

Adjournment Debate

I think that would have been better for the farmers of the country.

We Canadians have a responsibility not just to our own countrymen but to other countries around the world not blessed with the natural resources we have here. What has this minister presided over during his term of office? As we all know, farming is a very risky business. We risk bad markets, weather, hail storms, all kinds of weeds and everything else we associate with the variables of farming. During this minister's tenure he has allowed the government to become the dominant variable, to the point that people are now cutting back on production. This is not because of the variables with which they have learned to live over the centuries. I just mentioned some of the things farmers must cope with, such as weather. There is a common joke; we blame the CPR for everything, including hail storms! Farmers in my part of the country have learned to live with all of these things, but they are now finding it impossible to live with the variables this government has imposed on them.

The Minister of Agriculture cannot have it both ways; he cannot go around the country saying that the banks are the bad guys and that they should not be lending unlimited amounts of money, implying that people get themselves into trouble because of all the money they borrow and cannot repay. The minister cannot say those things while at the same time supporting his government's policies which deliberately keep interest rates high. I could give all kinds of examples of those policies, but I do not have the time to do so tonight. The simple fact is that this government supports the policies of the Bank of Canada and Mr. Bouey, and that is the main reason we have high interest rates. If the Minister of Agriculture were to choose to take up that cause, go to bat in the cabinet, in public and everywhere and resign on this issue, he would earn a tremendous amount of credibility from the agricultural community in this country. I cannot emphasize too strongly, Mr. Speaker, that the budget contained virtually nothing for farmers and that it literally gutted the Small Business Development Bond. In fact, they do not even call it a Small Business Development Bond, they call it the small business bond. There are no guidelines available to the banks as yet. We met with the Royal Bank of Canada on Tuesday night and the bank officials stated that they had not received any guidelines on how the small business bond would be made available to the farming community and that they would go ahead on their own and begin to make loans.

● (2205)

Surely it is incumbent upon the minister to see that there are some guidelines available to the banks so that the banks can then come along and assist farmers in difficulty. I know the Parliamentary Secretary will get up and read a bunch of things that have been prepared by the department and he will talk about all the great things that the minister did. I find that unfortunate.

I shall close, Mr. Speaker, by wishing the chairman of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, who has recently suffered

some illness, a speedy recovery and a Merry Christmas to everyone in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Ostiguy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): In reply to the question asked by my colleague opposite concerning interest rates, I would like to point out to him that it is very interesting to see that some people are trying to prove with statistics what the hon. member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) is now saying to the effect that the refinancing made possible through the Farm Credit Corporation and announced in the budget will only save \$15 in interests per farmer. My hon. colleague was very careful not to say per farmer in Canada, which is the true basis of his figures.

If he had used these words, Mr. Speaker, we would have seen immediately the irrelevance of his comments since the government has never pretended to reduce interest rates paid by every single farmer. On the contrary, this program has always been aimed at those in dire straits. I believe that the folder recently published by the Farm Credit Corporation at the request or for the use of farmers clearly shows that this is a program designed to provide financial assistance during a difficult period. Nearly all eligibility requirements can be found in this folder as well as the maximum amount provided, and so on.

Finally, every farmer who receives the maximum refinancing amount of \$200,000 from the Farm Credit Corporation will save not \$15,000, but up to \$28,000 over two years if he pays the current interest rates of 18¾ per cent, since interest on loans now being granted by the Farm Credit Corporation to those in difficulty is 11¾ per cent, which means that the Corporation is offering a 7 per cent discount on interest rates. While the number of farmers in dire straits is certainly higher than it would appear from bankruptcy data, it must be recognized that they are still a minority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary, but his time has expired.

Mr. Ostiguy: It is already over, Mr. Speaker, but I had so much to say.

[*English*]

PETRO-CANADA—QUERY RESPECTING LOCATION FOR HEAVY OIL UPGRADER IN SASKATCHEWAN. (B) RESPONSIBILITY FOR SITE DECISION

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I take part in this adjournment debate to try to solicit some information on a question that I asked on December 9 of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde). I find the reply strange, as I took the time, and felt I did the right thing, to give the minister prior notice that I would ask a question regarding something in the constituency of Kindersley-Lloydminster, which is of utmost importance to that area