



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 180

PUBLIC SAFETY

Flooding in Alberta—Disaster
Financial Assistance Arrangements

ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change Research

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

THE SENATE

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

PUBLIC SAFETY

FLOODING IN ALBERTA—DISASTER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, as an Albertan, I am saddened and shocked by the level of destruction caused by the unprecedented floods in Alberta, and concerned about the well-being and safety of the people affected by those troubling events, as I know all honourable senators are.

I would like to praise the efforts of the brave emergency workers and all those volunteering to help their neighbours in these difficult times. I would also like to thank the government for the sympathy it has expressed and for the support it has provided. I know that the Prime Minister, a Calgarian himself, appreciates the magnitude of the destruction.

Southern Alberta is on track to set a new Canadian record for flood damage, in terms of both the cost and the number of people forced from their homes. In terms of property damage, the flooding appears to be without precedent. Unfortunately, home insurance policies generally do not include coverage for damage caused by overland flooding. Premier Redford has committed \$1 billion to begin the recovery efforts.

Could the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us what level of assistance the Government of Canada will provide to Albertans? Will any funds be provided under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I thank Senator Tardif for the question. I am sure that we were all horrified by the magnitude of the problem due to the very serious flooding of many wonderful communities throughout Southern Alberta, with which most of us are very familiar. Our colleague Senator Tannas is from High River, and he was evacuated.

The Prime Minister flew to Alberta on Friday where he met with the Mayor of Calgary, the Premier of Alberta, first responders and other officials in the Alberta and Calgary governments.

It is true that in many cases insurance will not cover the damages caused by this disaster and that is where the disaster assistance program will kick in.

Through the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements, the Government of Canada supports the provinces and territories by cost sharing their eligible disaster response and recovery expenses which exceed what they might reasonably be expected to bear on their own. Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to, evacuation operations, restoring public works and infrastructure to the pre-disaster condition, as well as replacing or repairing

basic, essential personal property of individuals, small businesses and farms.

There is a proven process in place, based on existing guidelines and a cost-sharing formula, for the provision of financial assistance to provinces and territories under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements. As the Prime Minister and other ministers of the government have indicated, the Canadian government will fully participate and share the burden with the Province of Alberta and the municipalities for the horrendous circumstance in which they find themselves.

ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): I thank the minister for that response and I thank the government for the assistance.

I heard Minister of State Ted Menzies say on the radio this morning that extreme weather events like the Alberta floods are becoming more common. He said there is no doubt that the climate is changing all around the world. However, in the last years, the government has cut weather monitoring programs; notably, the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, which provided grants to scientists studying weather. The ripple effect has been the closure of weather monitoring stations and the elimination of research on climate science.

In view of these troubling events, in the face of warnings from scientists that we should expect more unpredictable, extreme weather events, and in view of Minister Menzies' comments, does the government still think that cutting weather monitoring programs and shutting down research stations such as the PEARL research station and the Kluane Lake Research Station, was a good idea?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): First, honourable senators, this is an unmitigated disaster in Alberta.

• (1830)

I was watching a scientist on one of the television networks explaining the unique circumstances that caused this severe flooding: a huge snow cap in the Rockies; a very cold spring, where the ground had not properly thawed and therefore could not absorb a lot of moisture; an unprecedented rainfall within 24 to 30 hours; and the creeks and the rivers were unable to handle the rush of water. These were all unique circumstances.

I think there is a debate to be had in the future, perhaps, about climate change, but in this particular incident — There was a serious flood of much the same magnitude as this over 100 years ago, the difference being that 100 years ago, a lot of the lands that flooded were not occupied by human beings.