

Adjournment Debate

procrastination by the Minister of Agriculture who says that he has a committee which is working on this problem, but he cannot get around to making a recommendation for action. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is calling for action. They have identified this as one of the most serious climatic disasters in the history of the province and are calling on the Government to provide a massive \$500 million dollar drought aid package.

● (1825)

The Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), with what appeared to be only a weekend's notice, were able to commit \$1 billion to the Canadian Commercial Bank depositors. Surely after five to seven weeks, the Government can make a commitment to the farmers in Saskatchewan, Alberta and other area of the West that have been devastated by this disaster. If that decision is not made, the situation will continue and farmers will be driven to welfare and uncertainty. I want to emphasize the urgency of this matter. The Government should stop procrastinating. It is also important that the Government make the payment directly to the farmers.

With respect to assistance for livestock producers, the province announced a program, saying that it would go to Ottawa to obtain more assistance. The federal Government, with a flourish, announced its program and indicated that the one program was supplementary to the other. In fact, the province grabbed the federal assistance so that the individual livestock producers ended up with nothing more than the provincial help. The Government should act soon and I hope that whatever form that assistance takes it will make the payment directly to the farmer so that the viability of this industry can be preserved. It is a matter of national urgency.

Mr. Len Gustafson (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question put by the Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster). I am sure he knows that we have spent the summer attending many meetings in the areas he has mentioned which have been devastated by drought. I want to assure him and the House that the Government has taken this issue very seriously.

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) went to the Prairies and met the farmers in several areas, along with the Agriculture Ministers of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Subsequent to

that meeting, the Government responded quickly with respect to livestock in Phase 1 of the task force report. This amounted to some \$48 million to the farmers to maintain their livestock herds.

The Hon. Member specifically mentioned the cost-sharing arrangement. He certainly should know that the arrangements between the province and the federal Government was cost sharing and the federal Government's commitment was \$30 per head to the livestock producers. He must also understand that these agreements must be with all of the provinces on a fair basis and on a cost sharing arrangement.

With regard to Phase 2, any special assistance will be in addition to the crop insurance payments to Prairie producers, which are expected to total \$500 million this year. The committee is now hard at work reviewing assistance requirements for crop damage. The full damage has not yet been assessed and, of course, it cannot be fully assessed until the crops are in. It would be irresponsible of the Government to prematurely put in place an assistance program for crop damage that may or may not be adequate to respond to the need. However, I can assure this House, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, that the committee will be in a position to make suggestions to the Minister just as soon as all the facts are on the table. I can also give the assurance that this Government will act quickly and responsibly once those recommendations have been received.

● (1830)

I also want to assure this House and the farmers of western Canada that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has been very concerned and asked me to report on a daily basis to him as to the seriousness of the drought. I am sure the farmers are very thankful for the type of consideration that has been given by this Government. I know in speaking to many of the livestock producers that they have been very pleased with the response which this Government has given.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 3(1).

The House adjourned at 6.32 p.m.