

Adjournment Debate

things done in that area. That has not been the case, but it must be the case in future if we are to have acceptance on the part of the public of the kind of rehabilitation programs the government wants to put into effect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lachance: Mr. Speaker, if you permit me to call it ten o'clock, I will be able to make my speech tomorrow.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION—SUFFIELD COMMUNITY PASTURE—REQUEST FOR PERMANENT OPERATION

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, in this adjournment debate I wish to continue the discussions I have already had with the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson) relating to the recent decision of the Department of National Defence that "grazing should not be permitted in 1976 and possibly for several years thereafter", that is, in the Suffield PFRA pasture near Medicine Hat.

● (2200)

On February 19 I addressed a question to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Lessard) based on a most unfortunate and irresponsible press release issued by wildlife and fish and games interests in Alberta, the first sentence of which reads as follows:

The native grasslands of the Suffield Military Reserve, approximately 1,000 square miles of what was once one of the ecologically most valuable natural areas left in North America have been almost totally destroyed by the mismanagement of the Canada Department of Agriculture, Department of National Defence and the PFRA administration.

In my opinion it was sentiments such as this quotation, essentially from environmental and wildlife interests, that were instrumental in influencing the Suffield base commander to recommend to the Minister of National Defence that PFRA pasture grazing should cease. In doing so the Minister of National Defence chose to reject the very practical recommendation of his cabinet colleague, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion.

In essence the PFRA report stated that there has been no unalterable damage done to the ecology of the range, although there is some damage; that PFRA could improve conditions with better distribution and more uniform grazing, with increased watering facilities, but this requires extra financing which is presently not available under the temporary operation of the pasture.

PFRA recommends that under the strict terms of reference for use of the Suffield pasture—that it only be available under emergency drought conditions—no grazing be permitted because of the excellent growth here in 1975 but

that, if required, the pasture could operate this year with reduced numbers of cattle.

This latter suggestion is a sensible recommendation that any cattleman can support as it is a policy he would follow on his own pastures; I mean by that he would make the cattle numbers fit the available grass.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that these PFRA recommendations were prepared by agronomists like Dr. Bob Lodge and PFRA director Walter Thomson who have a history of over 40 years of PFRA pasture administration to back up their practical knowledge and experience.

I take some considerable pride in pointing out that PFRA has always agreed with my personal view since serving in this House that the emergency drought term of usage is ridiculous in determining if the Suffield pasture shall be used on a year to year basis.

Surely now is the time to establish a policy of an on-going permanent pasture so that proper management, with adequate financing, can develop sufficient watering facilities and good range management. It does not follow that a permanent pasture will permit indiscriminate grazing with excessive cattle numbers. Cattlemen ranchers are by nature the very best conservationists. Their long-time livelihood depends on their understanding of and co-operation with nature.

Production of short grass on the Suffield pasture is the highest and best use of these lands and the multiple use concept of these lands by cattle, wildlife—including rattlesnakes—and even gas wells, is a long established land use principle that must continue to be recognized.

We are not so desperate yet for food that the Suffield pasture should be stocked completely with deer and antelope—and no cattle. Cattle and sheep are much more efficient converters of grass to meat. The Suffield pasture will support approximately 5,000 head of breeding cattle—I refer now specifically to the PFRA pasture—at a maximum quota of 20 head per patron, and that means some 250 farmers, all small cattle producers, will be severely affected by this order.

Since this entire area is primarily a ranching or grazing area these local farmers have not been able to take advantage of better grain markets, whereas cattle markets currently leave much to be desired.

I know that the minister and his parliamentary secretary are very well aware of this situation. I would ask the minister to consider again the recommendations of the PFRA staff and confer with his cabinet colleague, the Minister of National Defence, to work out some sensible compromise solution that will permit the Suffield pasture to operate this year perhaps on a limited basis. At least it should continue to operate. The good public relations that would accrue to his department, and indeed to the Department of National Defence, would be well worth while.

I want to point out that the use of the main Suffield area by the United Kingdom for tank training is now in its sixth year of a 10-year contract. I suggest it is not too early to begin to establish a policy for the future use of this 1,000 square mile area. I further suggest that the government of Alberta should be foremost in these future policy deliberations if only because the lands are, after all, Alberta lands, overlaying one of the largest proven natural gas fields in