

THE SENATE

Tuesday, May 3, 1977

The Senate met at 8 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.
Prayers.

BANK ACT QUEBEC SAVINGS BANKS ACT BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-39, to amend the Bank Act and the Quebec Savings Banks Act.

Bill read first time.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

Senator Perrault moved that the bill be placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading on Thursday next.

Motion agreed to.

DOCUMENTS TABLED

Senator Perrault tabled:

Capital Budget of The St. Lawrence Seaway Authority for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1978, pursuant to section 70(2) of the Financial Administration Act, Chapter F-10, R.S.C., 1970, together with copy of Order in Council P.C. 1977-896, dated March 30, 1977, approving same.

Copies of Order of the Administrator under the Anti-Inflation Act, pursuant to section 17(3) of the said Act, Chapter 75, Statutes of Canada 1974-75-76, respecting compensation plan between The Corporation of the City of Brantford and its employee group composed of its Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief. Order dated April 29, 1977.

Report of the Department of the Environment for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1976, pursuant to section 7 of the Department of the Environment Act, Part I of Chapter 42, Statutes of Canada, 1970-71-72.

PRAIRIE PROVINCES

DROUGHT CONDITIONS—QUESTION

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, I should like to ask the Leader of the Government a question concerning the worsening drought conditions being reported from the prairie provinces. There is a real concern on the part of prairie farmers about ground water and dust conditions, and the prospects at the moment are among the worst since the 1930s.

I ask the Leader of the Government:

(a) What are the prospective conditions for grain growing and agricultural crops in the prairie provinces?

(b) What is the current situation with respect to water?

(c) Is there any estimate at this time of a possible reduction in grain quantities in the 1977 crop year? If such a reduction in crop prospects is on the horizon, what might this do to grain prices?

• (2010)

Senator Smith (Colchester): Mr. Whelan is going to pray for rain, I think.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, I appreciate the fact that Senator Austin provided prior notice of this inquiry, in the form of a letter, so I have replies to some of his questions. These are important questions for all Canadians.

His first question was: What are the prospective conditions for grain growing and agricultural crops in the prairie provinces?

At the moment, summer fallow crops are expected to be near normal. This could deteriorate, but with the present level of moisture we can expect the yield to be near normal. Stubble crop yields will be 50 per cent to 60 per cent from normal.

The honourable senator's second question was: What is the situation with respect to water, and is there any estimate as to a possible reduction in grain quantities in the 1977 crop year?

Water conditions, particularly in the southern part of the prairies and northwestern part of Ontario, are very low. Any rains, unless a complete torrential downpour, will not fill in streams and reservoirs. The water situation, as far as livestock is concerned, is serious at this moment for ranchers who have cattle out on the range, and if they are dependent on dugouts or shallow wells for water they could have problems. Shallow wells are 100 to 200 feet deep.

We may have to have some emergency or contingency plans to either take cattle to water or, if possible, to pipe water to them where they are being pastured. If they must be taken to water, feed will have to be taken also. The cabinet is considering what emergency plans might be put in place, in cooperation with the provinces.

The situation is also serious for communities on shallow wells, where they are also experiencing difficulty.

The third question was: Are there parallel situations existing in the United States? Yes, particularly in states bordering Canada.

The fourth question was: If reduced crops induce hay and normal animal food such as corn, what will ranchers do with respect to production of beef cattle?