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# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

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**Thursday, October 19, 2006**

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**Chair**

Mr. Gerry Ritz

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## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, October 19, 2006

• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC)):** We'll call this meeting to order.

We are now going to move to the motions. The first one on the docket will be Mr. Easter's motion. It was presented the other day.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Yes, Mr. Chair, the motion is pretty straightforward, and it is put forward with some urgency.

I move that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food undertake an emergency review on October 24, 25, and 26—meaning next week—of the government's actions toward the Canadian Wheat Board.

As I indicated at the last meeting, we do have very serious concerns about the way the government is operating relative to the Canadian Wheat Board. I outlined that in the House yesterday. We do think it is undemocratic, unethical, and in fact it is stretching the legality of the law with the gag orders coming out last week.

So the motion is put forward really by all three opposition parties to give voice to some of the organizations, individuals, and governments that, to a certain extent, have been left voiceless by the approach taken by the minister.

It is a real shortcoming, I believe, not to have the Canadian Wheat Board on here as a witness in terms of the implications they see, but we did have a legal interpretation of the order in council from the Library of Parliament. There is a real concern about whether or not individuals can really speak out in their own right, on their own position, relative to the single-desk selling position of the Canadian Wheat Board.

So that's the motion. That's the reason for it. The witness lists are attached, and we'd like to add to that witness list.

I think André would like to have added the Quebec grain producers.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll need someone to move an amendment to add witnesses. If you're including the witness list in the motion, that is part and parcel of it, so we'll need a motion on the floor to make that amendment, unless you have unanimous consent.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Are you going to be putting the amendment in the motion or not? It's your decision.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Well, I guess that's a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson is still on.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** He had a point of order.

**Mr. David Anderson:** No, I'm just asking Mr. Easter if he's going to include the witness list in the motion, or if he's going to put his quotation marks up above.

**Mr. James Bezan:** And that's my point of order here, Mr. Chair. It's not usual to be submitting the list of witnesses as part of the motion. Usually witnesses are prepared and submitted to the clerk, and those witnesses are called.

**The Chair:** It can be done. There is a statute—

**Mr. James Bezan:** So this will not at all prohibit us from calling other witnesses besides those on this list now.

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. James Bezan:** So then there isn't really a need to have a witness list if we can still submit other names.

**The Chair:** It's Mr. Easter's motion. He has the right to list witnesses in this format as he sees fit. If they want to add this list to be part of the motion, I would have to have an amendment from the floor and a mover and a seconder, and then Mr. Easter would have to accept that as a friendly amendment or we'd have to vote on it, as I understand it. The clerk can clarify that for me.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, the intent of the motion is to have the hearings. Those are the witnesses we would like to see brought forward. I'm not sticky on it being part of the motion. We are cooperative enough here that we can have the witnesses as separate from that. We certainly, in the opposition party, agree this list should be there. I'm not sure where the other two opposition parties are at, although we had the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on this list.

When was it his intention to come? Was it early November?

**Mr. David Anderson:** It was November 2, I believe. I suspect that's when he will be here.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We don't want to have to subpoena him, but we could. I don't have a problem with the minister coming at that time. I don't know about you folks.

The motion is there. I will hear from the other opposition parties, but I'm not sticky on it being a part of the motion itself.

**The Chair:** Alex.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** I think we have to realize that obviously the minister has a busy schedule, and if we have him coming at a certain time, then probably that's when he'll be here.

So if this is not part of the motion, if we want to add a few more names of possible witnesses, is there a deadline we need to follow in order to have these people here? I may have one other person or organization to add.

**The Chair:** To clarify, if you're going to stipulate October 24, 25, and 26, the clerk will have to make arrangements as soon as possible with these folks. We have no idea of the availability of the ministers of agriculture for Saskatchewan or Manitoba. So we may have to be flexible. That's the problem with putting dates in the motion. "As soon as possible" gives us some flexibility in that regard, Alex. Stipulating dates makes it problematic to line up witnesses.

André, do you have anything to add? We're on that side of the motion, so go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** I believe we could quickly reach a consensus on the fact that the witness list should not be closed because each one of us could... Obviously, it cannot be unlimited since we only have three days. However, it would be good to say in the motion that we have three days to hear the Canadian Wheat Board and we could submit a list of witnesses to the clerk. I think that's what we should do.

• (1115)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** I had my name on the list to speak to the motion, so I'd like to reserve that.

Mr. Chairman, what I'd like to propose is what I hope might be a friendly amendment. It would be worded as an addition: "or any additional witnesses, as requested by any member of the committee".

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** To make a point there, if we do this, then every witness that's put on the list has to be invited.

**Mr. James Bezan:** We're saying let's keep the list separate from the motion.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't have a problem with the list being there, provided that we have this on the end of it. If not, then I won't support the list, because that—

**The Chair:** The general consensus is that the list doesn't have to be attached to the motion. Basically the motion directs the committee to hold three days of hearings on the Wheat Board, and then the list will be supplied to the clerk in the usual way.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, Mr. Chair, but we are certainly emphasizing that these witnesses here be a part of that.

I would also suggest that we have Howard Migie as chair of the task force. This committee has not heard from Howard Migie. We can't find a schedule. We know he's not holding public meetings. Their recommendations are crucial, and he is an employee of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. I don't want any excuses from him on why he can't be here next week.

**The Chair:** Okay. All we can do is ask and then get back to you with whatever—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, to be honest with you, Mr. Chair, that's not quite adequate. We have a task force. Farmers can't find out information on that task force. The task force that's been appointed is very slanted one way. Howard Migie is the chair. This committee needs answers, and for Howard Migie not to be available next week is unacceptable.

I would go as far as subpoenaing him, if that's what we have to do, because this guy is holding meetings. The future of the Canadian Wheat Board is at stake, and we want him here next week. If he's not here, then I suggest we subpoena him.

**The Chair:** Fine.

Are there any other discussions?

**Mr. David Anderson:** What do they want to do with the motion?

**Mr. James Bezan:** We're going to hold off the motion until after

**The Chair:** Give us a final wording, gentlemen, as to how you want this to go, exactly as it stands or—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** The wording would be: "That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food undertake an emergency review on October 24, 25, 26 of the government's actions towards the Canadian Wheat Board." And for those witnesses, the list does not need to be attached.

Pardon, James?

**Mr. James Bezan:** So your quote would finish off after "Canadian Wheat Board"? That would be the end of the motion.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It would finish after "Canadian Wheat Board". That way, you don't need the additional wording.

**The Chair:** The only problem I have with this right off the bat is that you're specifying October 24, 25, and 26 in the motion, but you're also saying that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is coming on November 2, and that's okay.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We're not putting the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food in that motion. I think it's okay.

**The Chair:** So he won't be on the initial list.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I think in the minister's case, he's scheduled elsewhere. I will not accept that Howard Migie will not be here next week.

**The Chair:** Okay. So your list of witnesses, which will be supplied to the clerk, will not include the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food because he's coming on November 2 anyway. So then it's not problematic to the motion.

Do we have unanimous consent to see the motion changed by putting the quotation mark at the end of "Board", and then the witness list as a separate entity? Do we have a motion to that effect?

Okay, I see a lot of heads nodding, I'll need some names. Mr. Steckle moves, seconded by Alex Atamanenko.

We need unanimous consent in order to change it to that.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** All right. So we've basically handled that motion.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** No, we have discussion on the motion. There was an amendment.

**The Chair:** This is done. Now you can amend it or whatever. That's what we're moving to now. The motion stands as you read it at the top of the page. We haven't voted on the motion yet. Now it's open to amendment.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** What I'm saying, Mr. Chair, is the motion has been changed from what was circulated to us, so I'd like to speak to what I now know is the final wording in the motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. The wording hasn't changed. The only thing that has changed is the quotation mark is moved right behind "Board", instead of at the end of "the witness list".

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Okay, I was taking it as if the list was included as a...whatever.

**The Chair:** No, it is a stand-alone.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Okay. I'd still like to speak to the motion.

Mr. Easter, you mentioned being democratic, this kind of thing. What I find very undemocratic and bordering on communistic is the fact that the farmers in my province of Ontario have an option, and farmers in your riding, Mr. Steckle, and to the south and in the real wheat-producing areas of the province tell me, we have an option and we like that option. What I'm saying is undemocratic is this: why in the heck shouldn't somebody out west, in whatever province, have the same right?

That's what this is about. It's not about ending the Wheat Board; that's just political rhetoric. He knows it, I know it, and everybody knows it. So I will not be supporting the motion from that aspect.

**The Chair:** All right, fine.

Mr. Thibault.

**Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.):** I don't want to argue with Mr. Miller, and I understand his position; it's a legitimate view. But I think what we're debating is the motion and not the board. If we stray from what's in front of the committee today—it's not debating whether or not there should be a wheat marketing board—we won't get done in two hours.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** My only comment is that my concern is about the time constraint here. I think next week is going to be difficult to bring in...especially if we want to see some of the provincial ministers before us. I'd like to see all the prairie provinces have their ministers at the table to present their positions, not just two out of the three areas. For that matter, even part of northern B.C. is within the Wheat Board mandate, and we should be bringing forward that minister as well.

So there is a huge issue there, and I think the timeframe is going to be detrimental to the overall debate. I'd like to see flexibility so that if it requires bringing in some of these witnesses down the road, we have the ability to handle it. This motion doesn't give us that flexibility.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone else?

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'd like to make the point that we've spent quite a bit of time on this. We've had a meeting already, we spent two hours in the House yesterday, we have another hour of debate scheduled in the next two weeks on this, and we have other meetings on this issue as well.

Next week is busy with the CN and grain movement. That's an important thing in my part of the world; the grain is not moving the way it should. We were going to talk about some other issues in Quebec—the pork issues, and so on—later. All of that stuff is being set aside. The CGC review is not going to be done in one meeting. Now that we're going into November with these things, the schedule is already off.

I think we should defeat the motion.

**The Chair:** To that point, when I read the motion that says "undertake an emergency review", that doesn't necessarily mean we use and actually book committee time; it could mean extra meetings.

Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** We feel this is a crisis at this point. I've talked to more people. I had a meeting with CFA, and they're coming out with a statement tomorrow. There are all sorts of far-reaching implications from a decision on the Wheat Board. We feel there's a crisis in agriculture and we want it addressed this coming week. That's the point behind the motion.

**The Chair:** This motion supplants the calendar we had and moves everything off. You're okay with that?

That's the point Mr. Anderson was making. We're okay with changing the calendar now because we had accepted that earlier.

Ken.

• (1125)

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** For the record, I would like to say I also feel this is a matter of urgency. If you talk about the top agricultural agribusiness or agrifood issue in the nation today, what is happening with the Wheat Board and the process is the number one issue and warrants our shifting everything back so we can deal with it appropriately. That's to the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** As I said, Mr. Chair, when we put forward the motion originally, we had come together with great reluctance as three opposition parties to put this motion, but we see a government bulldozing ahead with this so-called task force—tainted task force—that has people on it from one side of the issue. If anybody has looked at the Canadian Wheat Board website, they will see the board's response to the task force. Read that and you can see the concerns we were raising in the House yesterday about the seriousness of moving ahead with this so-called marketing choice and, in the process, from our point of view, not abiding by the law of the land in terms of having a vote by primary producers. With great reluctance, we set aside the regular business of the committee.

However, you will know the minister has given the task force 30 days to come up with recommendations. This committee doesn't know what the task force is about, and farmers don't know, other than that it does away with single-desk selling. It's extremely important we have that task force in on an urgent basis. This has been bulldozed ahead by a government that seems not to want to listen. You heard the Prime Minister yesterday.

The last points are very strongly in favour.

The last point I would make is that I know a second motion, which is on a very urgent matter in Quebec, will be coming forward from Mr. Bellavance as well. With this motion the way it is, by agreement we could set aside an hour next week to deal with André's point, because it is an urgent matter in that area as well. But the urgency of doing this next week on the Canadian Wheat Board can't be understated.

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I could speak at some length to Larry's comments about the Ontario Wheat Board. There are different circumstances in Ontario. Most of the wheat that is exported goes to the Wheat Board. Much of the wheat in Ontario is used domestically. We don't have the wheat situation they have in the west. We don't depend on exporting wheat; the western wheat is a different situation.

I'm getting an average of 12—and for a while there were 14—letters, handwritten for the most part, not copied, from farmers from your provinces in the west asking us to do whatever it takes to find resolution. They want some answers—these are farmers, and I don't know these people. I've kept every one of them, so you can see them if you want. Some of them are from your ridings. I want you to know we're getting pressure in Ontario from the people out west.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Steckle.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Just to Mr. Steckle's point, if he looks at the top of the page, he'll see they're all coming from one fax number. So I think you can consider that to be an organized propaganda campaign, which we hear about.

The second thing I want to address to Mr. Easter is that no law has been broken here, absolutely no law at all. So he should quit saying that. I'll just leave it at that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I think we are getting just a little bit ahead of ourselves. We know the task force has been told to report back to the minister by the end of the month. I think we're jumping the gun here and we're not going to get all the information we need. We should wait until the task force reports before we call them before the committee. I think that would be prudent.

You have to remember that there are two sides to this debate. Even people who are in the Wheat Board area, who have their permit books in the Wheat Board, are on both sides of this issue. It's just not one-sided. Within our ridings, we have these debates happening in western Canada now. I know most of the members sitting on the other side of the table don't understand that, but we have an ongoing

heated debate on this issue, and it's passionate on both sides. We have to be respectful of the debate that's taking place on both sides of the issue.

•(1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you, James.

Robert.

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** I disagree with James. I think this is one of the biggest areas of interaction we're having, where the biggest change could be positive or could be negative. That whole debate has to happen, and I think we have to be part of it. We certainly have to hear it. It's important that we inform ourselves.

For me to say that I think there should be a Wheat Board or a single desk or there shouldn't be, or those things—I'm not prepared to go that far, but I want to inform myself about it. I want to see how farmers are going to interact with government on making that decision. Is it going to be individual? Is it going to be collective? I want to make my recommendation after a full study on where I think it should be. It has ramifications throughout the agricultural industry.

There is a great fear in supply management that they're going to be next, because the same argument can be made by any producer. Any producer could make that argument, that they should have their choice in how they market and, if they can be more effective on their own, that they not be controlled. That argument could be made. Everybody is watching how we deal with this, how the government deals with it and how Parliament deals with it. I think it would be irresponsible for us not to take action and not to inform ourselves fully.

**The Chair:** We've dedicated half an hour to this, gentlemen. We're at that point now and we have one more motion yet to go—a notice of motion and Mr. Bellavance's motion. Is there any more discussion?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Call the question.

**The Chair:** We'll call the question.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I call for a recorded vote on the motions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay. If we're having a recorded vote, I'll read in the motion.

The motion, as it stands, by the Honourable Wayne Easter, Alex Atamanenko, MP, and André Bellavance, MP, reads: "That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food undertake an emergency review on October 24, 25, and 26, 2006, of the Government's actions toward the Canadian Wheat Board."

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** As to the witness list, get your names in as quickly as possible, gentlemen. The clerk will be busy for the next few days lining up everything he can.

André mentioned the Canadian Grain Commission, and Alex said he had a couple more, so they'll have to be added to this. I'm sure the government side will have a witness list as well, if possible.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Just as a question to André, did he want the Canadian Grain Commission at these hearings, or did he want that separate?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** The Quebec grain producers.

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay, but you had also said the Grain Commission earlier. Was that a mistake in translation?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I didn't talk about that.

[English]

**The Chair:** I had heard the Grain Commission, and I had also heard the grain growers of Quebec. So it's just the grain growers of Quebec.

Anyway, put that in a formal way to the clerk—and Alex, you also, and the gentlemen on the government side as well.

The problem we may have is that we're limited to three meetings by the motion. We had sort of decided at the start of the hearings as to how many witnesses at a table. We may have to expand that, if that's okay.

Good. We've finished with that one.

We're moving on to the motion by Mr. Bellavance. Would you care to speak to it, sir?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** In fact, it's a follow-up to the reaction.

The other day, I asked for unanimous consent to hear the potato producers of Saint-Amable on an urgent basis.

I don't want to repeat myself. We know what has happened. The embargo has been lifted and we were the first to welcome that. We're very pleased with that decision. However, you should understand that in the Saint-Amable region, where they had the nematode infestation, producers are left with nothing. We know that the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program won't be of any help to them.

I have asked for them to appear before the committee on an urgent basis. That's what they asked for in the letter that all the members of the committee have received, I believe. We didn't get unanimous consent because Mr. Gourde believe that it could be detrimental. However, during and after the meeting, we talked to those people and learned that there had been no negotiations at all.

We know that the minister is discussing the situation with his staff, which is quite proper, but I don't see why we couldn't meet with the affected producers. They could come here to tell us about their needs and what they expect from this committee and from this government. They've had to destroy their potato crops and it will be difficult for them to start growing potatoes again for the rest of their lives because of what has happened. You have to understand that.

I think it would be easy for us to spend an hour to listen to them. It's really a very urgent situation. I wouldn't want us to start setting the schedule of the committee with motions — it may be strange for

me to say that since we have two motions to move — but we don't have any choice. I could not get unanimous consent because Mr. Gourde did not agree at the time even though, as far as I'm concerned, he didn't have any reason to disagree.

We can hear those people even if the government is negotiating with them. After talking to them, I've realized that those negotiations aren't very advanced in any case. So, there's no reason for us not to hear them. If there was a solution and the government had good news to announce, we would be the first to applaud. So, I don't think there's any problem as far as that is concerned.

The reason why I'm moving this motion is that the situation is extremely urgent. This problem has just happened and the producers are in a very difficult situation and want to be heard. I don't see why we would refuse to hear them.

• (1135)

[English]

**The Chair:** At this point you've given us notice of the motion. Are you're now moving the motion?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** It is seconded by Monsieur Roy.

Is there discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I don't have a problem with the intent here. There was obviously a serious problem. What I'm asking, more than anything, is whether it is still as urgent to have this since the embargo has been lifted, and this kind of thing. I'm just wondering, because of the previous motion that was just dealt with, and the three days. That's a question, more or less, for Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes, Larry.

The affected producers are from the Saint-Amable region. The US embargo applied to all the Quebec producers, even to those who had not been affected by the potato cyst nematode. When the two governments came to an agreement and the embargo was lifted, that was perfect for the rest of the Quebec producers because their production could again be sold freely as in the past. However, the Saint-Amable producers are in a dire situation. I'm not saying that there are many of them since there's only about twenty of them who are affected, plus some others who grow other crops and whose land has also been contaminated. At this time, there's nothing for them. They're left with nothing.

At this time, the banks are being patient but you know as well as I do that their patience is limited. Some producers don't even have enough money to buy groceries and so their situation is really extremely urgent and I would like us to give them a hearing.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll have Mr. Atamanenko and then Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** To add to what André has just said, I believe that the committee giving them a hearing will help the minister when he talks with others and has to make a decision. Hearing a few additional witnesses will increase our knowledge. For this reason, I believe I'm going to second the motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** I want to tell the members of the committee that we're all very aware of the problems that those producers are facing at this time. It's an extremely rare event.

We're talking about inviting them to come here but I believe we could also travel to their region to see directly what their situation is. We could visit their farms. Here, in this room, we can talk about what changes those producers would have to make. They have machinery and special warehouses for potatoes and they might have to stop this production. I believe that all the members of the committee should go visit their farms. It would then be easier for us and for the government to grasp the extent of the problem. We owe it to them. Together, we could talk to them and get a better assessment of their situation. That would help them. I strongly believe it's our duty to go there. It's a regional problem but, for the government and for all political parties, this would be a historical decision and it would be very important.

That's my suggestion.

• (1140)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter, and then André.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** The committee at some future date could in fact do as Mr. Gourde suggests, but at the moment, the bottom line is that for those producers in Quebec, having come through eight or nine years ago, out of the potato region, a problem of a similar type—we were shut out of the market—the problem really is a financial one. That's what it comes down to, at the end of the day. The problem is a financial one.

They don't know what to tell their bankers. They don't know what to tell their creditors. They don't know what is to be made with their crop. They have no idea where the Government of Canada may be going on the issue.

Certainly we should bring them in with some haste. We should hear from them and then make further decisions from there.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I find Mr. Gourde's idea excellent but one doesn't exclude the other.

I tend to agree with Wayne. The committee would only have answered a request from those producers wanting to be heard. I still think they should come here to talk to us. As Alex mentioned, that would help the government to come to a decision. As far as we're

concerned, our role would be to help the government to decide. Nothing would prevent us from going there afterwards.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I believe that our committee can travel when this kind of situation happens. Budgets are available for that. We could visit their farms. We could meet on site. I believe we owe it to them.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** What's owed to them, I believe, is an answer to their request which was to come here and testify before the committee. The last time we tried to travel, it ended up being a disaster. I believe it would be easier to get them to come here and for us to listen to them. The situation is extremely serious and urgent. However, nothing would prevent us from going to Saint-Amable later on.

For the time being, I ask for a recorded vote on my motion as drafted.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Gourde, one last point.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** For the government, going there would be a strong symbolic gesture. It would be a way to demonstrate that our government is aware of the situation. That's why I think it's very important for us to go there.

[English]

**The Chair:** The question will be called on the motion as it stands. I'll read the motion into the record so that...

You have a point of order, Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I would have liked to amend the motion to read as follows: "That, in light of the urgency of the situation for farmers and other host crops affected by that potato cyst nematode in the Saint-Amable area in Quebec, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food travel to Saint-Amable to hold a meeting on site".

[English]

**The Chair:** We have an amendment to the motion. I'll call the amendment and we'll vote on that.

Monsieur Gourde, we didn't get all of that down.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I have moved that the committee go to Saint-Amable and hold a meeting on site.

[English]

**The Chair:** So rather than hear evidence and so on, you would go to Saint-Amable and....

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I have a point about the "instead of" part. To me, you're meeting with them—

**An hon. member:** Here or there.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Yes, here or there; the location is the thing.

It's not that you're going to go there and not meet with them. I think you can have the meeting with them here and not see anything of what they're going through, or you can have the meeting there, on-site, and see what they're going through.

I just wanted to clarify that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Thibault.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** I will vote against the amendment but not because I'm opposed to the principle. Indeed, I believe that going to the region to visit those farmers and learn other things about the region at the same time would be a good idea. The problem is that we have other work to do here. We have meetings that are planned and we have work to do afterwards. Those are long days and it would be difficult to reserve a full day to travel there.

If those farmers had asked us to go there, my reaction would be different but they know the kind of schedule we have and they accept that situation. That's why they've asked us to meet with them here. If, when they're here, they invite us to go to their region, we would take that into consideration.

Mr. Bellavance alluded to the disaster that happened when we tried to travel in the past. I was responsible: I had not recognized that all the members of the committee had to leave at the same time and that it would have changed the balance of the parties in the House of Commons. Now, I understand this issue and, at the same time, I see how difficult it would be.

So, I will vote against the amendment but for the main motion.

• (1145)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** All right, we haven't called the vote yet, Mr. Thibault.

We'll have Mr. Atamanenko, and then I'll go to—

**Mr. David Anderson:** Can we read the motion before we discuss it here?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** That was my question. We're now discussing the amendment, and I'd like to hear the amendment.

**The Chair:** All right. The amendment is on the floor. We will read it, and then we will call the question on the amendment. Okay?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk of the Committee:** I'm going to read it.

That, in light of the urgency of the situation for farmers of potatoes and other host crops affected by the potato cyst nematode in the Saint-Amable area in Quebec, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food travel to the Saint-Amable region to hold a meeting on site.

Was that your motion, Mr. Gourde?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I would hold the committee meeting there.

**The Clerk:** That's what it stays at the end: "to hold a meeting on site".

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is everybody clear on that?

Do you have a point of order, André? No? You're ready to vote.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I want to talk about the amendment.

As I said earlier, I'm in favor of the committee traveling there to meet with them. I agree with Mr. Gourde that we owe it to them to go and see their farms, but I also believe that they deserve a positive answer to their request that we take cognizance of their situation. They're asking us to act urgently. They would appear before the committee and explain their situation.

We should also take account of the schedule. We've just passed a motion stating that we're to meet on October 24, 25 and 26 about the Canadian Wheat Board. Mr. Easter has agreed, as we have on the opposition side, to reserve one hour to hear those potato producers.

It should be understood that, if the committee travels at that time, anywhere in Canada, we won't be able to talk about the Canadian Wheat Board. There is a problem of logistics but it could be easy resolved if we decided to set aside one hour next week to hear the potato producers of Saint-Amable.

I would add an amendment to the amendment, as it were. I would move that we meet here with the potato producers of Saint-Amable and that, during a future meeting, the committee travel to the region in order to visit some of the farms. I would have no objection to that. As a matter of fact, it would be an excellent idea.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll have Mr. Gourde and then Mr. Atamanenko.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** To conclude and to answer Mr. Thibault, I will say that it's very important for us to try to go to the area. In fact, all farmers work for the benefit of the people. In such an urgent situation, we owe it to them to leave Ottawa and to go and meet with them locally. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Just as a point of clarification, are you moving a subamendment at this point, André?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, do you have a seconder? We don't need one? Okay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I would like to keep the motion as I had drafted it but, to answer Mr. Gourde's request, the committee could very well decide to go there later on.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Just check with Jean-François right there, and we'll get the wording down properly.

Yes, Alex.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I was just going to say that I agreed with André as far as logistics go, and I was going to say that once these people are here, we can listen to them, and at that point in time we can talk to them about what might be a good time to go to visit, rather than making an amendment to an amendment to an amendment to an amendment.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** I like the way you put that.

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** On the same point, if Mr. Bellavance would agree, I would ask him to withdraw the subamendment and deal with it as a separate matter of motion at a point when we've decided which way we're going with this one, rather than go through this process. Because this is going to get very complicated. We can still do what you want to do, but let's pull that back, pull it off, and then bring it back.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, I'd certainly be willing to do that on agreement that we travel later. But the way Mr. Gourde's motion seems to be coming forward, the impression could be left that those who oppose his amendment really don't want to go to the area to see those potato producers.

I think the best approach would be that we bring them in, we hear them out, and then we do what André says at a later date, when it's convenient to all parties. But it's absolutely urgent that we hear these people for an hour next week to hear their financial concerns, so that we can express that to the government in a clear and unequivocal way.

**The Chair:** That's terribly cynical, Mr. Easter, but I hear you.

So is the subamendment still on the table? André, are you withdrawing it?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** One could add to my motion, at the end: "and that the committee travel to the region at a future date".

[English]

**The Chair:** Well, now you're changing the main motion. Let's do this in order. Let's call the question on—

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I was trying to...

[English]

**The Chair:** —Monsieur Gourde's amendment. Then we'll go back to the main motion, and you guys can wordsmith it at that point. But let's clear one or two off the table here.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** There's a point of clarification.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Gourde, do you have a point?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** If it's so urgent, Mr. Bellavance, why not go there?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Well, Jacques, if it's so urgent, why don't you agree with us meeting with them here? That's what they're

asking. Stop playing games. I know what you want. We want to hear them and we want to go there.

[English]

**The Chair:** Gentlemen, we're going to call the question on Monsieur Gourde's amendment at this point.

**An hon. member:** But isn't there a subamendment?

**The Chair:** No, he's going to go back and change his own motion.

The subamendment that you tabled is withdrawn, so you can go back and change your own motion after we deal with the amendment—as I understand it.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** No. I wanted to add to Mr. Gourde's amendment. I want us to hear the witnesses here and to travel to their region later on, in the future.

[English]

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gourde's amendment did not include hearing from farmers here. His change of motion was that we go directly there and hear from them. You can't change his amendment—

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** All right.

[English]

**The Chair:** —in the way that you're wanting to.

I'm going to call the question on Mr. Gourde's amendment as the amendment that's on the table right now. That's what's coming before us. We will read that into the record again, and then I'm going to call the question.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, just so I'm absolutely clear, if we are to accept Mr. Gourde's amendment, that would mean we would not be inviting these people in, as they have requested, to have a hearing next week. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** We would be travelling to Saint-Amable next week to meet with all of them, according to Mr. Gourde's amendment. The committee would go to them rather than their coming to us. That's the gist of the amendment.

Does anybody need to hear the full amendment?

You wanted a recorded vote, Mr. Miller? Okay, just give us a chance to catch a scorecard here.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

• (1155)

**The Chair:** We're now back to the main motion.

Mr. Bellavance, you had another amendment in mind.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes, I want this to be added to my motion: "and that the committee travel to the region at a future date".

[English]

**The Chair:** Is everybody clear on what's being added? Let me get that off first. Do you want me to read the full motion?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Just the end of it.

**The Chair:** Okay. What we're adding—and correct me if I'm wrong, André—at the end of your motion as it stands now you would add, “and that the committee visit Saint-Amable at a later date”.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I was saying "to the region".

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's what I heard.

What I have is all right?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** All right. Discussion?

You're moving the main motion so that particular amendment has to be moved by someone else, just to keep everything copacetic here.

Mr. Thibault is moving the amendment, seconded by Mr. Atamanenko.

Is there discussion on the amendment? Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** If the opposition is going to vote for this amendment, they need to show up at the bus next time so that we can go. We are not going without an equal number of official opposition members, and they need to understand that.

**The Chair:** The point is taken.

Is there any other discussion on the amendment? Shall I call the question on the amendment?

**An hon. member:** The question.

**The Chair:** The question is on the amendment, and the amendment reads, “and that the committee visit Saint-Amable at a later date”.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I want a recorded vote.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** We're back to the main motion as amended. Is there any discussion or shall I call the question?

**An hon. member:** Call the question.

**The Chair:** Do you want a recorded vote on it as well, André?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Mr. Chairman, just to save you some time, I would suggest we could probably use the same one and record—

**The Chair:** Apply the vote. Is that what you're telling me? I'm not sure we can do that.

**An hon. member:** Apply it.

**The Chair:** Can we do that? We can apply the vote? Okay.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** The motion is carried unanimously, and it only took half an hour to get there. Way to go, guys. Good job.

Yes, Mr. Thibault.

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. Just for my clarification and understanding, on the first motion by Wayne, Alex, and André, when you wrapped up you said that we might have to extend the panels because we were limited to those three days. I don't see the motion as limiting. I see the motion as instructing the committee to meet on those questions on those three days, but there is nothing that would preclude the committee, if it decides, to extend the amount of hearings on those matters. It's not a closed-door motion. It instructs the committee to do it for at least those three days.

**The Chair:** Right, but at the end of those three meetings we would then have to have another meeting to agree to future business and carry on.

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** Yes, that's right.

**The Chair:** All right. Just a moment, we're just talking about the logistics of this meeting that we're going to work in here on the potato nematode, André. We'll take the first hour of the Tuesday meeting. Okay? Good. The clerk will then line up the witnesses.

There are 20 or so farms involved, you said, and we'll distill that down to two or three people who will be at the table doing the presentation?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** We could invite the Fédération des producteurs de pommes de terre du Québec.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, as long as they know that. The clerk will have to know who to contact.

That concludes the public portion of the meeting. We'll now go in camera and begin discussions on the Grain Commission, and we'll suspend as we make those technical adjustments.

Grab a coffee. It's going to be an interesting hour.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]





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