

publicly by all concerned, and that includes farm producers, rural communities, provincial governments and our Canadian parliament.

● (1240)

This statement today is the first official comment on the drought crisis that the minister or any department has made. I would only add that it is long overdue. The drought is here, especially in the west. It is still here. The signs, to anyone able and willing to observe, were apparent three years ago. This past winter was the third successive winter drought, and it was also the most serious of the three. Soil moisture reserves have been steadily declining for well over three years. Last year's excellent growth was a miracle. It resulted from just two rains, one in June and one in August. The rains in the last two days over a big part of western Canada are very timely. I must add that they are the first of any consequence since last August. All Canadians should give thanks for this life-saving event, especially those in western Canada. The minister, quite properly, pointed out that not all of the drought areas received relief with this timely rain. I would be less than truthful if I did not point out that the southeast corner of Alberta, my constituency of Medicine Hat, received only about one-tenth of an inch.

I wish to thank the minister for this statement, even if it is late in the season and late in the day. The urgency is so great that there will be a sense of relief that the federal government has at least recognized there is a drought and that it will continue in spite of the good rain. It will take three or four feet of wet snow, or five or six inches of rain to make any surface water for stock watering on the short grass ranges of Saskatchewan and southern Alberta. Both of these possibilities are highly improbable. I emphasize, in response to the minister's first sentence that the situation is still serious, that there is no question of "if it becomes serious": it is serious.

I welcome the statement about the long-term program in the event of an extended drought. I hope it is not extended, of course, but the continental signs indicate otherwise and we should be planning accordingly. The cost-sharing statement with reference to the provinces is welcome and, I am sure, will be taken up by the provinces on the prairies. The special reference to water is also most appropriate. I hope some further detail will be forthcoming about this subject. I refer to this sentence on page 2 of the statement:

There will be assistance measures to keep up the quality and supply of water in streamflow.

The word "supply" is intriguing. What is meant by it? Does it mean an increase in supply and, if so, how will this be provided? The deep-well program will receive instant acceptance and co-operation in Alberta since they have already announced a program there. It was announced on Tuesday of this week. I am sure this will be received in the same way by the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. I note the reference to "farms and rural communities". I can only assume this includes small towns now seriously short of domestic water supplies. There is some real urgency there. I ask the

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minister if the "emergency help for livestock operations" refers to pipelines and pumping for stock water. These are details that should be forthcoming very shortly.

I want now to refer to a short paragraph in the statement on page 4 which reads as follows:

Our agricultural weather experts in Ottawa have been using computers to predict the way in which given moisture conditions would affect summer crops and livestock this summer. Computer maps showing these predictions allow us to see in an instant the main trouble areas, and plan to help them.

This is a commendable statement, but why not share this vital information with farmers on a nationwide scale, with all the details? Why be so secretive about it? If the information is there, and I believe it is, it is available on a continental basis. Let us hear about it and not make a political issue of it. Toward the end of his statement the minister said as appears on page 5:

As everyone knows, it was too early then and it is too early now to react as if a severe drought is upon us.

May I repeat that, Mr. Speaker.

As everyone knows, it was too early then and it is too early now to react as if a severe drought is upon us.

I say it is not too early, Mr. Speaker. I say to the minister, to this House and to the nation, read and reread the history books, especially about the dirty thirties, those ten years of dirty thirties, and remember Harry Truman's admonition, "the only thing new is history we haven't read yet." Let us hear more of the new steering committee. What is on the agenda? Have they met yet? Let us hear about it all across the nation. The task force headquartered in Regina should be a useful approach provided it is given a big green light. That includes PFRA which is able and willing to perform. But it has to be given the go-ahead now.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that there are three principal groups deeply involved in this drought emergency. The most important is the farmers themselves and that, of course, includes cattle producers. Then there are the provincial governments and, finally, the federal government. I want to suggest that farmers have already made significant sacrifices because of this draught—especially cattle producers—by reducing their herds so drastically. Also, at least some provincial governments have acted, and I am sure others will follow. The challenge now, surely, is with the federal government to show leadership and understanding. I hope that this includes a new look at a tax incentive for farmers to help them get over this extended drought period which we are heading into.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, lest anyone question my credentials for responding to this statement, may I point out that like a number of members in this House, I have a particularly valid credential in that I vividly remember what happened in this country, especially in western Canada, in the 1930s. I regret that my colleagues from agricultural constituencies are not able to be here so that one of them might respond, but I am happy to do so on behalf of my party. I join with the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave) in saying that the most significant thing about this statement is that it has been made. It is significant that