

Honourable Senators Olson and Argue, regarding agriculture and the drought situation in western Canada.

Hon. H.A. Olson: Honourable senators, I would like to have the reply read.

Senator Roblin: I would be glad to oblige my honourable friend. He is here in the flesh, he has made the request, and he will get it.

Senator Flynn: Where—in the nose?

Senator Roblin: The Minister of Agriculture agreed to provide \$30 per cow, or an equivalent for other classes of livestock, for Saskatchewan producers, as well as producers in the other affected provinces. It was a decision of the Government of Saskatchewan that the maximum payment should be \$60 per cow. Since they had already made the payment, Mr. Wise had no choice but to reimburse the Saskatchewan treasury for the federal share.

With regard to the government's policy on drought assistance, at this time the policy has not been formulated and will not be formulated until the 1985 crop is harvested and the impact of the losses can be assessed.

Recommendations were made to cabinet with respect to the livestock industry and cabinet was asked quickly to implement them. No recommendations for assistance to grain producers have been made and none will be made until after the harvest. It is expected that cabinet will act quickly upon them as soon as they are put forward.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question with respect to the drought program. Since there is obviously a problem with the harvest in much of this same area because of wet conditions now, as opposed to the drought conditions that created the problems, is the Leader of the Government saying that there will be no decision taken by the government with respect to the grain growers in that area until all the harvest is in, which will likely not be until next spring in some of those areas?

Senator Roblin: I am familiar with the problem my honourable friend has raised. If you have unsatisfactory climatic conditions you have trouble getting the harvest off the fields. I can tell my honourable friend that there is a special committee which is meeting in Regina right now in order to try to bring some finality to this question so that the agricultural community will know what is intended.

Hon. Hazen Argue: Honourable senators, why should the people in the drought area in southern Saskatchewan have to wait for the completion of the harvest in northern Saskatchewan before consideration is given to their plight? Surely, the drought disaster area is well known. The situation there has no relation to and does not depend on the crop which is harvested in any other part of western Canada.

● (1430)

On the basis of the announcement of the \$60 or \$30 from Ottawa as payment to the western beef producers, is the minister aware that the Premier of Saskatchewan, in announcing the \$60 payment in his own press release—I do not have

[Senator Roblin.]

that in my hand, but I can certainly produce it—said that he was going to ask the Government of Canada for additional money for those beef producers?

My question is: Did Mr. Wise send the money to the treasury of Saskatchewan in response to a request by the Premier of Saskatchewan, or the Minister of Agriculture of Saskatchewan, or the Minister of Finance of Saskatchewan, or any member of the Government of Saskatchewan?

Senator Roblin: Honourable senators, I think the answer that has been given to the question is perfectly clear—that is, the Government of Saskatchewan named a sum that it was distributing to the farmers of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada made a contribution to that.

Senator Argue: That was a contribution made to the Government of Saskatchewan, not to the beef producers.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend may say that, but I cannot be expected to answer for the Government of Saskatchewan; I can only tell my honourable friend what the federal government has done in the matter.

Senator Argue: I asked if the Premier of Saskatchewan had asked that he receive the money instead of the beef producers, contrary to what he said in his press release. I cannot hold the minister in Ottawa responsible for what the Premier of Saskatchewan has done, but surely it is a legitimate question to ask whether the money was sent to the Government of Saskatchewan in response to its request, or was it the automatic policy of the Minister of Agriculture of Canada to send that money to the Government of Saskatchewan instead of to the beef producers? It is unbelievable that that could have happened. I cannot understand, for the life of me, how that happened.

Senator Roblin: If my honourable friend had listened carefully to the answer he might have understood, because the answer clearly said that the Government of Saskatchewan had made the payment directly to the farmers before the federal government was in the business, if I may use that expression. Therefore, the federal government's payment was made to the Government of Saskatchewan because the payment to the producers had already been made.

Senator Argue: But you have missed my point. The Government of Saskatchewan said to the beef producers: "Here's \$60 per head paid by the Province of Saskatchewan without strings attached, and watch for more because we are asking Ottawa to add to that payment." After that payment was made, nothing happened. I said from a public platform in Saskatchewan that that was the biggest robbery this country had ever seen; \$16 million at a crack was stolen from the beef producers. It was literally taken from them, because they were promised an extra payment. The Premier of Saskatchewan—not the federal government—broke his word as given in the press release.

Senator Roblin: I cannot comment upon that matter.

Senator Flynn: You have made your point.

Senator Roblin: I can only respond to questions that affect the Government of Canada. I cannot deal with questions