

Advance Payments

reply on March 10 saying that he thought the provision was worth reviewing again and he undertook to re-examine the regulations in this regard when the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act is next opened up for amendment. The good Senator started to take a look at it after the matter was raised by my friend from Prince Albert.

After that he raised the question in the House. He directed questions to the Minister of State for External Relations (Mr. Pepin) who was then in charge of transportation. He shakes his head no. In any event, he raised the question in the House, saying that the Act as written discriminated against farm wives. At that time the cash advance was some \$15,000. To explain to those people who might not know what a cash advance is, it means a farmer could get an advance on the grain stored in his bins. The maximum is \$15,000. Under the old Act, which we are amending today, if there was a partnership that \$15,000 could be doubled to \$30,000. If there were three partners, it became \$45,000. But that was not the case if your partner was your spouse. In 99 per cent of the cases the spouse, of course, is the wife because it is the man who is registered as the permit book holder. Despite the fact that the wife is a full-time farmer and equally responsible for the work on the farm, when she applied for a cash advance she was turned down. That was discrimination against women, it was wrong, we all now think it was wrong, and it is just too bad we took so many years to correct it.

I wanted to give credit to the Hon. Member for Prince Albert for initiating this matter, for raising it in the House and writing to the Minister. He also went to the Human Rights Commission and launched a complaint in his campaign to make sure we had a change in the law. I have a report from Stan Hovdebo, MP for Prince Albert, dated February 1, 1981 concerning the fight against discrimination in this legislation. I also know from personal experience that he discussed this issue with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. He talked about it with our local action committee in Saskatchewan. So it is a great pleasure for me to say a few words in testimony to the work that Hon. Member has done. Unfortunately he is not here today, he is back in his riding office in Prince Albert, but I had a chance to speak to him very briefly on that earlier this afternoon.

The other important point about the Bill before us today is the doubling of the cash advance from \$15,000 to \$30,000. Farmers have been calling for this, as we have on this side of the House, for several weeks. I am pleased it is in the Bill and it will be of some use to the prairie farmers.

I want to make the point that the solution to the problems being faced by ordinary farmers on the Prairies is not only advancing them more credit. We have to find a more lasting solution which will provide them with the means to stay on the farm and continue farming. I am very fearful that if we continue this kind of drift we will get larger and larger farms and eventually the day will come when we have just a few large corporate farms covering several townships of land. The small towns and communities will practically disappear and we will be like the State of Colorado which has very few farms, all

basically run by large corporations, and the farm workers are paid a minimum wage, not unionized and exploited right down the line. With this, of course, comes the destruction of the fabric of rural life which we have known in this country ever since it was opened up in western Canada back around the turn of the century and even before.

● (1440)

I would like to suggest at this time, Mr. Speaker, that we do something immediately to stimulate the farm economy. We need an immediate injection of cash into the hands of farmers. I would like to suggest to the Minister and his officials that we should persuade the Cabinet to eliminate the federal gas tax on farm fuel. There are three or four different kinds of gas tax on farm fuel. There is the sales tax, the well-head charge, the Canadian ownership charge and so on. These taxes amount to around 30 cents for every gallon a farmer buys to plant his crops, cultivate his land and harvest the crops in the fall.

I believe we should be eliminating those federal fuel taxes. That would cost the federal treasury a couple of hundred million dollars. In effect, we would be giving the small and average farmer in the country an immediate stimulation of hundreds of dollars. In many cases it would be \$1,000 or \$2,000. This would go a long way toward keeping farmers on the land. Farmers are running a Canadian-owned business. This money would be kept right here at home. Farmers are great spenders. They will spend this money. They will buy more farm machinery which will help places like Brantford, Ontario. They will make more repairs and fix up their buildings. This will stimulate the economy right across the board. I cannot think of a better way of stimulating the economy and trying to make a dent in the unemployment rate in urban Canada than by stimulating the farm economy.

I come from Yorkton-Melville and if one eliminates the native population, according to the latest census data my riding has the lowest per capita income in Saskatchewan. Perhaps that is why the gas tax is more important to me than it is to most Members of the House. We have more small, marginal and average farmer than any other riding in Saskatchewan. In the Yorkton area there are still a lot of farmers on a half section, three-quarters or section of land who are having an extremely difficult time making ends meet. Many farmers are massively into debt and just cannot afford the high interest rates and high energy costs we are experiencing. A saving of an extra thousand dollars on farm fuel would help immensely to keep them on the land. I appeal to Members of the House not only to pass the legislation before us, but to do something substantial and significant for the ordinary farmers of the land.

Farm bankruptcies in my area have doubled in the last year or so. I believe the same is true in other areas as well. I do not know what is going to happen to some of those people. I have met with several farmers who have just lost their land or are in the process of losing their land. Some of these people are forty or fifty years old and have no other particular skill or trade that they can exercise. Some of them are younger, of course,