but a few of the national benefits that would proceed from this work being gone ahead with immediately.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

I will summarize the benefits that will accrue from this work not only in Saskatchewan but generally throughout the Dominion of Canada. It will provide certainty of crop production in an area where the incidence of crop failure is three years in ten. It will provide diversity of production where at present grain growing, mostly wheat, is predominant. It will provide for increased livestock production. It will provide stability for the farmer, the labourer, the merchant, the manufacturer and the transportation system. It will assure tax stability by maintaining reasonably uniform production and income. It will assure an increased population, both rural and urban, due to smaller farms and increased services demanded of the urban population in villages, towns and cities. It will provide for the development of industry to process the products of the irrigated land. It will provide power for industrial and domestic use.

In that connection I might mention that the plan as projected by the engineers will produce over 500,000 electric horsepower, over half of which would be available for industrial and rural electrification in Saskatchewan. It will provide for the continuation of the work being done in the restoration of the levels of Long lake, the Qu'Appelle lakes and also other lakes adjacent thereto. Those are a few of the benefits which will follow from this work. Above all, this work will assure national dividends by maintaining in Saskatchewan tens of thousands of people who will thereby be assured of a reasonably certain income in the years to come. It will assure a reduction in the amounts now being paid out in prairie farm assistance.

I shall not go into particulars as to the nature of the project. The cost is approximately \$63 million. That cost will be saved in a few years as a result of the reduction in the amounts now being paid, in prairie farm assistance. The saving will be multiplied over the years in the increased value that these lands will acquire, for the estimate is that the lands in this area affected by this irrigation project will increase in value approximately four times. It is necessary, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) will agree. Our people in Saskatchewan in the face of difficulties have shown a courage that, if equalled, has never been excelled anywhere in our country. They have faced drought. They have faced the ruin that follows grasshopper infestation. They have faced three in ten years of reasonably good crops, often followed by partial failure in the other seven years. Irrigation will insure the farmer in this area against much of the present crop failures.

This project—and it is admitted it will have the results that I have referred to—must not