

NISA, the Net Income Stabilization Account, to supplement their income levels.

Senator Olson: By way of supplementary, most farmers are aware of those programs; however, when the minister takes the trouble to recite the programs that are available, does that mean that the government has already taken the position that either a farmer can be a beneficiary of those programs or that is it? We know that if they did not apply for NISA and GRIP prior to May of 1992, they cannot apply for those programs now.

• (1420)

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I am not sure that the honourable senator should dismiss these programs so lightly. The fact of the matter is that this year on the prairies, it is expected that crop insurance will provide close to \$500 million in payments while GRIP payments may be in the \$1.2 billion range. If crops continue to deteriorate, farmers can expect increases in the payments from these programs.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I did not in any way intend to diminish the value of those programs. The honourable minister has a bad habit of giving an answer that bears no relationship to the question. My question was: Is it the intention of the government to recycle all of these programs, which farmers had to apply for back in April or May, or was the minister's purpose to inform farmers that that is what will be available and nothing else?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I was making the very valid point that, because of the foresight and cooperation of the federal and provincial governments and the farmers themselves, farmers can have recourse to all of these programs in cushioning the effects of adverse weather conditions. That is the point I was making.

Senator Olson: That may be a good point, but the fact is that farmers must apply for such programs at the time of year they are offered, namely, in February, March or that part of the year. In other words, you have to make the application before you seed the crop. Surely that is sensible.

Senator Barootes: You cannot buy fire insurance after the fire; you must have it before.

Senator Olson: I understand that, but apparently your leader does not understand. That is the point I am trying to make. He comes along and announces all these great programs, knowing very well that unless the farmers had applied for the programs last spring, they would not receive anything from them. I want to know whether the Leader of the Government's purpose today was to advise farmers that the position of the government is that they either applied last spring or paddled their own canoes.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, there must have been quite a few farmers applying. I told the senator a moment ago that crop insurance would provide about \$500 million in payments this year and GRIP about \$1.2 billion. There has been quite a good take-up on these programs. I

referred to the foresight of farmers in this respect as well as to the cooperative attitude of various levels of government.

Senator Olson: I will leave it at that for now. The minister is obviously not prepared to even acknowledge that he heard the question, so I will try again later or tomorrow.

THE CONSTITUTION

INTERPRETATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF REFERENDUM RESULTS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, I want to read a sentence or two from a newspaper story. I am reading from today's *Globe and Mail* where Graham Fraser reports that Mr. Mulroney threw some confusion into the question of how the referendum results will be interpreted. The article reads in part:

In the morning, he referred to the fact that French President François Mitterrand had accepted a 50.7 per cent vote in favour of the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, then finally, at the end of day, clarified that majorities in each province would be required for that province's legislature to ratify the agreement.

My question to the minister is this: What understanding is there, if any, either written or oral, among the first ministers as to the significance of a majority in a province? For example, is the Premier of Nova Scotia under any obligation arising from an understanding to seek support for the Charlottetown consensus in the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia if the answer in Nova Scotia on October 26, 1992 is a very weak "yes"?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, a majority vote of the population, whether in a province or across the country, even if that majority be 50 per cent plus one, is not without significance. To answer the honourable senator's question directly in a word, the answer is no.

Senator Stewart: I want to preface my next question with a newspaper quotation from the *Chronicle-Herald* of September 12, and I am quoting Professor Duncan Fraser:

Senator Barootes: Where is the *Chronicle-Herald*?

Senator Stewart: Ask your colleague, Senator Buchanan.

Senator Barootes: London, England. I have it.

Senator Stewart: It might be wise for Senator Barootes to get Senator Buchanan to give him a tour of Nova Scotia.

Professor Fraser says that the referendum is not binding. He then states:

It is well that the issue has to be resolved by the provincial assemblies. They would be ill-advised to go against a well-authenticated public opinion and this opinion will be validated only if it is certain that there is a clear public understanding of all the issues involved. This can only be ascertained by a legislative examination of the promised legal text in extensive public hearings.