

THE SENATE

Tuesday, May 24, 1988

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.
Prayers.

QUESTION PERIOD

AGRICULTURE

WESTERN CANADA—DROUGHT CONDITIONS—MEETING OF
MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Hon. H.A. Olson: Honourable senators, I would ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate if a meeting between the ministers of agriculture from the four western provinces and the federal minister has been called to deal with the serious drought situation in western Canada.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I do not have the date of such a meeting. I think my friend is aware that a meeting will take place.

Senator Olson: I have a supplementary question. Will the Leader of the Government give us an assurance that he will convey to the minister the urgency of this situation and that, in fact, it is worse today than it was yesterday; it is worse this week than it was last week; and that there is such an extreme emergency that each day's delay has very serious consequences for some people, who have already begun selling off their herds?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, with great respect, I think the honourable senator should cease trying to convey the impression that nothing is being done by provincial and federal governments on this matter.

As I have indicated previously, there is a federal-provincial committee monitoring the situation carefully. There have been contacts at the ministerial level between Ottawa and the provinces, and there will be a meeting between the federal minister and his provincial counterparts.

The honourable senator tries to convey the impression that nobody in the federal government has heard about these conditions. I want to assure him that the interests of western Canada and the serious drought situation there are well known to the large and effective delegation of western Canadian members of the House of Commons.

Senator Olson: If that is true, there has been a long period of time—an unconscionable period of time—between the seriousness of the situation being realized and any action being taken. Before the leader gets that disgusted look on his face, I want to tell him that there are people out there right now—

today, the day before yesterday and last week—who are wondering what the federal government is going to do about this situation. They are now faced with the problem of having no feed for their livestock. I do not know how I can get that through to the leader. All I was asking the minister to do was convey the urgency of the situation so that some action will be taken.

In case he does not know, I can tell him that the livestock auction sales in western Canada are now starting to fill up with brood cows, but that this is not the time of year to sell brood cows unless there is an emergency situation, such as the inability of farmers to feed them.

Day after day those cattle are losing weight. They are losing as much as three pounds to four pounds a day, and at the prices currently set that is costly.

I do not want to get into a speech—

Senator Argue: Go ahead.

Senator Olson: —but the government ought to move on this. I do not offer any apologies to the leader for trying to indicate that the emergency is now and yet no action has been taken.

I ask politely again if the leader would convey to the authorities in the federal government that the urgency is now, not some time later after the government has monitored the situation some more.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, with great respect, it is not necessary to convey to the responsible minister, or to the elected representatives of the people of western Canada, the urgency of this situation. They are well aware of the urgency of the situation.

Senator Olson: I can advise my honourable friend that the livestock producers in western Canada have been given no indication of positive action of which they are aware; therefore, I should like them to know: When does the federal government intend to take its responsibility and do something about this situation?

WESTERN ARCTIC (INUVIALUIT) CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING—ORDER STANDS

On the Order:

Third reading of the Bill C-102, An Act to amend the Western Arctic (Inuvialuit) Claims Settlement Act, as amended.—(*Honourable Senator Macquarrie*).

Hon. Heath Macquarrie: Honourable senators, on Thursday last I gave notice that I would move third reading of this bill