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# **Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, October 7, 2010**

**Chair**

**Mr. Larry Miller**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, October 7, 2010

● (0900)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)):** Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** I'd like to read my motion. The motion basically asks for an extension of 30 days so we can continue the healthy, democratic debate on my Bill C-474. I think we agree that we've had some really good balanced points of view, and I'd like us to set aside some time for witnesses. I would like to have this extension given the fact that after I introduced the bill...we've agreed to spend some time on the report and other issues. I just feel that because of that and the summer break, we're running into time limits.

Anyway, here's the motion:

That the Committee request an extension of thirty sitting days to consider Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), beyond the sixty days from the date of the Bills' referral to Committee, as provided in Standing Order 97.1(1); and that the continued study, clause by clause consideration and reporting of the Bill be completed by the end of the extension period.

I just might add that if we accept this motion, we have a proposal from the steering committee that could fit this into a timeline that I think would be acceptable to everybody.

**The Chair:** Alex, just so we're clear on the amount of extension time, do you have a date?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I think the clerk could probably tell us. It's 30 days past—

**The Chair:** Oh, it's 30, so you're asking for the full 30 days.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I won't need it, but according to the regulations—

**The Chair:** No, I just wanted to clarify that. It would be December 10, the Friday of the last scheduled week here.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** According to our discussions—

**The Chair:** No, I know, but just so we're clear on the date. I just wanted that.

Okay. You have the first chance to speak to your bill, if you care to.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I've spoken a bit already, and I'll try not to take much time.

My point is that it's a piece of legislation on which I need some more time. A lot of us have a few witnesses. This would give us time to tidy it up. I believe we said that another three, four, or maybe five meetings at maximum would still give us time to finish our report

before the November break and then get on to other business that we may decide to do.

I'm asking the committee to approve the motion so that I can have that extension. I will not need the full time to December. As I said, according to what we've calculated, this should be finished even before the Remembrance Day break. So a timeline has been worked out. I would just like to have assurances so that we can go ahead and then witnesses can be called when we get back.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

I just wanted to confirm a few things. If the extension is not granted, when must this be referred to the House?

**The Chair:** On October 22, and that's a Friday. That would be two weeks from tomorrow.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** So October 22, in two weeks, okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux, further to that, the final work on it would have to be done on October 21. That's a regularly scheduled meeting day for us, a Thursday morning.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Okay.

The second question I have, Chair, is that if this motion passes here at committee, will it still have to be dealt with by the House? Is that correct? The committee itself can recommend to the House that the House should allow the committee an extra 30 days, but the House must vote on this. It's not just resolved here at committee.

**The Chair:** I'm not sure how—

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** This is a report to the House. I just want to confirm that.

**An hon. member:** Just for clarification, is it votable in the House then at that time?

**The Chair:** I'm not sure of the exact procedure.

It's an adoption of reports. That's how it would get dealt with. It would probably be one of those unanimous votes, that whoever's in the House at the time it came up—

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I wonder if you could check on that, because I remember that last week we voted on another private member's bill being extended 30 days, but I will say I can't remember whether it was a standing vote or whether I happened to be in the House when it was read aloud. I remember that it wasn't just an adoption of reports; it was more that the House had to concur on that for it to actually happen. They had to vote on it.

• (0905)

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Anyway, this should not halt debate; it's just a question of procedure.

**The Chair:** We'll get that shortly here. Is that fair enough?

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Chair, again on the process, Mr. Lemieux kind of asked the question I had about how it flows through the House. Maybe I'll just take it a step further. If we extend it and we want to complete it earlier than the 30 days, is there any restriction on completing that report next week or this week?

**The Chair:** No. I would presume that we could pick any date or request any date, but again, whatever date we choose has to be approved by the House.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Then if we don't approve this extension, basically that would mean either we—

**The Chair:** That won't happen. The committee has to—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I guess my question is, if the committee doesn't approve the extension, does that mean on the 22nd it will report back to the House whether we're done with it or not?

**The Chair:** That's the last date we have to report it. When you say if we're not done with it, I'm not sure.... It just gets reported back, I guess, in the form that it.... It would be deemed to be reported back without an amendment. Does that answer your question?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** I just want to speak in favour of Alex's motion for the extension. The debate has met with many interruptions because of other legitimate business that has come before this committee, but also for the very reason that Mr. Lemieux raises: that we'd have to get the request or motion for extension, if passed, before the House, which is not likely to happen until the week after we return, so that it could be considered. So I think it makes sense that we give that extension, on the understanding, of course, that it wouldn't mean that the entire month would be consumed by hearings on this particular issue and that if we did finish earlier it could be sent to the House before the end of the 30 days.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think basically Alex is asking for an extension to meet some of the requirements of Parliament. As my colleague said, there have been a number of interruptions. I do not see this going through to the deadline the clerk mentioned. I think we are in reasonable agreement to three or four more meetings to clean up the witness lists.

Another priority for us before the November break is to hear from the department on some of the programs that people in the farming community see leaving them in a financial dilemma. So we definitely have to have the department before us as soon as possible, but I do not see this extension jeopardizing that requirement.

We have to deal with legislation as a committee, but we have a responsibility to the farming community out there to deal with issues that are affecting them on a day-to-day basis. I'm just putting a caveat in that we need to hear from the department. I think all of it can be handled prior to the November break.

I'm in support of Alex's extension so that we can get all that done.

**The Chair:** Well, the department is part of some other business that we need to deal with.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Thanks, Chair.

Let me say that I don't support the motion. We are not in favour of the bill. We have never been in favour of the bill. We voted against the bill. We're the only party that voted against the bill in the House and that gave clarity to the agricultural community about what our position is on this bill.

We are legislators. The first priority of a committee is legislation. It must be legislation. There's a clock that ticks when a private member's bill is referred to committee. Legislation is supposed to take priority. This bill arrived in front of committee on April 14. There are 60 sitting days to deal with a bill—60 sitting days. We're talking about this bill having come in last spring. What has happened, Chair, is that our schedule has been continually interrupted. The Liberals have used nice words, saying that there have been many interruptions, but they've been their interruptions, Chair. They have been tabling motions meant to distract the committee, tabling other work, and engendering debate that didn't need to be taken.

Perhaps it's my military background, but I work with priorities. What is the priority of the committee? The priority of the committee is legislation. We should not be letting other things interfere with our priority. That has been our advice to our opposition colleagues, which they've thrown aside on many occasions because they have a different agenda.

Now we get to the point, Chair, where 60 days is coming up and there's a bit of panic on the other side because we haven't dealt with this properly. They feel they haven't dealt with it properly. It's inappropriate to, I'll say, have interrupted the committee's priority work over these past 60 days, or almost 60 days, and then at the last minute, as timelines are coming due, insist that we put in place a 30-day extension.

A second priority of committee is reports. When we go out and have many witnesses come in front of this committee, when we travel as a committee, we have a responsibility to issue a report on the work we've done. That's what Canadians are waiting for. That's what the agricultural community is waiting for.

Chair, I remember last December. Last Christmas we were doing a report on competitiveness within agriculture. Right while we were trying to review and finalize the report, a report that we should have put out much earlier than it went out, the opposition, the Liberals in particular, put motion after motion after motion in front of committee. I think, if I remember correctly, we had six or seven motions stacked up, blocking, interrupting, and delaying the important work of the committee. At that point, there was no legislation in front of the committee, so I would argue that the top priority would have been finalizing the report. But it was motion after motion. Our point at the time, Chair, if you go back and check the records, was that these motions were delaying and obstructing the work of the committee. But that did not deter our opposition colleagues from continuing to put motions in front of committee. As a result, the report was issued much later than it should have been.

Now we find ourselves in the same position. We have legislation in front of committee. That would be a number one priority. A number two priority would be the report. We travelled across Canada. We've been talking about youth and the future of farming, a very important topic. The farming community would like to know what the committee's thoughts are on youth and farming. We should not be entertaining other types of business until we're done with legislation and until we're done with the report, which are the two top priorities of this committee. But that's not what's happening, Chair. In fact, if you check with the clerk, you will see that there are numerous motions that have been put by members of the opposition, in particular by the Liberal Party. What do these motions do? They delay and obstruct the work that needs to be done on these two important priorities: legislation and finalizing the report.

Chair, we're just repeating a cycle here that we went through last December. I've spoken to my colleagues outside of committee to try to get them to focus on priorities. They won't do it. They would rather extend and continue to inject motions and other activities that will, in their words, interrupt the important work of committee. I agree with them; it interrupts the important work of committee.

● (0910)

The other thing I'd like to say, Chair, is that I am surprised the Liberals are supporting Alex Atamanenko's motion for a 30-day extension.

Quite honestly, I was out across Canada during the summer and I have been visited by many farm groups. I know the Liberals have been too—I know they have. And I know how much confusion this bill has injected into the agricultural community and into research and development.

Chair, we've brought this up at committee before. There are many, many farm groups, and rather than focusing on farming and the betterment of farming, they are expending resources to come to committee on this bill to lobby me and my colleagues and my Liberal opposition MPs. They are expending a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money trying to fight this bill.

As I said, Chair, the Conservatives are the only party that has taken a clear stand on being against the bill. The Liberals have been waffling, and this is what's injecting.... The Liberals could stop this right now. If the Liberals just said, "You know what, we've had an interesting discussion to date and we're going to vote against the

bill", this would be a great relief to farm groups and organizations that have expended a lot of time, energy, and money fighting this bill and trying to raise our awareness of the implications on them, on research and development, and on the farm community.

The sooner this committee is done with this bill, the better.

We know our position; I don't understand why the Liberals don't know theirs yet, especially when they've had countless meetings with these farm groups. That they would extend this agony in the farm community for another 30 days, to me, is unconscionable. I cannot for the life of me understand why they would want to extend this for another 30 days.

If they truly don't know where they sit on this bill, then I say to all those farm groups, seed groups, research and development groups, "Keep putting the pressure on the Liberal MPs, keep visiting them, and do not let up your pressure. Obviously they don't know what you're talking about or they're not listening to you or they really don't care." If they were listening, Chair, or they did care, they would vote against this motion and bring this to an end.

Chair, it's been in committee for almost 60 sitting days—since the middle of April. How much longer does this have to go on?

Let me conclude, Chair, by saying that in my opinion this committee has had ample time to deal with this bill. We have been delayed and obstructed by the opposition, but we still have had ample time to deal with this bill. By the Liberals supporting this motion they are distracting the important work done by farm groups, particularly those concerning research and development—those groups that are trying to move the yardstick forward for our farmers.

This came up in our competitiveness report. What makes farmers more competitive? Research and development, new products, advancement. All of that is in turmoil right now, thanks to this bill, and thanks to our Liberal colleagues who have supported this bill to this point. I'd love to hear them say in this debate that they actually don't support this bill. I'd like to hear them say they are going to vote against the bill. But then I would challenge them and say, if that's the case, why are they injecting confusion and uncertainty into the marketplace for another 30 days?

If they're against the bill, let's vote against the motion, let's vote against this in the House and be done with it. Our farmers and farm groups would appreciate some clarity from the agriculture committee, and more importantly some clarity particularly from the Liberals.

They're playing it both ways: "Well, Chair, we're in favour of it, but we're not in favour of it. We're not sure yet." I do not understand how they cannot be sure, given that this bill has been in front of committee for 60 days.

I'd maybe have to check with the clerk on that. When was this tabled in the House? Do you have that information?

● (0915)

**The Chair:** Going by memory, I would think it was some time in May, but I stand to be corrected on that.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** No, it would have been tabled in the House before it came to committee. Alex would know.

Alex, when did you table your bill in the House? Was it June 2009?

**An hon. member:** Pass the floor over to Alex.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** No, I'm not passing the floor over.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I don't have the date in front of me.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Okay. My point, Chair, is that this has been in front of committee for 60 days. There was debate in the House on this, and of course the bill was on the order of precedence before it was debated in the House.

I don't know how long it's going to take my Liberal colleagues to make up their minds on this bill. I don't know how much pressure they need to come under from the farm community. I don't know how many more farm groups need to visit them. But right now they're equivocating, they are unclear, they have no fixed position, and it's hurting our agricultural sector and our farmers.

This motion simply prolongs the agony, and for that reason we're going to vote against it.

I encourage them to vote against it. If they want to say they are truly listening to the concerns in the farm community, then they need to act. It's more than just talk, and we've had a lot of talk from Liberals. Oh, they do this, and they say this and that, but when it comes time to vote, that's when true intentions are known.

Our intentions are known because of our voting pattern on this bill. I challenge the Liberals to step forward and make a decision, and for heaven's sake, make the decision in favour of our farm community.

Thank you, Chair.

• (0920)

**The Chair:** I have answers to two of your questions. It was tabled in the House, first reading, on November 2, 2009, and reported to the committee in April.

Before I give you the answer to the request for an extension, perhaps I could ask everybody to put their phones on vibrate and take off their favourite ditty. No names are mentioned, by the way.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Here is the answer to your question, Mr. Lemieux.

Request for an extension.

Upon presentation of a report requesting an extension of thirty sitting days to consider a bill referred to in section (1) of this Standing Order, a motion to concur in the report shall be deemed moved, the question deemed put, and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred to the next Wednesday, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business.

There is more to it, but I can explain it in a nutshell. As long as there's a direction or a request from this committee prior to October 22, it can still get dealt with in the House after that date. But it still could not go beyond that 30 extra sitting days, which would take us to December 10.

Is everybody clear on that?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Chair, simply for clarification, there are two votes that have to happen here. The first vote is here in committee—

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** —and the second vote will be in the House. There are two votes in order to grant this extension, so the Liberals have two times here, potentially, to clarify their position, and they may or may not.

You don't have to comment on that last statement.

**The Chair:** And I'm not going to. So it's once at the committee.

Does that answer your question?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Yes, it does. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now move to Mr. Bellavance.

Mark, could you take the chair for a couple of minutes?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** I call the question, Mr. Chair.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I don't know how we are going to manage to work because of the attitude the parliamentary secretary has just exhibited on a mere formality, a mere request to extend consideration of a bill. It makes me laugh when the parliamentary secretary talks to us about the priorities that have been established. In fact, the steering committee, and the Conservative member is on that committee, put Bill C-474 precisely on that list. We have to complete our consideration of it because we have no choice. It is part of our work as legislators, and the House is where we will have a final vote on the bill, as is the case for any other bill.

The Conservatives themselves told us, when we came back to continue the session, how important it was that we consider this bill, and that we had to hear a number of witnesses. At one point we were up to 30 or 40 witnesses. That request came from the Conservatives. Obviously, I realized right away that this was so we would waste time in committee and not consider the other priorities. In any event, it is no longer a priority for the government, maybe, but that is not what's important here. We are talking about a mere formality.

Personally, I have been on Parliament Hill since 2001, as a parliamentary assistant or a member of Parliament. I don't recall—there are more seasoned parliamentarians than myself around this table and I would like someone to give us examples—a single occasion when a committee prevented a 30-day extension of consideration in committee. It is a mere formality, it is done virtually automatically. This is not where the fate of Bill C-474 will be decided, it is in the House of Commons. That is what democracy is, even if it is not what the Conservatives wanted, and when things don't go their way, they want to muzzle everybody.

In this case, we don't want to discuss just Bill C-474 until December 10; we just want Mr. Atamanenko to have the necessary latitude to be able to finish the consideration of his bill in committee. I myself have sponsored a bill that is at the report stage, this very day in the House. I know how important it is. We don't do it for the fun of it and to make the headlines. I didn't make the headlines with my bill. We do it because we have worked with people we want to help and we think this kind of legislation will help them out. That is what we are trying to do. It isn't very complicated.

So I find it hard to understand why the parliamentary secretary is telling us today, for purely partisan reasons, that he opposes extending consideration of this bill, with a long-winded speech about how we should oppose the bill. He is entitled to oppose it, there's no problem on this side there. But come on! Allow the extension as is done everywhere. Give us the chance, as is always done at the stage that comes next, to have an agenda. So such and such dates will be devoted to Mr. Atamanenko's bill, when he himself wanted to consider it for six meetings at the outset. After that, he agreed that we could maybe consider it at three or four additional meetings. We will make a list of the witnesses we want to make it a priority to hear. We won't keep going to December 10 on this, but I don't understand why we have discussed this for half an hour and why big speeches are being made about this today.

• (0925)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In listening to the parliamentary secretary, I'm not quite sure exactly what the position is here. It seems that not long ago, a week ago, in our discussions, the impression I got was that the government wanted to give me time to extend and have discussions on this bill. The next priority then would be to look at the report of the committee, which I thought was logical. We also thought we might inject one meeting in order to hear from the department. We then would move on and get all this completed. Now there's a complete reversal.

I just want to remind him of two things. First of all, it was first tabled on November 9, 2009, and then we had prorogation, thanks to his government. We had to retable it again in March 2010. During this time we did get into our report on young farmers. We did some travelling and had witnesses.

So, in effect, if it was such a priority for everybody, and especially this government, why did it not say, "We can't do that, we must do the legislation first, and then we'll move on to talk to young farmers and do our tour"?

In the spirit of cooperation, when it was brought up to look at the report on young farmers, I thought, well, we've got some time, let's do that, this is important, we need to get on the ground, we need to have those witnesses, and then we'll come back to the bill. We came back to the bill prior to leaving for the summer break, and then of course we had summer. So there are all these factors that play into the extensions.

If it were a simple matter of the bill being introduced and we need to do it in priority fashion, then this would have happened well

before June. But for various reasons this committee chose to have some other priorities. And I agreed to that. I didn't insist on getting this bill through.

All I'm asking now is to give the democratic process its worth. Let's have these witnesses, both for and against the bill. Let democracy work. For every person who is against this bill, I can probably get two who are for it. We've had them—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** We've had them here in the meeting. Let's get on with it and let democracy work. Let's not get bogged down in process, as André said, and get on with discussing some other business.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I should point out—in fact, I feel I have to point out—Alex, that your bill, yes, was tabled on November 2 last year, but nine months earlier, in February, this committee agreed that the future of farming or the future of agriculture was a big priority. A whole bunch of BS, that I won't get into, carried on and that didn't happen until this past spring. So I think that needs to be, in all fairness, pointed out.

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I want to say I agree with you, André. I agree with what you said in the first meeting when you said that we don't need any more meetings on this. Our positions are clear. Let's go to a vote and let's not waste the committee's time on this bill. Let's get on to other important business of the committee.

Alex, I want you to understand that we do have a joint motion to look at this issue outside your bill. That's the idea of the joint motion. That's the ability for us to actually go and look at the issue without having a gun to anybody's head or threatening the industry and scaring away investment. That's the problem with delaying this legislation.

I think we should vote on it now. I don't think we need any more witnesses, because we can hear those witnesses when we do our study later on, and we can have a good, honest debate at that point in time. We can hear all the groups, listen to their policies, and listen to what they think.

It will allow the committee to actually be proactive, instead of doing it this way through legislation without having a real understanding of what's going on unless we travel to the universities, unless we talk to the professors. I think if you did that, you would understand just how serious this piece of legislation is and how seriously it will hamper Canada's growth, how seriously it will hurt Canadian farmers. It's serious, Alex.

So let's get this bill thrown out. I hope Mr. Easter is going to stick with this on this one, because he knows that. He knows this is a bad piece of legislation. He also knows that there are hundreds of millions of dollars in investment that are being tied up or are in jeopardy because this legislation is sitting here in front of this committee.

Let's vote on it today. Let's get it done. Let's get it out of here and let's move on to some progressive committee business that we can all work together on and that will actually be beneficial to farmers. This one is not beneficial to farmers. This format is not beneficial to farmers. This is a waste of time. If we're going to take another five meetings wasting farmers' time...I don't see why, when we could be moving on to some other things that are more beneficial to farmers.

Chair, when I look at this motion to extend, no, absolutely not, based on that reason. The committee is actually going to hear a lot of these witnesses in the future when we do some of our future business, and we can hear them in a light that is actually more progressive and more constructive, instead of in a destructive motion or a destructive bill like Mr. Atamanenko has brought forward.

Plus, I think Mr. Atamanenko himself will really understand just how important this industry is to Canada. He'll really understand the research sector, what's going on, and how we're going to feed the world. This isn't just about organic farming versus farmers. No. This is about looking out 10 or 20 years at how we're going to feed ourselves. How are we actually going to put food on people's tables?

That's why to hastily say we can do this in five meetings.... No. We've done enough. Get rid of the legislation. That has to be gone.

If we pass this legislation, Alex, we would chase away so much investment to other parts of the world. Our farmers would be so disadvantaged. We would see flocks leaving the prairies in droves. That's how bad this bill is.

You do not want to pursue this. I'm speaking from the heart. You do want to start the debate, and I commend you for doing that. I think your intentions are very, very honourable, and I think we need this debate. I think we're hearing this from farmers and we're hearing this from industry, but not in the relevance of the legislation, not at this point in time. So I think let's get it done with now and let's move forward. Let's bring Mr. Valeriote's motion and my motion forward. Let's get on with doing some progressive business.

Mr. Bellavance, I'm sure you have some business you'd like to move on with.

Why are we wasting our time on this thing? Let's get it moved out.

We've been very clear on this side. Let's quit jerking around the industry. Let's just make a decision and move on.

● (0930)

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote:** Mr. Chair, I will just add only a few more points to the arguments that have been presented by Mr. Atamanenko and Mr. Bellavance.

I've had discussions with the industry people who don't favour this bill, and while they had concerns about it and have concerns about it, indeed, they have actually been grateful for this opportunity they've had to have this discussion, to demystify what was formerly an industry that few people knew anything about, including perhaps many of us around this table.

One of the things that I came to this committee with was a promise to myself to attempt to honour the rights of people to be heard. And regardless of where I stand on this bill, I don't believe in shutting out

and shutting down the opportunity for people to be heard, notwithstanding that their opinion may not be consistent with my own.

Now, Mr. Atamanenko has consistently deferred discussions about this bill over time when those interruptions occurred. I regret that people around this table try to point fingers at each other. I really regret that, because it really doesn't lead to what I would say is respectful discussion about the issues at hand.

All of us around this table have participated in bringing about the disruptions, and I don't think there should be any finger pointing. I am prepared to support Mr. Atamanenko in his effort to pursue that which he thinks is important to those who he's representing, whether or not I support this bill.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I support everything Mr. Valeriote had to say, but I feel the need to make a couple of points.

In part, this discussion has been delayed a number of times for very important reasons. The future of farming report that we've yet to do was an important study to get off the ground. Legislation could have taken priority and we could have gone to it, but I felt we had accommodation on this committee to deal with basically all of the issues that came before us.

I'm disappointed, Chair, in your remarks.

● (0935)

**The Chair:** In my remarks.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** In your remarks you said we had a whole bunch of BS happen. I don't consider it to be BS that a number of us.... Motions came forward from all sides. I know the parliamentary secretary tried to blame it all on the opposition. We saw lots of delays, obstructions, and motions from the government. But I don't consider it BS that the members on this committee from the opposition side asked that the food safety issue be dealt with, that the Weatherill report be dealt with—

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter, I never said anything about food safety. I said the BS that goes on at this committee all the time—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, do I have the floor or do I not?

**The Chair:** You do, but I'm correcting you on a point of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You're not correcting me.

**The Chair:** I sure as hell am, sir.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You said, and I quote you correctly, Mr. Chair, that there was a whole bunch of BS happened—

**The Chair:** There was. I did say that, but I never said anything about food safety.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** So is that BS the Weatherill report, or is that BS the—

**The Chair:** Don't try to put words in my mouth.



**Hon. Wayne Easter:**—financial issues of hog and livestock producers? Are you suggesting that's BS, or are you suggesting that when we want to talk about the AgriFlex program, which is important to producers—

**The Chair:** No, I'm talking about all the games that get played at this committee all the time.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm just making my point that there are important issues that come up on a day-to-day basis that affect farmers daily. We felt those issues should have been discussed. That's why we put those motions forward. Some motions came forward from the government side as well. We discussed those issues and felt we could certainly get accommodation from the committee to try to handle all the issues there before us.

I know the parliamentary secretary is trying to make some political points here and really misrepresent the position of the Liberal Party, but we've made it very clear all along.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** What is the position of the Liberal Party? Put it on the record.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** For the record, we've stated that we are not in favour of this bill, but we do believe in having the discussion. I think a proposal was put forward the other day that we would hold about four more hearings.

Alex has made it clear that we could get this discussed and before Parliament before the Remembrance week break, and I think that's fair. The last meeting this committee held was one of the most constructive we've had. We had good witnesses from both sides on this issue who outlined valid points that I think give us an idea of where we need to go forward in the future. Frank and Randy's proposal may be an area where we can deal with that.

So I don't see limiting the discussion. I hope we can get through this bill before the Remembrance week break and in the interim deal with the extremely important issue of government programs and the advance payment program. We need to have the department before us so we can answer some of the producers' questions. They are facing financial hardship and need some answers on where they may be able to go to stay in the industry and have some financial well-being.

So that's where we're at, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Well, on some of the games I referred to as BS, you just contradicted yourself. Frank talked about how he wanted to hear from witnesses, yet you and Mr. Eyking just a few short days ago wanted to limit the debate on this bill to two meetings in total, and today would have been the last one. So if you're going to speak to this, at least be consistent.

Mr. Eyking has a point of order.

● (0940)

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Chair, with all due respect, because you mentioned my name, since we've come back from the summer break, I've been approached by Conservative members, including you, two or three times. One day you wanted three days on this motion, last week you guys wanted to extend it forever, and now you're back to cutting it, even today.

So if there's any flip-flopping, it's not on our side. It's on that side. I remind you, Chair—and it's very hard in your position, because of what the parties stand for, and you're with the government—that you just have to use due diligence as chair. I just advise you to try not to get involved in the fray. Be above it and chair it the best way you can.

**The Chair:** Fair enough, but when I get something pointed at me, Mr. Eyking, I'm going to respond to it, and I did.

We'll go to Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I won't take long.

We just had Mr. Easter say that they were going to oppose this bill. I'm trying to understand something here that isn't really very clear: if that, in fact, is his view personally or whether it's the party's.

We have a bill in front of us that is not supported by industry. I know what Mr. Atamanenko and Randy said. I give you credit. I know that your heart's in the right place in bringing it forward.

I have not had industry people of any kind come to me to say that this is a great bill. In fact, they say it should not be in front of you. I'm not going to repeat everything that was said by my colleagues, but what it is doing is an incredible detriment to our research and development. It's also a big concern to our farmers, because the development of those types of grains and oilseeds and other commodities we now rely upon as farmers, whether they are drought resistant or pest resistant or nutritional products developed and approved by Health Canada and CFIA and PMRA, are now put on hold.

Now we've said, wow, we're going to put all this science in place, but now government is going to have an emotional reaction. That emotional reaction made by politicians is going to carry an incredible amount of weight. That incredible amount of weight brings uncertainty. I want you to remember when we were going through the issue of the recession and losing markets. When we're opening markets, those markets are not made on emotion. Those markets are built on scientific research, and we can always go back and say that this is the science, this is the science, this is the science. That's why we've been able to open markets. That's why we've been able to go and reopen markets, particularly to beef and pork, because we've always relied on science.

Quite honestly, the industry people are saying that we are going to make them look like hypocrites.

When we say it has to be based on science, and now we're going to say.... We're the only industrialized country, actually. No other country has ever gone down this road, for obviously very good reasons. But Canada is actually going to step aside. Canada is now actually going to interject an emotional political view so that our research will actually come against and discredit the agriculture industry and its farmers for not knowing what is going to be good for the industry and what is going to be bad for the industry.

I know that Mr. Valeriote talked about demystifying the provisions. I think for those in the agriculture industry it isn't an issue of clarification. Certainly, I can't vote in favour of the extension.

Mr. Chair, before we broke I talked about it, back in May, I think. I have my concern about the future of farming. After meeting with the young farmers I was adamant that we continue to move on that. We now keep putting things in front of it. At that time, quite honestly, the deal was that we were going to finish that debate before we broke for the summer. That's what we had agreed to. But when things keep coming forward, unfortunately, we get the crisis of the day.

Mr. Easter, you know, there are things that come up. I don't disagree with you in terms of things that are important. But we cannot deal with every crisis of the day. Somebody has to determine what it is, and quite honestly, the one that came up in your last motion on the advanced payment....

You mentioned the other day the Ontario beef producers. I talked to the Ontario beef producers and their past president. I had two of them in my office. They had three or four items. This was not one of them. In fact, the past president said he wanted to thank me for doing it. The issue was that they were concerned that there wasn't going to be an extension. They were getting anxious that there wasn't an extension. They wanted to thank me for actually doing that.

• (0945)

So the crisis of the day should not be one that is manufactured, particularly ahead of those that we've all agreed upon, for example, the future of farming.

Quite honestly, Alex, this whole bill is going to make the difference on whether agriculture is sustainable in the long run. If you remember, as we went through the country and we talked to our young farmers, those progressive, innovative farmers were relying on the fact that we were going to have the research and development and we were going to be able to move ahead. These are positive people. They looked at this industry on agriculture that has so many opportunities in it. That opportunity comes because they have the processes in place that our other competitive nations have, and we shouldn't be putting more barriers in front of them.

So I will not be able to support the extension of this motion. I'm glad we're able to have this small time for debate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Thanks, Chair.

I just want to follow up on a few points that were made.

When Mr. Valeriote was talking he was leaving the impression I think that if the committee doesn't pass this motion, we're somehow shutting down debate and not letting people have their word.

But, Chair, I want to go back to the timeline on this bill, because I think it's extremely important. It was tabled in the House in November 2009; that would be one whole year ago, 12 months. It was referred to committee in April 2010, and now we're sitting in October 2010. There has been debate in the House on this private member's bill to get it to committee. There has been intense lobbying done by the agricultural sector. And, quite frankly, Chair, there's been debate here in committee. We've had witnesses come forward on this bill.

So I think the important thing, Chair, is that this is not shutting down debate. What they're asking to do is prolong debate. That's what the motion is about. It's not about shutting down debate; they want to prolong debate.

The question I ask, especially to the Liberals, because they are the swing vote on this, is why? Why do you want to prolong debate?

Chair, here's the issue. The issue is that we're talking about legislation here, something that will actually change an act. If you want to have the debate, you can have the debate without legislation being the crux of the matter. This is what the industry is worrying about, that this legislation will pass. That's what they're worried about.

Mr. Valeriote and Mr. Hoback have put together a joint motion to study biotech. There's no legislation involved with that. It would be a committee study of biotech. It's a perfect opportunity to have the debate on biotech, on matters such as what Mr. Atamanenko is proposing, without the heavy hammer of potential legislation passing into law. That's the difference.

So they're asking, first of all, to prolong this debate on a bill that could have a very detrimental impact on the industry when what we could do is pass a motion that the next committee study is on biotech. We could have the same debate, Chair, and in fact have a more expanded debate without legislation being on the table, without legislation striking fear into the industry, because if this bill passes, it will have a very detrimental impact on the industry.

I want to highlight this. We know this because we have had leaders from farm groups come and see us. Last week, or a week and a half ago, we had the biotech industry into our offices. They were meeting with me, meeting with my colleagues, meeting with the Liberals, meeting with the NDP and with the Bloc. I can tell you, they're worried; they're very worried about this bill and where it's going. And they're confused, because on the one hand the Liberals say, "We're against the bill".... Actually, that was a bit of a revelation. That's the first I've heard that concretely on the record, that the Liberals are against the legislation. On the other hand, Chair, they're going to vote for the motion.

It simply doesn't make any sense. I think the industry sees that that position makes no sense. If you are against the bill, vote against the bill. Vote against prolonging the debate, prolonging the agony in which the industry finds itself. Vote against prolonging turmoil within the industry.

If you remember our last witness, Chair, we had Wilfred Keller in from Genome, and that was the question I asked him. He's in the marketplace, he's in the industry. I asked him, based on his experience, is the very debate on this bill having a detrimental impact on the industry? That was my question. And his answer was yes.

Why this debate should be prolonged makes no sense, Chair. And if we're going to prolong the debate, that's only going to prolong the misery within that portion of the agricultural sector.

The second last thing I'll bring up is that Mr. Valeriotte is from Guelph. As we know, Chair, universities are very keen on research and development. They look for opportunities to make advances, particularly in agriculture. We've been to the University of Guelph. We've toured their facilities. We've spoken with their heads of departments as a committee. They're very clear about it. They are for research and development and moving the yardsticks forward for the agricultural community. Yet this bill throws that into turmoil. So I'm unclear as to why Mr. Valeriotte would prolong the uncertainty, particularly when he's from a riding that contains the University of Guelph.

The last point I'll make on this, Chair, is that we all know how we're going to vote now. We know the NDP, obviously, are for the bill. It's an NDP private member's bill. The NDP are probably going to be for that. We know that we are against. We've always been against the bill. We've been very clearly against the bill, both in the House and here in committee. And we've just heard the Liberals say they are against the bill.

• (0950)

So the cards are on the table, Chair. There is no need to prolong this. If we want the debate to continue, let's have it continue on a biotech study, not on a bill when that bill is having a detrimental impact on the industry.

Again, I would appeal to my Liberal colleagues to see the reasonableness of this argument, and I know they have heard it from industry. So I would encourage them, Chair, to vote against this motion to prolong debate, because debate has happened.

Instead, what we could do is this. There are meetings left before the 60 sitting days expire in which the bill has been before committee; there is still more time for witnesses to come forward. Let's call those witnesses forward. Let's have our debate during the allocated timeframe.

Let's vote against this motion. Let's get this bill back to the House and let's just deal with it. Then, as a committee, let's move forward with the joint biotech study, which shows there is cooperation here. Yes, we have a disagreement on this bill, but there is cooperation in this committee and we've seen the good work that we're able to do. Let's continue the debate on a study, without the threat of legislation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When something is wrong, it's wrong. It's wrong. Why carry on a bunch of debate on an issue when it's very clear that it's not in the best interests of farmers? It's certainly something we've had a lot of debate on in the House. We've had debate here in committee on it, and certainly we've all had an opportunity to hear from farmers, certainly over the summer particularly. We all had a chance to travel in our ridings and other parts of the country.

I very clearly have heard what farmers want to see happen with the bill. They want to see it defeated, and they've made that very clear to me. I know they've made it very clear. Certainly our government has been very clear that we support farmers in that and we want to see this bill defeated. We voted against it, and we've been against it here in committee. Yet, of course, we have the opposition,

particularly the Liberals, being quite unclear as to what their intentions are.

Not only has this been a bad bill and one that we don't want to see carried forward, but I think it's also been a waste of the committee's time when we could be dealing with other issues, particularly the future of farming study that we've been doing. I think that's one we need to get back to dealing with, because certainly there are a lot of issues that need to be dealt with out there. I think this bill goes against some of those interests. I don't see the future of farming being furthered by this debate. If anything, this debate does more harm to the industry than anything else that it could be doing.

We heard from young farmers when we were doing our study across the country that they understand where the future is in farming, and certainly a big part of that is research and development and new opportunities. This bill would go a long way to harming those kinds of opportunities for our young farmers.

So it's very clear to me that this bill is one that we want to see defeated, and I think farmers want to see defeated. If that's the case, I see no reason to support this motion to extend the time allotted for the consideration of this bill here at committee or anywhere else.

As I said, if it's wrong, then let's defeat it. I'm prepared to defeat this motion and I'm prepared to defeat this bill today, if given the opportunity. I know farmers would be glad to see that. I know our party would support farmers in that.

When it's creating all this confusion in the industry, it's something that we really need to think about and we really need to try to do our best to deal with it.

If there are calls for further debate, and I've heard that from some of the opposition, I certainly have no desire to see debate stifled by any means. Mr. Hoback and Mr. Valeriotte have co-sponsored a motion, clearly a non-partisan type of motion when it's supported by both sides, to study biotech and its implications for the future. I certainly support that, and I think we should be moving forward with something like that without any question. That's something we could be discussing, because it is important for the industry.

In the context of this bill...and from all accounts that I'm hearing from farmers and farm groups, both in my riding and across this country, they are very concerned about the confusion this bill is creating out there. They are very concerned about the uncertainty they're seeing created by this bill. They want to see this bill defeated and off the table. I think we should be doing everything we can to ensure that happens as expeditiously as possible. That's why I will have no support for this motion, and I believe our party doesn't want to see this motion supported. We certainly want to see this bill defeated and we want to see it done as quickly as we possibly can.

It's unfortunate that the Liberals want to try to ride both sides of the fence on this issue, because they could certainly be very helpful in assisting farmers and seeing this off the table as quickly as possible if they would choose, just for once, to take a position on something.

● (0955)

I find it very frustrating when you have individuals here.... Certainly Mr. Valeriote was part of the motion with Mr. Hoback to see the study on biotech, which we all support, yet he represents Guelph, a riding in which we have certainly one of the leading agricultural institutions in the country, and they would certainly not want to see something like this bill move forward there.

It really frustrates me when someone isn't representing the wishes and needs of their constituency. Certainly, to me, that would seem to be the case with this when you have a member representing an institution such as that who would sit here and ride the fence on an issue like this when it would very clearly harm the interests of an institution in his very own riding. Certainly, we need to carry on some debate on the biotech, and that should be done in the context of the motion that Mr. Hoback and Mr. Valeriote put forward, but not with a bill like this one.

The Liberals have kind of said or indicated today for the very first time that they wouldn't support this bill. I have a really tough time trusting them on that. They've been consistently riding the fence on this issue, and I have a really tough time trusting their position, which, for whatever reason, they have now decided to come out with here today.

Certainly in the context, as an example, of the gun registry and the debate on the private member's bill we had there, it was clear that particularly Mr. Easter was not a supporter of the gun registry. And then suddenly he had a conversion. I don't know if it coincided with the fact that his party was being whipped. I have to imagine it was, and I guess he was whipped into it by his leader, but it makes me really question whether we can trust what they're saying here. I would imagine the voters back in the good riding of Malpeque on Prince Edward Island would also have a really tough time trusting that position.

I have some quotes here from Mr. Easter that make it very clear where he claimed to stand on the gun registry, just as we've heard their claims today that they oppose this. I see here from Mr. Easter in November 2009 something that I would say is a very clear indication of where he stands: "I do not favour a gun-control system that makes criminals out of farmers and hunters." That sounds pretty clear to me, as clear as the kind of statement that we heard earlier.

● (1000)

**The Chair:** You're next.

Is this a point of order?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** That's right. I want to remind Mr. Richards that we are not talking about extending the debate on the gun registry; we are talking about extending Mr. Atamanenko's bill. That's all I wanted to say.

[English]

**The Chair:** That's right—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can I respond to that point?

Certainly, yes, we're having a debate here today on whether we would extend this motion, and there have been some statements

made by the Liberal members. I am trying to decide whether we can trust those statements that have been made, and I'm using an example to try to decide that. That's all I'm doing here, so I believe it is relative to the point.

Anyway, Mr. Easter made it very clear that was his position, but then—it was funny—we had a vote a couple of weeks ago at which I didn't see him stand up and vote that way. Following that vote, when he stood up and voted against the very wishes of his constituents and the very wishes of farmers in this country—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Richards said I voted against the wishes of my constituents. Could he table before this committee the poll he has that would prove that? We've heard Pierre Lemieux say the same thing in the riding.

As for my position on making criminals out of farmers, the proposal that I support is the proposal that Michael Ignatieff put forward, which showed some leadership on finding a way of going to a ticketing offence rather than a criminal offence. So let's get the record straight.

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes. Do you know what—

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Richards is doing an excellent job of bringing up some points.

I wonder if Mr. Easter would be willing to table the poll that he did in his riding showing that his constituents are in fact in favour of the gun registry, which is why he voted for it, if he wants to get things on the record.

**The Chair:** Yes, well, we'll wait for both of those documents.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

Certainly I think Mr. Easter has just made a perfect illustration of exactly what the problem is here. He is saying he's going to represent what Michael Ignatieff wants rather than what farmers or his constituents want. That, to me, is the very point here. How can we believe what they're saying here today in this committee when we know that tomorrow Mr. Ignatieff could come out and just whip them into doing something completely different? That's the whole point we're making today. It's very concerning to me to see that.

Mr. Easter says there is no proof that his constituents want this. Well, I have a quote here from an individual from the Prince Edward Island Outfitters Association. He says he was very disappointed in Mr. Easter and what he did. He says that the registry is annoying and one more piece of paperwork for hunters and farmers. And his quote, after the vote—

● (1005)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Mr. Richards, we have a long list of people here who want to speak.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have the floor, do I not?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Yes, but if you stick to the motion that's at hand, then everybody can—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. Well, I'm certainly discussing that.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** As the chairman, I'd just like to stick to the motion at hand. If we veer off it, we might have to go to the next speaker.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. Again, I've been very clear that what I'm doing is providing some context for my concerns as to whether that is something we can trust from your party.

This is a quote from the fellow from the P.E.I. Outfitters Association: "It's strictly along party lines", and he, referring to Mr. Easter, "certainly flip-flopped over on us...."

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Mr. Richards, I'm going to move on to the next speaker now.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Whoa, hold on a second.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** I'm going to Mr. Bellavance.

**An hon. member:** A point of order, Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** No more points of order.

I asked, in a polite way, that we stick to the motion and not attack other members. As the chair, I will not put up with attacks on other members here on an issue that's not even relevant to the motion at hand.

Mr. Richards, you know what—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I've made it very clear.

Well, I challenge the chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** You can challenge the chair all you want.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I've made it very clear that this is salient to the motion because of the fact that we cannot trust what the Liberals are saying here. I'm challenging your ruling.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Chair, I think there is a serious misunderstanding here, or bad faith.

[English]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, I've challenged the chair. I don't believe we can move on until—

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** How many points of order do we have on this side? Who has the point of order?

Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Even though we're going to lose on it and there is no debate on it, he did challenge the chair. I'm only raising it to protect your reputation, Mark, not mine.

You're going to lose it anyway.

Just have a vote.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Call the vote for the chair. So this will end the meeting probably.

Right?

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** No, no, he's just challenging your decision, Mark.

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

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Francis, it doesn't matter because he's going to vote with you anyway. He gets to vote on a tie, so we're going to lose either way.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Which chair are you challenging now?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** I'm not challenging anybody! I'm just telling you the rules.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Just for clarification, the chair has been brought back to the table.

Just for the chair to know what happened, the Conservatives got off topic quite a bit, so I tried to bring it back to order as best I could, Chair.

**The Chair:** That's your prerogative as the chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Good luck if you can get them back to the relevant topic at hand.

Mr. Bellavance is on the—

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Chair, I had the floor.

[English]

**The Chair:** We have a speakers' list...

They're challenging you, Mark. Get back in here.

• (1010)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Clerk, we have to bring this to a vote, right?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Chloé O'Shaughnessy):** That's right.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** Okay. There's a motion challenging the chair.

We're going to have a vote on the motion that the decision of the chair be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair sustained [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** I am staying here, and I resume the meeting.

We'll go to Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Richards, on a point of order.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I have to ask a question on procedure here. Because it's the ruling of the chair being sustained, does the chair have the right to decide a tie vote when it's his ruling that's being challenged? It's a bit of a conflict of interest, is it not?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking):** The clerk says this is all kosher.

Let's move on to Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we started this morning, there has been either a misunderstanding or bad faith on the Conservatives' part, because what we are talking about is not whether we are in favour of or opposed to Bill C-474. Since we started this morning, the parliamentary secretary has been making big speeches to say he is opposed to Bill C-474. We know that. What we are discussing is the possibility of having a 30-day extension for this bill. I repeat, that should be a mere formality. I have never seen a discussion drag on about this in any other committee and I want to make things clear. Randy is right, and even though it was in camera, it doesn't bother me to repeat it: I did not want us to spend the entire time we have between now and Christmas on one subject, whether it be Bill C-474 or something else, because ideas were already firmly entrenched and we had to give priority to the list of witnesses we should hear on this and be sure that an appropriate number of meetings will be devoted to the bill. What we are discussing here is whether we want to be sure we can do that. As a committee, it will simply facilitate our work when we set the agenda we are supposed to have set at 8:45 this morning. Then we will be able to say that we have all the latitude we need to consider the priority matters, one of which is Bill C-474.

I will remind you that I was even opposed to 10 meetings being devoted to this bill and I will continue to oppose that. We had reached a compromise, that we might need three or four meetings to hear all the witnesses and finish it, but we are going to have until December 10 to do that, not until October 22, if we don't agree to Alex's motion. So it is just to facilitate our work so we can set an agenda and devote a particular number of meetings to Bill C-474, a particular number of meetings to reviewing the programs, and another particular number of meetings, obviously, so we can complete the report on young and beginning farmers.

So I don't see what the Conservatives are aiming for when they make big speeches to tell us how awful the bill is. This is not where that will be decided; it will be decided in the House. That is where the fate of the bill will be settled, by voting for or against it. Here, we just want to know whether we should have the latitude, as a committee, to be able to put it in the right place on the agenda between now and December 10. That doesn't mean we will be talking about it until December 10; there is a big difference.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Before I say a few words here, I'm getting tired of hearing slanderous remarks against Wayne by Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I can say this.

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Mr. Atamanenko is very close to breaching Mr. Richards' parliamentary privileges. The fact of the matter is that in a court of law, if you want to say somebody is being slanderous—

and I'm sure Mr. Valeriote knows this—the person has to be telling a lie.

When Mr. Richards is quoting factual information that Mr. Easter did flip-flop on the gun registry, that he did say for 13 years or longer that he was going to vote that it was a bad bill, and that he did flip over. So now if you want to say that he's being overly partisan, I'm fine with that, but to say somebody is being slanderous is going too far.

• (1015)

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Okay. I withdraw my comment. I would like to say that he's being overly partisan and I would like to say that there are other places to do this, such as in an election campaign.

I would just like to say that I don't often defend on a personal basis members of other parties, but if Mr. Richards would have spent half the time that Mr. Easter has spent throughout his career defending farmers, then I think we'd all be much better off. I'll leave it at that.

There have been a couple of points that have been raised. For the record, Brazil is a successful country in regard to GMOs—

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Chairman, when you stepped out of the room, Mr. Eyking made the point that we are not to attack other members. I wish Mr. Atamanenko would listen to that advice. It was just five minutes ago. Mr. Eyking was very clear on that.

**The Chair:** He did withdraw the slanderous comment.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** But again, he continued attacking him after withdrawing.

**The Chair:** Actually, I heard him praising Mr. Easter quite a bit.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** And attacking Mr. Richards.

**The Chair:** Yes, okay.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** It won't happen again, Mr. Hoback.

**The Chair:** I will watch this.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I have a couple of points to make, and hopefully we can get to the vote soon.

You mentioned other countries. Brazil is a successful producer of GMOs. It has similar rules in place to what we're trying to propose with this bill. The department itself is looking at market access in regard to their proposal for low-level tolerance, so it's already being looked at.

Of course, industry doesn't want this bill. Monsanto, CropLife, and Syngenta are putting pressure on all of us. They don't even want to have this healthy discussion here. They're putting fear into the farming organizations. They're going to withdraw all sorts of research and development. I think we, as parliamentarians, have a chance to ask who do we represent, farmers or these corporations?

And I think we have the right to ask them next time they lobby you, are they prepared to cover the costs if we introduce genetically modified alfalfa and wheat, which is what his bill is targeting, to reimburse farmers when they lose markets in other countries? All this bill is looking at is the impact of potential markets. It has nothing to do with stifling research. There's tremendous research and development that has gone in this country, and virtually all of it has been with non-GM traits.

We have markets. All we're saying with this bill is, look, let's put that little insurance there so our farmers don't take a hit. Actually, I'm hoping there will be other colleagues from other parties who come on board with this bill so we can make the distinction: do we support farmers or do we get on this corporate bandwagon and continue to be mouthpieces of this industry?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Again, Chair, one of the concerns I have here is one of trust. I'm glad to hear that Mr. Easter made the comment...he stepped out and said that he will not support this bill. We needed him to say that in the first vote. We wouldn't have wasted a lot of the committee's time if he would have done that.

What concerns us—and I think this is where Mr. Richards was trying to get to—is he also stood up on a vote in the House on the long-gun registry where he wanted to see it scrapped, and then his leader changed his mind. I'd like assurances from Mr. Easter, if he is actually going to vote against this bill, that he has assurances from his gods above him that the Liberal Party will vote against this bill. Is that lock, stock, and barrel?

The point I'm concerned about here is in the Liberal Party I don't know who makes up their policy. Is it Mr. Easter, when he's sitting here today? Is it Mr. Ignatieff, when he's sitting somewhere else talking to somebody else tomorrow? I really don't know. So how can I trust him based on their past experience on voting? That's a concern I have with what Mr. Easter said.

But the other point I want to make is if he is telling the truth—which I think he probably is, I think he's an honourable person generally—if that's the case, why would we waste more time on it? He says, we're going to vote against it anyway. Obviously, the witnesses he brings forward he's going to zone out anyway. It's not going to have an impact on his decision, on how he's going to vote on this legislation, so why are we wasting the committee's time?

Mr. Bellavance makes a lot of sense. It's time to move on to other business. So why would we extend this? Let's have a vote on this thing today and be done with it. I think we should look at putting a motion back to the House to discontinue with this legislation. I guess that's where I see these things going.

I don't know why we're wasting all this time either, Mr. Bellavance. I agree with you. This is a waste of time. We're wasting farmers' time. We're wasting my time. But in the same breath, we shouldn't have been here anyway. If the Liberals had voted appropriately, if they believed this was a bad piece of legislation when we started, we wouldn't be here having this debate. We would

actually be going out and doing progressive work on behalf of farmers and the agriculture industry as a whole.

Again, it doesn't change anything; it just re-emphasizes why this should not get a continuance. We've heard the Bloc now say that they think this should go away. We've also now heard Mr. Easter say that he's going to vote against it and the Liberal Party is going to vote against it.

Where are we at here? This seems so silly. Let's get onto doing some work for farmers for a change instead of playing these political games.

• (1020)

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

Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to get off the topic of debate for one second because I was trying to be polite and not raise a point of order in the middle of Mr. Bellavance's speech, but I would like the record to clearly show, or somebody to put on the record, that while Mr. Eyking did clearly breach, in my opinion, Mr. Hoback's parliamentary privilege by taking the floor away from him—without just ruling him out of order, but clearly taking the floor away from...Mr. Richards. Thank you for the correction, Mr. Bellavance. When the challenge of the chair occurred, our chair had the dignity to not sit in and vote, as he could have done, to overrule the opposition on this.

So our side isn't playing partisan politics on it. I want to congratulate the chair for trying to keep some kind of balance with this.

That being said, Mr. Chair, I would like to get onto the topic that we're talking about here, which is Bill C-474. While I believe that Mr. Atamanenko has put this bill forward with the best of intentions, as I've read in several articles and talked about to several of my producers and stakeholders, this is a bad bill. This may have good intentions throughout it, but the bill itself is a bad bill. I don't want to get into all of the different aspects of the bill, but I believe many of my colleagues have brought forward many of its negative aspects.

One that really concerns me is moving away from the science-based approach to a market-based approach. I would like to spend a couple of minutes talking about the crux of this and why it's important to take care of it right now. First of all, while this is continuing to go on, the industry is in turmoil. There is uncertainty as to whether this bill is going to be passed or not. I've had many industry representatives come to me about that.

Mr. Easter shakes his head at me, but the fact of the matter is that Mr. Easter.... And no more backroom games here. Let's get it all out on the table. Mr. Easter has come to us in the past and said he's going to vote against this bill. Mr. Easter has come to us and said let's just bring it to committee for a little bit and get some hearings on it and then we'll vote against it there. Well, Mr. Easter, you can't simply gut the bill in committee and not have it heard from again. Mr. Atamanenko will simply bring it forward in the House and there will be a vote anyway.

You ask why we don't simply move forward on this quickly. Well, because Mr. Easter has not only flip-flopped on the long-gun registry—and I'm not going to get into that at length, but he has flip-flopped on issues when it comes to the agriculture committee, on issues when he's dealing with colleagues on this side, so there's really no trust left from our side with the Liberal ag critic. We really don't know...and we all know that his party uses the whip more effectively than our party, which has more free votes than any party in the House of Commons. That's a fact, Mr. Chairman.

The crux of the matter is that I really believe if Mr. Easter wants—and I want this on the record—to move forward for farmers, if he wants to do the best thing for farmers.... If all he wants to do is spend his last dying years as a member of Parliament on scandals and doorknob press conferences, then he should resign today as the Liberal ag critic and let somebody sit over there who can make deals that we can actually trust and move forward on for farmers. So I think Mr. Easter should do the honourable thing and resign so that we can move forward—

**The Chair:** Let's stick to the topic, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will simply wrap up by saying that this is a bad bill. An extension on this bill will only create more uncertainty in the industry for a longer period of time. I think we need to deal with this quickly. I think we need to report back to the House that the committee recommends that we don't move forward on this bill, and I think we should make that vote today.

• (1025)

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

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm glad to have the floor back after I was so rudely interrupted by the vice-chair.

Mr. Chairman, I have a real concern here. This is a bad piece of legislation. Certainly, our party has been very, very clear here that when you've got a bad piece of legislation, let's defeat it. Let's defeat the legislation. Let's defeat this motion to extend debate. Let's just get on with dealing with the issue at hand, which is the fact that we've got a bad piece of legislation before us, one that will harm the interests of farmers, one that will harm the interests of the industry, one that will do a lot of damage to our trade relationships, and one that will do a lot of damage to the future of farming. That is something that we have been discussing and something that we've spent a lot of time travelling across this country studying. Now it's been left to the side while we deal with legislation that, frankly,

could have been defeated at second reading had the Liberals had the guts to stand up and do so.

The point has been made, but certainly I have the same concerns. I was making that point earlier, that regarding the Liberals, I just can't be sure that I can count on them to do what they say. Certainly, tomorrow their leader could come forward and whip them, just like he did with the gun registry bill, as an example. Rather than do what's in the best interests of farmers, they will stand up and do what they're told by Michael Ignatieff.

I just don't want to see any time extension granted because I'm concerned that it will give them more opportunity to have a chance to flip-flop. If they've now said they're on the record as being opposed to this bill, then I would call on them to stand with us and defeat this piece of legislation and this motion.

Let's get on with things, and let's move on with things, like the study we've got on the future of farming. Let's move on with the motion that Mr. Hoback and Mr. Valeriote have co-sponsored to study biotech and its future implications for the agriculture industry. That certainly seems to me to be the kind of thing we need to be doing in this committee, the kind of debate we need to be having.

If this is not a piece of legislation the Liberals can support, then why are we wasting our time carrying on with debate on it? We've been very clear as a government that we're not supporting it. We won't be supporting it. If the Liberals really are true to their word, that this is what they intend to do as well, I do not understand why they would want to carry on with something that they would then see no value in either. We just cannot be certain that we can take their word and trust them on this.

Again, I think we need to look at biotech and its implications for farming. We've got an opportunity to do just that with the motion that's been put forward. Certainly, even in the context of the future of farming, there's opportunity to look at biotech in terms of what it may or may not be able to do in terms of helping out farmers to be able to see the future of agriculture continue with our young farmers going forward. They've certainly been very clear.

I know both in the time that we travelled across this country hearing from young farmers and also with my own opportunities to speak with farmers in my riding and elsewhere in the country, they've been very clear that they understand the need for research and development and new opportunities for farmers, be it new markets being opened up to them through the good work that Minister Ritz, the trade minister, and the Prime Minister have done.... This has been very much appreciated by farm groups all across this country, because of the great work that is being done to help farmers have more opportunities to market their products. These are the kinds of things that will help ensure the future of farming, things like new opportunities. Certainly, when we look at research and development and biotech, we do see opportunities there for farmers.



●(1030)

To see a motion and a bill like this that would do harm and damage the interests of our farmers by removing opportunities for innovation from the agriculture industry is certainly something that I have a huge concern about. It's something that I just cannot allow to be carried on when I know that it's been made very clear to me by farmers that they have a concern about the confusion and the uncertainty being created by this piece of legislation and the implications of it, and by the fact that they're very unclear on the position of the Liberal Party in particular. It just really causes them great reasons for concern and confusion.

I stand with farmers in saying that if this is a piece of legislation that will not be anything that would help in the interests of the future of farming or help the agriculture industry to be able to continue to see new opportunities, then why carry on with a motion like this one? Why carry on with a piece of legislation like this one? Let's just defeat it.

Certainly, to me, that is exactly what farmers want to see us do. They want to see us defeat this motion. They want to see us defeat this legislation. That's exactly what I intend to do and that's exactly what this government intends to do. I would just call on my Liberal opposition across the way to do the same: to have the best interests of farmers in mind.

Certainly, I hear time and time again from farmers on the issues they care about and are concerned about, and yet on every single one of those issues, the opposition, the Liberals in particular—they're not there. They're not supporting what farmers want to see happen.

This legislation is just one more example of that. Certainly—

**The Chair:** A point of order, Frank?

**Mr. Francis Valeriote:** Can we just call the question, Mr. Chair?

**An hon. member:** I'm on the list.

**The Chair:** Only if I have unanimous consent, Mr. Valeriote. That's the rule.

Do I have unanimous consent to call the question?

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

**An hon. member:** *Oui*.

**The Chair:** Okay. I call the question.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** A recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, if you could do that, please, Mr. Lemieux has requested a recorded vote.

**An hon. member:** Could you read the motion?

**The Clerk:** Yes, of course. The motion before the committee is:

That the Committee request an extension of thirty sitting days to consider Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), beyond the sixty days from the date of the Bills' referral to Committee, as provided in Standing Order 97.1(1); and that the continued study, clause by clause consideration and reporting of the Bill be completed by the end of the extension period.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Chair, I have a motion that's relevant to the discussions we're having right now.

Clerk, can you help me if the wording is incorrect?

It is that the agriculture committee report to the House that it discontinue with this piece of legislation.

**The Chair:** The advice I'm getting here, Mr. Hoback, is that the motion we just dealt with asks the House to extend this, and the motion you're suggesting is exactly contrary to that. What the clerk is saying, and I think unless somebody can show me something that I've missed, I believe she is correct in that this motion would not—

●(1035)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** So, Mr. Chair, the impact of this vote we've just had by the Liberals, then, has meant that, no matter what we do, this bill has to proceed. Are you saying that this motion cannot come forward anywhere in the next 30 days?

**The Chair:** As per what I read before, this request would go to the House. The House would report back on it, and more than likely grant the extension.

**An hon. member:** You don't know that.

**The Chair:** I don't know that. I'm just saying that unless there's something else.... But to present this motion at this time...it can't come forth.

A point of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We have 10 minutes left. I think we could agree on three more hearings on this issue and put it behind us. Government members have wasted two meetings of this committee, and I suggest we get to the agenda items and just state a number of hearings so we can get the issue dealt with prior to the Remembrance Day break.

Let's please stop the games.

**The Chair:** As to the number of meetings on it, because we have a report from subcommittee in front of us, in order to discuss that we probably need to go in camera to deal with that report. If there's a wish to amend the report, we can deal with it at that time. I think that would be the correct procedure.

A point of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'd move a motion to amend the report of the steering committee.

**The Chair:** You can't do that at this point.

Mr. Storseth is next, and then Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to make a motion that the committee take out of camera and make public the minutes of our October 5, 2010, meeting.

We were in camera simply to discuss the subcommittee report. There was nothing that came out of that discussion that was confidential. I believe it will prove to the public that Mr. Easter is not telling the truth when he says that our side is the one playing games. It was Mr. Easter who talked out the clock at the end of the last meeting. It was Mr. Easter who had the floor. I move that the committee immediately allow the October 5 transcripts to come out of camera.

I believe this is in order and has been done in the natural resources committee in the past.

**The Chair:** Mr. Storseth, I thought you were making a point of order.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Regardless, I didn't. I'm making a motion.

**The Chair:** You didn't ask for a point of order? You had your hand up. I thought that's what you were saying. If you weren't on a point of order, then you can raise the motion.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

André.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I have something to say and it is not a point of order.

I am very pleased that the meeting this morning is public. Agricultural producers are going to see what offhand treatment the government party is giving them right now. We have extremely important matters we need to discuss and once again we are going to lose a working session, when there are not many left between now and the Christmas break. We have lost a working session to childishness.

The motion on the floor was only a formality, a request for an extension to consider a bill. We can very well decide to consider the bill at three meetings so we can hear a few witnesses, and that is what we're going to do.

I remind my Conservative friends that they themselves wanted to hear certain witnesses on Bill C-474. What is so dangerous about having discussions on a priority bill? We have no choice but to consider it and whether someone supports it or not is of no importance. Today is not when that is going to be decided. These political games and these attacks on Wayne Easter, or on anyone, get us nowhere, because it is his constituents, including the rural ones, who will decide his fate in the election, after he changed his position on the Canadian Firearms Registry. The election is when that will be decided. Talking about it here at every committee meeting, every day, will not help the farming community.

Some beef and pork producers, or producers from all sectors, expect us, their elected representatives, to operate in as non-partisan a way as possible. I know it isn't easy because we all have election platforms and priorities to abide by. This committee used to function well and we were able to work together. In fact I have told many people that. Unfortunately, things have been going badly for a short time now.

I will now come back to what you said earlier, Mr. Chair, that we never manage to finish what we start. I recalled the many reports we

have written. This committee has even produced unanimous reports. I have been a member for five years. We even managed to create a subcommittee on listeriosis. We made a report on that subject. Work does get done here, and I am sure that all my colleagues will agree with me that the agricultural producers are grateful that we are working for them, whether we are for or against certain measures, that is not important. The important thing is to try to achieve progress on issues.

Today, we have again had evidence of the disdain with which the Conservatives sitting on this committee look on the concerns of agricultural producers. They have engaged in systematic obstruction for an entire meeting because there was a request for an extension. I have never seen this in any committee, wasting time like this on this kind of motion, which is a mere formality. I still can't get over it. I am glad the meeting was public, because people are going to know this and they will be able to judge how the Conservatives are treating them.

● (1040)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have finished business, but we have way too much business that never gets finished, André.

I will just remind you that we have about two and a half minutes left.

I have Alex, then Mr. Hoback, and then you, Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I speak against Brian's motion. We can spend time conjuring up all sorts of meetings and bringing them out of camera. Our purpose initially was to decide whether, yes or no, we'd extend talk on my bill. We decided yes.

Our next purpose was to spend some time to approve the steering committee report. It looks, with two minutes left, like we are not going to do it. So we're going into vacation with no clear direction other than the fact that we've voted to extend my bill, which is good. But we don't have an idea of the schedule, because we won't have time to discuss it, because of this filibuster.

**The Chair:** Order.

We have a minute and a half left. Can I call the vote?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay, go ahead, Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** It's so frustrating, because, André, you're 100% right. I agree with you, but you're making the accusations to the wrong side of the floor. We wanted to get this thing off the table and get it away. It's the Liberal Party that's saying they want to hear more witnesses so they can vote against Mr. Atamanenko's bill. It's fairly clear what they are doing. They're wasting our time.

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I know we're going to run out of time, so what I suggest is that you have a steering committee meeting this afternoon or tomorrow so that you can plan the next two meetings for next week for this committee, with witnesses, so that we don't lose two more days.

**An hon. member:** No.

**An hon. member:** We're not here.

**The Chair:** I can tell you right now that I can't do that today.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Can you do it by call? We don't want to waste two more meetings.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** You're the guys wasting our time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hoback, do you have more?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Again it comes back to hypocrisy. They don't want to waste meetings, yet they bring in witnesses, and they're basically saying they're not going to listen to them. Well, that's a waste of time. They've already told Mr. Atamanenko they're going to vote against his legislation.

So what will we be doing for the next five or seven meetings? We'll be wasting everybody's time. It's frustrating.

André, you're 100% right that we have not done farmers a service today; we've done them a disservice. We have not done them a service moving forward, because we're entertaining something where our minds are already made up.

● (1045)

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I just want to say that it's unfortunate. I actually disagree with some of what Mr. Bellavance says. Today's debate was important because it was about the continued confusion that's being injected into the agricultural sector by this bill.

Today we could have had witnesses here on the bill, but Mr. Atamanenko and his opposition colleagues insist on injecting other orders of business that obstruct continuing with the bill. So I take exception to what Mr. Bellavance has said. It's unfortunate that the Liberals have sided to continue this bill and prolong the agony in the agricultural sector.

**The Chair:** Can I call the question?

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

**The Chair:** All in favour of Mr. Storseth's motion to make the meeting of October 5 public?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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