

what we can get coming out of the west. If drought were likely in Quebec, the program would have been in place before the drought arrived and there would be no need for emergency measures. Even if that did not happen, it would not take three or six months until something was done about it—it would be done quickly. I say that, honourable senators, without complaint. That kind of fast action is required. It behooves the governments of Western Canada, the producers out there and other interested people to bring the problem before the federal government so that the pressure will be so great it will have to act. Let us hope that it will act quickly.

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I do not wish to extend unduly this debate, but I do feel it important to underline most strenuously the words of Senator Olson, Senator Argue and Senator Marchand on this issue, which is almost impossible to explain if you have not been there. I think a great many people in Canada know that our agriculture sector is already in a state of financial crisis. On top of the financial crisis, we now have the potential for devastation in parts of our prairie community. As Senator Argue has said, it does not affect small pockets this time—it affects whole provinces or large portions of provinces. There are farmers in our area in southwestern Alberta who refer to their land as “the Sahara Desert with a fence,” and that is an apt description.

Honourable senators, we travelled down there last weekend. Visitors from other parts of the province said, “Well, you are going to get rain—look at those dark clouds.” Honourable senators, those were dust clouds—those were clouds filled with topsoil blowing off the areas of southwestern Alberta, and it will take more than a decade to replace that soil. We are talking about farmers who cannot wait for task forces—they cannot wait for federal-provincial meetings that result in something three weeks, four weeks or six weeks down the road. We are talking about people who need action now to have assistance in terms of feed brought to their cattle or immediate financial and transportation assistance by which to move these herds to an area where they can survive. Otherwise, we are not going to have just an agriculture crisis—we are going to have a social crisis of major proportions in those small towns and villages, and one which will encroach upon the cities. It may take months before the cities realize that. But if we do not have action for our livestock producers now, I shudder to think of the kinds of speeches we will be making in the fall.

Let us get this issue before our committee. I know that Senator Olson did not even want to have to make this motion. The government can act within the week to get things moving in the Prairies. I most strongly urge the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate to carry that message, loud and clear, to the government so that we do not have to wait for even the initial steps to be taken before one of our committees.

Hon. Sidney L. Buckwold: Honourable senators, I will not be too long this afternoon, but it would be wrong for me to sit here as a senator from Saskatchewan without endorsing what has already been said by those who have spoken on this serious issue. As one who was raised in Saskatchewan and started his

[Senator Argue.]

business career in the height of the drought of 1935, '36, '37 and '38, I can say that it is difficult to visualize how we could possibly go back to those times. Yet, the other day I was driving my car and I literally had to stop myself from crossing a prairie road because of the tumbleweeds that were blowing across a road obscured by dust. Those are the symbols of a drought: tumbleweeds, and the fact that when you go outside you can just feel the grit in the air—and I am not speaking politically, although that might be encouraging!

I want to draw to the attention of honourable senators the impact not just upon the farmers but upon small businesses—upon those who make their living supplying farmers in the villages and hamlets surrounding the bigger cities. Big cities always manage to keep going—they have some industry; they have some civil servants with permanent salaries—but in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba literally hundreds of small villages are the lifeblood of those provinces. We used to classify them as “the two-elevator town,” the “three-elevator town,” and the big one, like the one Senator Argue hails from—Kayville—I wonder whether there is an elevator there yet.

Senator Argue: There is one.

Senator Buckwold: Kayville has one elevator, and it is filled up, sometimes, by the wheat grown by Senator Argue.

I draw to the attention of honourable senators that in the census of 1931 Saskatchewan was the third largest province by population in the Dominion of Canada. There was Ontario, there was Quebec, and there was Saskatchewan. We were larger than Alberta, Manitoba and British Columbia. We had, in 1931, the same number of people, within a few thousand, as we have today, in 1988, and we keep talking about the progress of that province. Our people moved out by the tens of thousands just to survive. The scene that is imprinted indelibly in my mind is one of wagons and old trucks loaded down with beds and diningroom chairs—it is the scene of the people of Saskatchewan, literally like the Okies, moving on.

Honourable senators, I am not trying to be a tear-jerker and I am not trying to draw from you the kind of response that you might get from begging for nickles. This is a very serious problem. Not only will the farmers be faced with further devastation in addition to low prices, high interest rates and loans—we keep hammering away about those—but the small businessmen in these areas will be faced with similar disasters. I do not know how many of these small storekeepers, implement dealers and café owners can keep going. That is why I implore the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate to try to impress upon those decision-makers, who I know will recognize the need, the absolute importance of action as soon as possible. Let us do something before the horse is out of the barn. We know that eventually the government will come through, that the door will be closed, but unfortunately, as I have said, it will be too late.

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, so that we can pass this motion today, let us clear up the procedural point raised by Senator Doody. The