

Honourable senators, this is a very important matter, and I am sure that senators who are far more knowledgeable than I will be able to make a valuable contribution to this debate. I can express concern, but I cannot readily provide a solution.

When I lived in Brandon, Manitoba, my landlord, Mr. Tinline, a most excellent man—I am sure Senator Olson has heard of him—as a young agriculturalist, played a major role in the soil rehabilitation program of the Prairies. It was his great fear, anxiety, indeed dread, that some day that terrible erosion, that terrible depletion of the good soil of the Prairies, would occur again. I was a little surprised and saddened—although the degree of suffering is not important, because we know this is a terrible situation—to hear Senator Olson say that, in terms of rainfall, the situation is worse now than it was in the mid-thirties. That is shocking. We thank him for his serious presentation of this grave problem.

Hon. Len Marchand: Honourable senators, I want to say a few words in support of the motion by Senator Olson. I confirm that just this morning I was in touch with the general manager of the B.C. Cattlemen's Association, Mr. Lorne Leach, who advised me of the current seriousness of the drought. He also informed me that he, on behalf of the cattlemen of British Columbia, has been in touch with the provincial and federal Ministers of Agriculture, suggesting measures that can be taken. I think Senator Olson has outlined some of those measures. Those measures should be taken soon.

Mr. Leach had mentioned that they not only want to look at the current situation but they want to take some measures that might be considered long term, for example, waterhole development. I do not know if senators here know anything about how waterholes are built in the rangelands of British Columbia, but waterhole development is very much a part of range management. In good years and normal years cattlemen are able to scoop out a piece of earth from the rangeland where they might see some dampness. Waterholes—at least, good ones—will generally last all summer.

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At the present time you can almost walk across the South Thompson River because the water is so low. The waterholes on the rangelands are dry. Quite a few wells are dry. The cattlemen are having to haul water from various areas to keep things going, and that is costly. There are situations where they are now trying to move cattle to areas where there might be some grass, but it is a costly proposition to move cattle 100, 200 or 300 miles.

The drought area covers quite a large part of the interior of British Columbia. It is in the Cariboo area; it is in the Kamloops area; it is in the Okanagan; and it is a little in the Prince George area as well. If this body can see fit to pass the motion that Senator Olson has put forward, I am sure that fact could go a long way to indicating to the minister that urgent action should be taken. This is not confined to just the Prairie regions of the country. It includes a large area of British Columbia.

I would like to assure honourable senators that the ranchers in the interior of British Columbia would appreciate very much if something could be done.

I would also like to confirm something that Senator Olson mentioned. In my conversation with Mr. Leach, he said that he would be able to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry on a moment's notice to make some representations and suggestions, which the cattlemen of British Columbia agree with. They know that this problem cannot be solved overnight. One of the greatest things that could happen is to have rain, but we have not had that. There have been rainfalls here and there, and perhaps pasture situations in some of the areas have improved, but not enough. There is still a dire need to do something on a short-term basis.

Hon. C. William Doody (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, first, I would like to refer to the opening comments of Senator Olson. He stated that someone had suggested to him that there was no reference to a budget, and I agree with him. Obviously, if he is not going to spend any money, then he certainly does not need permission.

Another point that I would like to raise—and here I am trying to be helpful—is that it is not my intention to ask for a sunset clause. In the rules of the Senate it says that a sunset clause should be included in a motion, and I thought it might save Senator Olson time and inconvenience if he had put one in. Certainly I have no intention of trying to delay the progress of this very worthwhile motion on its way to the committee. Anything that can be done to help alleviate the tragic situation that the farmers in Western Canada are experiencing at this point should certainly be done.

Once again, I would like to re-emphasize the comments made by the Leader of the Government in the Senate to the effect that the government is very much aware of the problem. It has been monitoring it very carefully and is taking whatever steps it can to alleviate the problem. I am sure it will treat the situation with the same kind of care and attention that it has treated other problems that have arisen within the farming community in the past.

Hon. David A. Croll: Honourable senators, I am a product of the Great Depression and the great drought. I was in office at the time; I was a minister of the Crown.

I remember the help that was given to the west. However, people made a lot of noise about it; they were not quiet. They were not quiet in Parliament; they were not quiet in the provincial parliaments. They were screaming, "Do something! Do something!" However, we did not quite know what to do.

I knew what the situation was out west at that time because I went out and saw it. Senator Olson has said to me, "Dave, you ain't seen nothing yet. It's much worse than it was then." I get around as much as anyone, and I do not remember anyone saying to me, "How are the westerners getting on with the drought?" Nobody talks about it; nobody says anything about it.

We have many methods of communication today. Not too many people read newspapers, but this situation should be