

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, the answer to the first part of the senator's question is yes. As to the last part of the question, any objective examination of the facts will show that that is incorrect. I speak not only of our budgetary policy but also of the general policy of the government with regard to the status of women. I will bear the honourable senator's question in mind for the debate which her leader, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, is launching on Mr. Wilson's budget.

AGRICULTURE

WESTERN CANADA—DROUGHT RELIEF PROGRAM— GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. H.A. Olson: Honourable senators, I want to ask the Leader of the Government about an announcement with respect to agriculture, because it has been several weeks since we met.

On one or two occasions—and maybe more than that—the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Mazankowski, has said that if it is demonstrated that there is a need for a program for the drought areas of western Canada, particularly Saskatchewan and parts of Alberta, it will be forthcoming.

It is now March 13. Many of these people who have been devastated by six years of drought in succession are trying to make some plans to get their crops seeded this spring. Could the Leader of the Government advise us when this announcement will be made?

What is particularly disturbing today is that since we last met I have received a form letter signed by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Mazankowski, the Minister of State for Agriculture and the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds. This letter does not say anything about the government having developed a plan. In fact, it discusses, for example, ways in which we can fully explore our options as we develop agricultural policy for the 1990s. It then talks about a meeting in Moncton in August, which is apparently where the ministers intend to have a meeting.

There is one encouraging note in this letter. It states that the timetable does not prevent us from forming agreements and implementing changes on specific issues along the way. It also states that the government has set up a committee as a safety net for grain and oilseed producers and will set up another committee to consider matters of financing, managing the family farm business, and so on.

I would appeal to the minister to carry this message to his colleague, the Minister of Agriculture: If he is serious about doing something in time to be of assistance to farmers, he should bear in mind that it is already March 13. In one month, or six weeks from now at the most, farmers in that drought-ridden area will be out on the land and will have to make commitments to buy fuel, fertilizer and all the other farm inputs. We are running out of time. Could we have an answer as to when a program will be announced?

[Senator Marsden.]

I also realize that the Premier of Saskatchewan has been in Ottawa in the last few days and that he made some representations with respect to this matter. However, when he returned to Saskatchewan he did not tell us whether or not he had received any program. He just said that there was no commitment. It is time for a commitment if we are to do anything for these people in 1990.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I shall convey the representations of the honourable senator to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture. In the meantime I can tell him that the matters to which he refers are still under consideration.

Senator Olson: Would the Leader of the Government like to venture a guess as to whether or not there will be an announcement in time to assist in the cost inputs for seeding a crop in 1990?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I shall refer that question to my colleague as well.

THE CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—"DISTINCT SOCIETY CLAUSE"

Hon. Dougals D. Everett: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

In a recent speech Mr. Chrétien stated that the original position of the Quebec Liberal Party and that of Mr. Rémillard was that the distinctiveness of Quebec's society should be recognized in the preamble to the Constitution.

Can the Leader of the Government tell us if that demand was made by Quebec in that way, or was the demand such that the recognition of distinctiveness was to be included in the body of the Constitution?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, that statement is not quite accurate with regard to Quebec's position or the position that Mr. Rémillard took on behalf of Quebec.

In any case, the point was made at the time, and an effort was made in 1982 to construct a preamble which would recognize the distinctiveness of Quebec society, linguistic duality in Canada, multiculturalism, aboriginal rights, and various features that go to make up the Canadian identity.

For whatever reason, the effort to draft a preamble failed. In the event, two important features of Canadian society were placed in the Constitution or the Charter. One was the recognition of our multicultural heritage and the other was aboriginal rights. So that when the time came to discuss Quebec's five conditions no preamble was on the table. The decision was made that the recognition of linguistic duality and the distinct society should be put in an interpretative clause in the body of the Constitution.