

Barootes is really an agricultural expert in many ways. He is a master of doctoring figures.

Senator Frith: Ooh!

Senator Nurgitz: Come on.

Senator Flynn: What about you?

Senator Argue: I am not a master. On that scale, I would be lucky to be a bachelor.

Senator Phillips: I bet that your wife would like you to be a bachelor, too.

Senator Argue: Senator Olson has brought up the \$3.2 billion. I guess the government had to pay out the money it did through the Western Grain Stabilization Act or it would have been breaking the law. I think Senator Barootes has said that. However, it was really the farmers' money. It was from the farmers' account. The government put in part and the farmers put in part. The only difficulty with presenting large figures as the amount of money allegedly contributed by the government to the farmers is that it misleads the general taxpayer into thinking that, somehow or another, the government has put up \$3.2 billion of the taxpayers' money for the farmers. That really is not the case.

Senator Olson: That is a terrible disservice.

Senator Argue: That is an interesting piece of accounting. In any event, Senator Barootes is a good supporter of the government, and he puts the best possible picture before the Senate. Really, a great deal has not been done. There was talk that \$1 billion would go to western grain producers. The announcement of that program helped Premier Devine win the election. There is no doubt about that. But after the election that \$1 billion shrank a good deal. A lot of it was siphoned off to eastern Canada, and it eventually became a little over \$800 million for western Canada.

Senator Doody: What?

Senator Argue: Most of it has not yet been paid. The farmers are waiting for the payments. But the program of \$1 billion has been announced and is out there. Almost every person in the city thinks, "You got a billion dollars. What are you bitching about?" In fact, the average cheque to the average farmer amounted to \$1,800. I suppose that the average farmer would currently owe \$18,000. So the average farmer would take his \$1,800 cheque, go around town—it would take him an hour because he would have coffee everywhere he went—he wanted to make it last as long as possible—and leave \$600 with three people where he had accounts. Those people would give him only a half grin because he only paid part of the account. Those who hold the balance of the \$18,000 debt are really angry and upset.

The farmers out there get more telephone calls now than they have ever received. The creditors have heard that \$1 billion is coming. The banks phone twice a day. This is true. The banks phone and say, "John, have you received your cheque? Don't forget the bank. You know, you owe \$250,000, so bring us the \$1,800." In other words, "the government has

sent out \$1 billion, so take your \$1,800 and bring it in to us." It does not go very far. I realize that there is more money coming, a little more than twice as much. Twice as much as \$1,800 is \$3,600, so they might get about \$4,000.

Senator Barootes: Nine thousand dollars.

Senator Argue: If on the average Senator Barootes takes 140,000 permit bookholders and divides that into the amount of money available, he will come up with the same figure.

Senator Barootes: The money is for farms or people, not permit books.

Senator Argue: You have to be a person to have a permit book, you know. They do not just pass them around. Some of them may be held by incorporated companies, but most of them are attached to persons. The amount I used, I think, is generally accurate. If you want to argue about whether it is \$1,850 or \$1,750, I will not oppose you.

The farmers have a crop to put in, and the \$3,600 may come to them in May, depending on how good the bureaucracy is at writing the cheques and getting them out. So, for many, the money will come after seeding. In this way, the farmers will not have enough money to buy the gasoline required to do the seeding, so maybe they will not create problems by putting in such large crops. There is a lot of severe hurt out there. Last weekend I had the privilege of speaking to a health conference in Winnipeg. I had people who deal in the fields of psychology and psychiatry say to me that they have had adult farmers come to them seeking help because of their emotional distress. Farmers of 30 and 40 years of age have broken down and wept because they were losing their farms. The suicide rate for farmers today is more than twice the national average. The suicide rate for farmers today has tripled since 1981.

I know that you are not supposed to talk about caucus meetings, but I am about to describe a different style of caucus. A group from southern Alberta, which will be meeting with all the caucus members, composed of farmers, the Mayor of Lethbridge, reeves and business people met with our caucus—and they are meeting with the caucuses of the other political parties as well—and told us of the foreclosures that are going forward in that part of the country. They told us of the problems with stores. I think they said that seven major businesses in Vulcan, Alberta, have closed in the last few months. Many of the farms out there, like many of the farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, will be lost to their present owners unless action is taken. That is the underlying situation. There is nothing in particular wrong with the bill before us.

Senator Doody: Good!

Senator Argue: It tidies up a few things. It says to a farmer who is in arrears and paying 15 per cent interest that it will take action to reduce the rate a little bit. It says to a farmer who is a tenant and who wants a cash advance that he does not necessarily have to wait until the landlord signs the application. So, it contains some tidying-up provisions. There is nothing wrong with those tidying-up provisions. The fact of the matter is that the farmers of western Canada will very likely be receiving less under the Prairie Grain Advance Payments