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Tuesday, November 16, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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•(0850)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody.

Larry informed me last week that he would not be able to attend this meeting, so he asked me to sit in as vice-chair. He also assured me that what we're doing today seems to be pretty straightforward.

There have been some changes. Some of our guests couldn't be here today, so we're going to have them in a few weeks' time. Today we're going to be dealing with motions and the steering committee report.

The whole meeting is going to be out of camera, so it'll be public. Just keep that in context.

I think what we're going to start off with is our steering committee report and see if we can get that done first.

We had a very good discussion in our steering committee report. I think when you look up until Christmas, we wanted to tidy up a whole lot of odds and ends, issues that everybody had on their mind, but we also wanted to have some time at the end to start looking into the bioscience research.

I think I'm going to let the clerk have the floor and explain....

Go ahead.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, a question first.

The witnesses that I think we were expecting today were with the department, were they not? It's on what is a...it's not even impending anymore; it is a crisis in the hog and beef sector. In fact, I talked to an individual this morning on Prince Edward Island and he is now working on over 30 cases with the Farm Debt Review Board—three bankruptcies in the last two weeks—and it is extremely serious.

So what is the reason that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada could not appear today? They've got a big department. They've got lots of people. This issue is serious. To delay it further is not going to deal with some of the.... It is going to see some people fall through the cracks.

It's not only in P.E.I. I was in the Interlake in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan, and there are serious, serious problems out there. People don't know how to handle the emergency cash advances that are impending. It is throwing off cashflows that are being negotiated with lenders over a four-year period.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Easter.

I think at our steering committee it was noted that it was quite important that the officials come sooner than later. I think the clerk talked a bit about that. Somehow today is not a good day, but I think we're going to have to put their feet to the fire one way or another to come at another meeting.

The clerk wants to talk a little bit about when they could possibly come, and then you can—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Chair, can I just jump in, just to say a few words—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —to my moustached friends, as I look around the room?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Just remember all this is in public, so be careful what you say about your colleagues.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, very good.

I just wanted to point out, Chair, that I'm not sure why the department couldn't show up today. But I would like to say that I think the way we've been operating to date as the committee is that the steering committee meets, they propose a schedule, and then the steering committee prepares a report.

The steering committee is only made up of four members, right? And there are more than four members on the main committee. So normally the report is presented to the main committee and the main committee ends up accepting or amending—at least having a chance to discuss the main report. I think that's where we're at today. We're going to be discussing the report presented by the—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Sorry, you arrived late, but that's what we're starting to do. The clerk was just starting to—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Right, but all I'm saying, Chair, is that at the steering committee it was decided to have the department. But the main committee hadn't read or debated or discussed or voted in or amended...hadn't had any chance to really deal with the report from the subcommittee. In the subcommittee, of course, that would have been one of the first agenda items.

So I think it's good practice, and it's a practice we've been following, actually. It's a good practice that before the schedule is actually locked in or acted upon, the schedule be discussed at the main committee if it's being proposed by a subcommittee.

I'm not suggesting that the subcommittee has to redo the work of the steering committee. I'm not suggesting that. I'm just saying it is good practice that the main committee look at what the steering committee is proposing before it's implemented.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Sure. And with all due respect, I think the committee thought it would not be too out of the realm...to have some department officials here. But I don't want to get into a debate.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, that's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I think I have a couple more people who want to speak.

Committee, I'm going to try to get through this morning as easy as possible with everybody—I don't chair every meeting—and I would just hope that we keep our comments short, because we have two agendas we have to do. We have to deal with the motions that we have on the floor. And if we're going to do everything we want to do between now and Christmas, let's proceed as quickly as we can to get the steering committee done, the report, and get our motions done.

Mr. Bellavance, and then I think it's Alex and then Wayne.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Thank you.

We just got our answer. Pierre just said that the officials are not here because he and the Conservatives want to look at the program that was reviewed at the steering committee before the witnesses appear. So, there's our answer.

Except that I find it appalling because we have already discussed in committee the possibility of having officials testify about program review. We wanted to review the steering committee report the same day. I'm sure we'll have these officials come and discuss it one of these days.

This isn't the first time it has been complicated to get officials to appear; normally, it should be much easier. Actually, they are already here. They don't need to travel anywhere. But suddenly, they have to go to Toronto, so that they don't have to appear here. I find that appalling.

I would like Pierre to tell me if the minister might still join us on Thursday. That would help us set the schedule for the rest of the session. I would really like for us to get to work as quickly as possible.

• (0855)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I think we've got Alex, then Wayne, and then Pierre wants to tighten up so he can answer any questions.

Alex.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): I think it's important to understand that when we had our steering committee meeting there was a representative from each party. When I left that meeting, I even asked the chair, who was a representative of the Conservatives, "Does this look okay? Are things fine?" And he said yes. So we all came out in agreement.

Normally what happens when steering committees do that, unless there's a lot of dissension, it's basically a rubber stamp, we go on, and we move on. We were led to believe this would be the case, and in that case, that's where we wanted to get these guys in from the department.

It seems ludicrous that a department made up of hundreds of people can't have somebody here to answer our questions. All of a sudden they're in Toronto. On my bill, the debate was shut down because I had agreed to do this, that we could have some people here as soon as possible to look and see what's going on in the farming sector. Now we're backing up again. It's almost as if this side doesn't want these guys to appear. I don't quite understand what's happening here.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I think the department was invited, and maybe the clerk has the stated reasons that they didn't appear.

But just on the steering committee itself, I don't know why the chair always calls the steering committee for regular committee meetings. Other committees don't all work that way. It should be called at a separate time so that we do not take regular meeting time for the steering committee to meet.

As well, I don't know others' feelings on this, but I have been looking at other committees and I've heard the chair say that he wouldn't vote if there was another Conservative member present to carry the government half. If we want to re-look at that sometime, I don't mind re-looking at it, if that would make things run more smoothly. But I don't think today's the day for that discussion.

I certainly believe the steering committee should meet at times other than regular committee business.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Before we go over to the government side, I just have two points.

One, Alex was right. The steering committee had a very good meeting. All sides were brought out, and we cast through a lot to get some sort of balance, because we know this is a good opportunity in the next two months to get a lot of things, to get a lot of people in. There was a lot of good karma at that steering committee, so we hope it'll transfer.

Also, to your point, Mr. Easter, that point was brought up to the chair and he agreed. He said in the future he's willing to try to have steering committees not during the main meeting. That was brought up, and he's agreeable to trying something different.

We have Pierre.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thanks, Chair.

I'd like to agree with Mr. Easter. Yes, having steering committee meetings outside of regular meetings is a good idea. I think the steering committee can probably work that out amongst themselves.

I want to take this last opportunity to clarify what Mr. Bellavance was saying, because what he said was inaccurate. He's saying that I said the reason the department is not here is because we hadn't seen the steering committee report. That's absolutely untrue; it's absolutely not what I said. I said I don't know why the department is not here. I don't speak to the department. I did not invite the department. I did not discourage the department from coming. The clerk communicated with the department, not me.

My only point is that it is good practice for the main committee to review a steering committee report before it's implemented, and it's a practice that we've been following to date. I want to clarify that, because I think it's unfair when another member says this is what happened when that's not what happened at all, and it's not what I said happened.

So I'm just clearing the record, Chair.

● (0900)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you.

In an ideal world, if we would have had a meeting earlier, then we wouldn't have wasted a meeting. I'm hoping this meeting shows good faith amongst us all, that we're moving forward and that we're going to move forward. I think if there are questions on why the department is not here, they can be asked to the minister on Thursday. I think if he wants to clear the air, that's where he can do so.

Mr. Storseth.

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

The only time that seems to be in good faith is when the opposition feels they're running over the government with the agenda in this committee. The fact of the matter is that the steering committee would work a lot better, as we've said many times, if the government representative was allowed to be there, rather than the chair, who Mr. Easter constantly accuses of being partisan. Then you put him in a position where he's supposed to be non-partisan. It makes it very difficult.

Anyway, the point I would like to make when we're looking at the agenda to the schedule is that we have a whole whackload of motions by Mr. Easter and every one of them is an emergency as of the date he puts it down. We have motions by Mr. Richards, Mr. Bellavance, and Mr. Atamanenko. We only have one motion on something that is a joint motion from two parties, Mr. Hoback and Mr. Valeriote, and I think it's something that.... Our committee is far more effective when we're not looking at partisan things and trying to take shots at each other, but is trying to move forward in some sort of consensual way.

I think this biotech motion is one where we can do that and get a very substantive study ahead of where policy presently is. I think we should be looking at that and maybe elevating that in the cycle of importance here.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Let's move on. We hope we're not going to be partisan here today. We have to work for the benefit of the food producers in our country and try to get some constructive stuff done over the next few weeks.

There's one more point, Mr. Storseth. I think—and I could be wrong—most steering committees do not have the PS on them. It's nothing personal, but I think that mostly has been a standard practice here. Usually the PS is not on the steering committee, because it could cause a little more problems. I think you'll see that in most steering committees the PS is not on them. There's nothing wrong with government being on it, of course.

I think we're going to go with Mr. Valeriote. Then I hope we can get back into the meat of what we're trying to do over the next few months here.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): This is not meant as a partisan statement, Mr. Storseth, but sometimes the impression that is left when invitations are given and people don't attend is that there's a certain degree of avoidance. While that may not be the intent, it's the impression that's certainly strongly being left.

My question is, Mr. Chair, through you to the clerk, did the department get asked to attend today? If they were asked, what was their response? Are they available on Thursday? If not Thursday, when?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I think if we can give the clerk the floor now for the next little while, she can address very shortly what's happening with the department, but then I want her to go right into our steering committee report.

Go ahead, Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Chloé O'Shaughnessy): Just to clarify, following the meeting we had before the break week, I did contact the department. Officials were invited to intend on the subject of program review today. The instructions I got from the department were that the responsible people who would be able to come and speak to that subject are at a conference this week in Toronto, so are unable to be here this morning to attend with us. I have re-invited them for November 23, which is next Tuesday, to come back if they're available next week. I have not heard back on whether or not they're available next Tuesday.

In the meantime, we also invited the minister, the deputy minister, and the president of the CFIA, as well as various other officials, to appear this coming Thursday, and they will be appearing. My understanding is that they will all be here. I don't have a confirmed list of who the other officials will be who will be accompanying the minister. But my understanding is that the minister, the deputy minister, and the president of the CFIA will be here on Thursday to answer questions, along with departmental officials, who will be named shortly.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Will that be for two hours?

The Clerk: The minister is available at least for an hour, for the first hour.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's unacceptable. If the minister is only here for an hour, then will the deputy minister and the president of the CFIA be here for the rest of the time?

• (0905)

The Clerk: I have received confirmation that the president of the CFIA will be available for the full two hours. For the minister and the deputy minister, the invitation was extended for two hours, and I know they have confirmed that they will be here for at least the first hour. There will be other departmental officials who will be here for the second hour, along with the president of the CFIA.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I think we expect the deputy minister to be here for the full two. It should be the minister, but...

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Let's ask. We'll put that request in.

Is that fine with everybody, that the deputy minister is there for two hours?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. Good.

Mr. Storseth, do you guys have the schedule here for our steering committee? Okay.

The Clerk: This is the third report of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. You'll note that the first point of the third report indicates that on November 16, which is today, we're going to invite departmental officials. Obviously, they were invited and they're not going to attend, so that first point is no longer relevant. Because they have been invited to attend instead on November 23, depending on their availability, the suggestion is either as it appears here or that we'll hear departmental officials on program review, depending on the availability of those officials.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's already been dealt with. We're hoping for next Tuesday.

Do you want to run through the different dates?

The Clerk: Okay.

Therefore, point number 2 says that on November 18 the committee will hear from the minister and the president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. As I said, I have confirmed the deputy minister and various officials will also be there.

On November 23, the committee will hear from individual agricultural producers concerning the review of various agricultural programs, including risk management and others. That would be in the event that the departmental officials are not available to come and speak on program review. We would then hear individuals on program review.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): On that, we would need witnesses on that date.

Go ahead, Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: So that those who weren't at the steering committee meeting will know, what we thought would be good here is that each party invite one producer—in other words, not necessarily the head of some organization. We could do that, but the idea would be for each of us to invite one producer on the ground who either has had good experiences with these programs or bad experiences. That would make it on the ground, sort of. I only wanted to mention that.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's on November 23, right?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): The 23rd, right?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: That would be for when we're meeting in regard to emergency relief and also the program review. It's my understanding that's what the steering committee would say.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Are there questions about the 23rd?

André.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: For the 23, I see that we have indicated the possibility of likely having the senior officials who are not here today. We know that we will see them on the 18, but this will only cover part of the committee session.

If, as agreed, each party invites one producer, that will be four witnesses. I imagine that, in one session, we could have the producers, who will come and talk about their experience with the programs, and some of the officials who were to appear today. It would be possible to do that in one two-hour session.

That's my suggestion.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We'd have the four witnesses and the department would have a backup.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: No, not a backup. One part of the committee session would be dedicated to agricultural producers, and we would keep the other part for hearing the officials.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's a good idea to have producers. It's good to hear from people who benefit directly, or aren't benefiting directly from government programming. One of the risks, though, is that every case is unique. Every farm has its own operation. Every farm has its own peculiarities. Whether funding worked or didn't work for particular farming, it's very particular to that farm. We can have producers. But I think it would also be good to have organizations, because they would give an overview of how it works within their commodity or their sector. I'm raising the point here that it might be good to have a balance. We want to make sure, too, that if we're having the department and witnesses here that there's not a debate over this specific claim on this specific date, that it deals more with issues and not with the specifics of a particular farm and how the department responded to that particular situation.

• (0910)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Hopefully, we'll pick witnesses who would have an overall—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Good point.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We'll just finish up on the 23rd, then, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Well, I know André is trying to get both here, but I really don't think two hours would do it for both. Is there any way of extending a meeting or having another meeting, seeing as we lost today?

When you get into risk management programs, everything from AgriStability to AgriInvest to AgriRecovery, there are a lot of issues. I think we've got lots of questions for a full two-hour session for the department. Even for producers to explain their case, I think an hour is tightening it up. Is there any way the committee can extend it or not?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I think the intention of the steering committee was to have a separate meeting with the department. I think that's—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, but we lost that one today.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We lost that one, so maybe we can start just moving them down a bit and we can have two meetings.

I don't know if that's the will of the committee.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Can we hold that for now?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Maybe we'll hold the producers till later on. I think there's a sense that the department should be here on the 23rd.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I don't know whether I agree. We would have more questions and the department could even be better prepared if we heard producers first on risk management and emergency relief. Things may come up at that meeting that we're not aware of. Then maybe the department, once it reads the witness testimony, could be prepared to answer if it comes after.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Well, if you look at the 23rd and 25th, if you've got your sheet in front of you, one could be for the department and one could be for producers, or producer groups, or whatever. Right? Do you see the two of them there?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I know, but they're two completely different issues.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I think we all wanted the department to come here next. So what is it, next Thursday, that we want the department, and the producers to come next Tuesday? Would that be your sense?

Hon. Wayne Easter: And then move the emergency relief back to another time? It's a completely different issue. The emergency advance relief is a huge problem on the payback timeframe.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): If I may, I don't want to get this too mixed up from where our original committee was, but because we lost the day today, that's where we're trying to fit in.... We've got to figure out the day we lost today with the department. Where are we putting it at the end of the day? Is it next Tuesday or next Thursday? I don't really want to change the rest of it.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'd suggest this, Mr. Chair, that on the 23rd you go with the full range of risk management programs, on the 25th you have the department officials, and then you move everything down a notch from there.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Does everybody understand that? It's not really changing the whole intent, because we lost today; it's just moving it all down.

Madam Clerk, do we have the understanding on the 23rd and 25th?

The Clerk: Yes. If I understand correctly, then, on the 23rd we would be proceeding with, as it states in number 3, the committee hearing from individual agricultural producers concerning the review of various agricultural programs.

Then on November 25, officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada would be invited to speak on the same issue of program review.

Everything else would be moved down.

So November 30 would then become the emergency relief programs with individuals.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I gather we've got to deal with motions today anyway, if we have time. So that would take number 9 further down.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's right. We're hoping to catch up today, so we wouldn't take up our time.

You're just changing the dates, right?

Okay, Madam Clerk, away we go.

• (0915)

The Clerk: On November 30 the committee would hear from individual agricultural producers concerning the effectiveness of current emergency relief programs.

On December 2 the committee would invite officials from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to appear concerning various issues, including the import of product and the recent internal audit report.

On December 7 the committee would hold a meeting on Canada-European Union trade arrangements and invite both negotiators and witnesses to appear.

On December 9 the committee would hold a meeting on the issue of the railway costing review.

On December 14 and December 16 the committee would commence its study of the biotechnology industry.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): The clerk needs witnesses from committee members...for which day? Is it just for the one day that you need suggestions for witnesses?

The Clerk: It would be November 23, for agriculture producers regarding their view of programs, and for November 30, regarding the emergency relief programs.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): It's for those two days that we'd have to bring witness names forward from committee members.

Are there any questions on any of the details of these days?

Yes, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know you're trying to move this in a non-partisan way, and I appreciate that, but I'd like to make a point to Mr. Valeriotte.

Once again, this is Wayne running this committee with a partisan smear. We're not going to tackle any issue, in any kind of timeline, where we actually dive into it and make good recommendations on changes. We're going to go meeting to meeting, to every different issue that Mr. Easter has come up with for the last year, and then put it in one meeting to do a drive-by smear. There will be no time for any real substantive response or recommendations on behalf of the committee.

It should be noted that that's the direction you're taking this committee for the rest of the year.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I was hoping we wouldn't go down this path. There was no directive from Mr. Easter to our steering committee.

Mr. Brian Storseth: You just had it. He figured out the agenda.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Anyway, we have a speakers' list. Hopefully—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, can I respond to that?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): No, you don't have time.

We're going to André and then Alex and then Wayne.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I'll be brief because it's not worth having a big discussion about it.

Mr. Wayne Easter is not on the steering committee. Each of us is presenting the issues that we discussed with colleagues of our respective parties. I simply want to repeat what Alex just said. At the end of the steering committee meeting, he himself asked Larry if the Conservatives could add other issues to the agenda and if he felt that everything was okay. He said yes.

You have to attend a steering committee meeting to know that we never squabble. Everyone takes their turn. Everyone says that someone needs to chair that committee, but we don't really need anyone to. We talk among ourselves, we present our issues and we try to have them added to the agenda. It isn't very complicated.

Mr. Easter did not chair the steering committee. Some of the issues that I presented are on this agenda; the others are from Larry, Alex or Mark.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Well, I was hoping that comment wouldn't come forward, but it did.

When Mr. Miller called me last week, he was very comfortable with this report, so I think we'll get through it.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: If we go with November 23 and 30, then we have to decide whether we do what the steering committee suggested, in other words have one producer per party. Or do we want a producer and someone from an organization? Pierre had a valid point. We have to decide so we do it correctly.

The other thing I want to say is that we did our very best at the steering committee. We all came with suggestions and we left that committee in agreement. To address Brian's concerns, and others', we're trying to get something done here. We're in no sense

undertaking some kind of feel-good study. We're here to see what will go on before Christmas. We want to tidy up.

We've all been hearing from producers. We want to zero in on some problems they're having, get those settled, and move on. We want to have a meeting on the up-and-coming Canada-European trade agreement and its implications for farmers. We want to start into the study on the biotech industry, after tidying up some of these loose ends. That's what we decided at the steering committee.

I don't even see why there's a concern about this.

• (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I hope we don't get back into previous comments, but I think Alex and Mr. Lemieux had a good point. I mean, I have no problem if one party wants to bring a representative from an organization, but I think there's nothing wrong if the president of the Federation of Agriculture for New Brunswick is one of the witnesses and can give an overall picture of what's happening in their area.

I don't think it necessarily has to be a farmer. It should be a farmer, but it could be a farmer who represents a group. I think we should leave it to the parties to figure out. We want an overall sense. It's not that there's anything wrong with having a hog producer, but maybe we should approve somebody who knows a bit about how the programs are working in their area.

We'll leave it to the different parties to come up with somebody. But I think we'd have a very good discussion if we had representatives of the farming community who see the overall good and bad of what's happening out there.

I have a speakers' list, and Mr. Easter and Mr. Lemieux are on next.

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

I disagree with the comments from Mr. Storseth. This is not a partisan smear. It's trying to deal with the issues that farmers on the ground face out there. If that means it challenges the government and what they're doing or not doing, then so be it.

I think this committee has a responsibility to farmers in this country, rather than making excuses for the government. There are several issues. I'd love to deal with biotech, but biotech is not going to do anything, as I mentioned earlier this morning, for the 30 people who are now going through farm debt review in my particular province. It's not going to do anything for some of the ones who can't cashflow their operations because of the announcement by the minister on emergency advance programs. We need to find a solution so that we can keep those producers farming.

There are three or four emergency issues.

One, I have quotes here from Linda Oliver from Saskatchewan, who's involved in that whole area from the Quill Lakes over to the Interlake of Manitoba. Those producers don't see a future right now. AgriStability, she says right here, did not work for cow-calf producers and they don't have a cushion to work with. They need something else. AgriRecovery is not working for them.

In the Interlake area a producer called me the other day, and I was out there on Thanksgiving weekend. Finally it was two weeks of dry weather. They certainly weren't going to get their crops off, but they could get some hay off. Now they find out, because they're three months' late getting their hay off, that their cattle are getting diarrhea and are getting sick. It's a serious problem. They don't have the money to buy hay, to bring it in, and it is going to have to be addressed on an emergency basis.

I think we have a responsibility as a committee to deal with those kinds of problems, rather than jollyng off to talk about something like biotech. I'd love to do that, but there are too many other important things.

The other point I want to make is about a serious issue that I think we need to address—and the steering committee did suggest it—and that's to talk about the CFIA and the bad audit they got, by their own internal auditor, which is clearly saying that imported product, other than seafood and beef and hogs and eggs, is not up to the safety standards of Canadian domestic product. It also puts Canadian producers at a disadvantage, because imported product doesn't have to meet the same production standards or quality standards that ours does.

I think those are important issues to people on the ground, and that's why I agree with this agenda.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That tidies up the comments on our report. I guess everybody understands it.

Can I have a motion?

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): A show of hands from whoever is in favour of the report as written by the clerk.

(Motion agreed to)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thanks, folks, for pulling that through.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: This is still not quite clear. So it's one witness per party?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's the understanding, and we hope to have a person who can tell us the good and the bad and what's happening out there a bit and who has an understanding of the programs.

There are two meetings we need witnesses for. That's one. The other one is the emergency relief program that we're also going to need witnesses for.

So now we are going to move on to motions. Does everybody have copies?

I have never chaired with motions before. There is a set order that we have to go through, Clerk, isn't there?

The Clerk: No.

• (0925)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): How many motions do we have? Do you want to give us a little overview of what we're dealing with here?

The Clerk: My understanding, when this time was set aside, was basically to allow members to propose any motions for which we've already received notice. There are quite a few outstanding, some from as long ago as March. So it's basically to help the committee do a little bit of housekeeping. If anybody wanted to bring anything forward, they could. There's no set procedure necessarily to follow, in the sense that whoever would like to speak just asks for the right to speak and they can propose their motion and go from there.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): So someone would move their motion, right?

The Clerk: That's right. Someone would move a motion, there would be debate on it, and then a vote on it.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I have Mr. Lemieux first.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, what I was going to say was that I think the normal practice of the committee is that we start with the older motions first, so that we don't get into a—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. That's right.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —and then we can jump ahead to another motion, if the committee tends to agree.

The second point I'd like to bring up, though, is the number of motions. This is one of the things that might have frustrated Mr. Atamanenko, that this committee deals with a lot of motions. I find we work very well together as a committee when we're working on a study. When motions come forward, they tend to be fairly confrontational and they take a long time to get through, and they tend to obstruct the work of the committee in some sense. I think Mr. Atamanenko suffered from that. He ran out of time in having his bill studied by committee, because there were all of these opposition motions before the committee.

And the motions are not necessarily useful, Chair. For example, we just set the schedule. We just had a good discussion on the schedule and voted on it. The schedule is intact, and yet a lot of these motions now talk about changing the schedule—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's right.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —saying that we should study this, study that, and launch something on this. That's what I mean. The motions are typically not productive in this sense. We just voted for a schedule and yet these motions are going to deal with what the committee should be studying, and we're going to spend a long time discussing them. We're losing time; we're wasting energy.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's a very good point, Mr. Lemieux. Maybe as we go through these, because some of these might have been moved last spring—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Some of them were moved last spring.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): No, but in all good faith here, if we have a motion, for instance, on bringing farmers here to talk about something and we're already dealing with it in our committee, then maybe the person who's moving the motion could say, okay, we're dealing with it, and could pull it. That could be the

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's not an issue, Chair. I think the issue is the opposite, where a motion is dealing with business that's not on the schedule. We just had a steering committee meeting. We just had debate in this committee. We just voted on a schedule, and now we're going to have a motion that launches the committee in a new direction. It's not on the schedule. So what do we do—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That'll have to be after Christmas, and then maybe the steering committee will have to deal with it, I guess.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I know, but you see the predicament we're in. That's what I mean by saying that a lot of these motions are not necessarily useful to the work of the committee. They're just thrown before the committee and they delay and obstruct the work of the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Let's see how we roll here. Maybe we could go along here...and some of the motions are relevant right now; maybe some of them are, I don't know. But we have to respect committee members here. If they have a motion, we somehow have to talk about it.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I think we should put on the record exactly what happened in regard to my bill. Pierre was saying, well, it's because of the motions that debate was shut down. We had an agreement to have as many meetings on my bill as possible, plus going over and finishing our report on young farmers. I agreed to that. Subsequently, at a steering committee meeting, there was concern on the part of my colleagues from both of the other opposition parties that we needed to have the department here. I agreed to that, to have one meeting with the department during this whole time. As a result, these guys shut the democratic debate down on my bill. It's as simple as that. It was shut down as simply as that.

Furthermore, in regard to motions, we ran out of time, not because of the motions, but because I've been very conciliatory over the last year in not insisting that my legislation take precedence. I've been trying to work behind the scenes with everybody to ensure that we have a chance to travel and a chance to look at the young farmers report. And when it came time to prolong debate and have a bit of an extension so we could at least hear the witnesses who were turned away at the door, these guys shut it down. I find that unacceptable as far as the democratic process is concerned, and that should be down on the record.

I don't think it's really amusing, Brian, to be honest with you.

• (0930)

Mr. Brian Storseth: What's not amusing is that it's not factual, Alex. I know you're an honest man, but the sorry part is that you don't understand what they did to you.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We're going to have a speaking order.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I understand perfectly what happened.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Easter, you're next on the speakers' list.

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

I just want to confirm and agree with what Alex said on his bill. He was used and abused, in my view—

An hon. member: By the opposition.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, by the government members. There's no question about it.

Mr. Chair, on the motions, I heard what Mr. Lemieux had to say, but there is a difficulty, and that is when we are doing a study that's taking an extended period of time, things happen in the agriculture sector meantime. Things come up that are of an emergency nature. That's why it's important to be able to put motions forward. When these were put forward, they were timely in trying to give the government some direction. So it is important that we be able to use motions, because things do come up.

Just on the list of motions, there are a number that are in my name that I'd like to take off. The first one on the big sheet, the hog industry one, I believe we're going to deal with via the steering committee report, so that one can be taken off. The one on the livestock sector of Canada can also be taken off, because—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Easter, could you tell us what page that is on?

Hon. Wayne Easter: It is on page 1. I'm going through in order. There are about four of mine that I think can come off.

The hog industry one is dealt with in the steering committee report. The livestock sector is partially dealt with, and that's at the top of page 2.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: A point of order, Chair.

Could you just confirm with Mr. Easter that when he says "taken off" he means that he's withdrawing his motion?

Hon. Wayne Easter: If you want the word "withdraw", that's fine.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I just wanted to understand. Are we putting it on ice, or does it mean we're withdrawing it?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Good stuff is happening here.

Step up to the plate.

Hon. Wayne Easter: The Weatherill report I'll leave on.

Going to page 4, the advanced payment program, that's in the steering committee report, so I'll withdraw it. I'll withdraw the one on management of imported food safety as well.

Four motions are withdrawn.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Does anybody else want to remove any of their motions?

Okay, go ahead, Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I've already told the committee that I do not intend to withdraw my motion on the SRMs. Obviously, there were changes. The government has made announcements. I just said that I did not intend to discuss it at the moment. I do not want to put it on the table; so let's set it aside.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Let's move on.

We'll go to Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I don't want to ruin the moment, but I'd like to correct the record for Mr. Atamanenko. The fact of the matter is that our side had an agreement. We were willing to go forward with more witnesses. From my understanding, you then decided to flip over to whatever Mr. Easter was proposing, and our side stuck to our principal position.

The real question here is what the Liberal Party's position is. They're the ones who gutted your bill. You knew our position the entire time. They are the ones here at committee who said we needed to see witnesses, and in the House they voted for it but made sure they didn't have enough members to show up to do anything. Nobody in the country knows the Liberal Party of Canada's position on your bill because they've been on both sides of the issue.

• (0935)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Storseth, I really think we should move on to the motions. You are kind of poisoning the well here if we keep talking about what happened in the past. I'm talking about the future here.

Is there agreement that we move to...?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Did Mr. Bellavance say something about removing...? No? Did I misunderstand?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): He's not removing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I said something, but if you aren't listening, I can't do anything about it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: But I was there!

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We're going to go right to the motions.

We skip the first two from Mr. Easter. Now we're going to the Weatherill report.

Wayne, do you want to move the motion on that one?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, I will move that motion, Mr. Chair. And I will state at the beginning that I do not see it as a priority right now. I believe we should go with the steering committee report and certainly start the biotech study as well.

I believe that at some point in time we need a review of the Weatherill report. We had a subcommittee that spent months as well meeting on that issue. From everything I understand, very few of the recommendations of the Weatherill report have been adopted by the Government of Canada. We need someone to lay the facts on the table about just where we're at in terms of CFIA and food safety. They still can't tell us the number of inspectors. We've seen a lot of information come out over the last couple of weeks from Bob Kingston and others. I do think that at some point in time in the new year we need to at least spend a day hearing from the government and the union on just where we're at on the implementation of that report and on its impact on food safety and on producers.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): My understanding is that we're not withdrawing, but we're going to park it until the new year. You might be able to get some answers in the next few weeks. We'll see what happens.

Okay. We'll go to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thanks, Chair.

I suppose it's a friendly suggestion. We're trying to do house-keeping and basically clean up the motions.

Maybe I could suggest something to Mr. Easter. He's saying that it's important. It's just that it's not important right now in view of the other things we want to do. So perhaps in the interest of housecleaning, if Mr. Easter withdraws the motion, he can always table it again. At least it's off the books, in a sense. Otherwise we're going to end up debating this and we won't have dealt with it, which kind of goes back to my earlier point. As we move forward, we're going to be looking at the schedule again as we try to fill up our meetings after Christmas. So perhaps we can remove this one now, and Mr. Easter can table it in the new year if he still feels it's important.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I was hoping we wouldn't get into debate over it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, I'm not debating this. This is more procedural, about withdrawing.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Why don't we say park it?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Officially, Clerk, do you have to table it until into the new year? What's the procedure here? I do not want to withdraw it, because I do think we need it pending, but I certainly do not see us bringing it forward before February, when we're into 2011. So what's the procedure we need to follow to get there?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): She said it can stay here as long as you want.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay, then, you don't need a motion to table it. So I will just leave it alone.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay, let's move on to—

Hon. Wayne Easter: It's untidy, but this is a public meeting, so we can go back to the record, so if I bring it up before December—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I guess, Chair, the only point I'm bringing up is that Mr. Easter can bring it up any time at steering committee as they set the schedule. So if we're housekeeping, let's housekeep. It's not a big point. That's all I'm suggesting.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Sometimes, if you're doing housekeeping, you don't move furniture.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Well, we just did—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —on four other motions.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay, we're moving on to page 3.

I'm going to call it “parking it”, and the clerk says that's fine. It's a new word. We'll call it “parking it”; we're not driving it.

We're going to specific risk management. It's André's motion, and he mentioned parking it too. Okay.

Alex, you're up next on your producer cars. As you know, we're probably going to have the railroad in, too, so I don't know if that's tied in.

Go ahead, Mr. Atamanenko.

• (0940)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: It never hurts to have some insurance. It never hurts to have some clout when dealing with the railway companies. I think passing this motion would give all of us a little bit more backup when we deal with these guys. As far as I know, nobody around this table is happy with what the railways are doing, so I would like to have this motion stand, and hopefully be adopted.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Are there any more comments on Mr. Atamanenko's motion?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: So this motion is now on the floor for debate? Is that what you're saying?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's correct. It's on for any debate, and then Alex wants to bring it to a vote.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I think we'll line up some speakers to debate it, because....

First of all, Chair, do I have the floor?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): If you want to be the first speaker, go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: All right. Thank you.

Chair, we voted on the schedule not too long ago, earlier in this meeting. We are having railway officials come in to talk to us about railway operations and costing, and certainly this matter of producer cars and producer car loading sites is one that can come up.

One of the issues with the motion, though, is that it constrains the committee, in that this is a motion that must be dealt with the way it is presented, and it's not necessarily correct. It's basically saying that the government should be doing the job of Canadian railway companies.

Although this committee ended up writing to Canadian railway companies, which was appropriate, it's not for us to manage which sites are open and which are closed. Our job is to make sure that a proper procedure is in place and that due diligence is done by the railways, and we want to ensure that farmers are given an opportunity to participate in the review process.

That's where our role is; it's not to amend necessary legislation to prohibit Canadian railway companies from arbitrarily closing down producer car loading sites. We're not a railway company. I think it's an inappropriate motion.

Mr. Atamanenko says this will just give the committee more clout. That's not what gives the committee more clout. What gives the committee clout is the very credibility of the committee and of the members who sit around the table, and the pressure we're able to bring to bear on the officials of railway companies when they come in front of the committee.

And we did this. The last time they were here, we expressed our concerns about the closure of loading sites, and the list of closures was actually delayed, based on the input from this committee. So this committee has clout; this committee has credibility. A motion like this just shoots us off in the wrong direction and it asks the government to do something that's inappropriate and that is not within the mandate of the government.

I am for the intent of the motion, which is that railway loading sites should not be arbitrarily closed. Of course. I think we're all in favour of that. What I don't agree with is the wording of this motion, which basically says that we should be amending necessary legislation to prohibit it. Is this under—what?—any circumstances? It doesn't make any sense. What if farmers were to agree that a site should be closed because it's not used at all? Should we pass legislation that says it should not be closed at all; that it should always be there, even though it's never being used?

The intent I understand. I think all members around the table agree with the intent. But when it comes down to what the motion is proposing, I think it's completely inappropriate.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Lemieux, we have a couple of speakers. Maybe you will want to work on a little amendment that might be doable. Or it might not be; we'll see.

I have Mr. Easter and Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Easter, you're up.

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

I'm fully supportive of the motion. Contrary to what the parliamentary secretary states, what the motion is asking is for the government, as is their responsibility, to amend legislation to prohibit the Canadian railways from arbitrarily closing down producer car loading sites. That's what they did last time.

The parliamentary secretary can go on and on, if he likes, about our letter, when we looked at the list of closures, delaying that from happening. It's true; we did delay it, but it happened nonetheless. What that exercise showed us was that all the power is on the side of the railways when it comes to closing producer car sites.

We had different stories, even from the Minister of Transport, that proved to be less than true at the time. We had CN before the committee, who basically, I think, thumbed their nose at the committee. Right now, all the power is on the side of the railways when it comes to closing producer car sites.

This is but one issue among many. They did the service review, and it was very clearly proven in the service review. We had many organizations, including the Western Grain Elevators Association, which showed on that one that there is a lot of concern from shippers and farmers about the service review and the imbalance of power.

We had the Federation of Agriculture, which maintains that railway revenues have continued to climb while farmers have seen rail freight rates jump by roughly 40%. So what we know is that prairie grain producers are being significantly overcharged for the transportation of their crops and that immediate action is required to address that situation as well.

So we have three issues: producer cars, where all the power is on the side of the railways; the service review, which has clearly shown that the railways are not living up to their service obligations but seem to getting off the hook, and the government either putting legislation in place to ensure that they provide the service....

The railways claim they are improving. Well, isn't that nice? What about the lack of service that prairie grain producers got for the last number of years? Nothing is happening.

Then there is the costing review, where the Canadian Wheat Board has shown, through an independent study, that prairie grain producers have been overcharged for years. The government backpedals on that one and fails to bring forward the costing review that the CFA and NFU and many others are in fact demanding.

I think this motion at least shows that this committee is saying to the Government of Canada: live up to your responsibility; you have the Department of Transport, the Department of Agriculture—the expertise—to draft necessary legislation that would prevent the railways from arbitrarily closing producer car sites and at least bring some power balance between the railways and the farm community.

The last comment I'd make is that it used to be, at one time, that before the railways could either increase prices or change a lot of their structures—branch lines and so on—that affected rural communities, there would be a hearing process. It would take a number of years—I think it was two or three years—before the

railways could go ahead and make the move. They had to go to another authority.

Now, all the power is on the side of the railways. That's unacceptable. This motion, I think, makes the government responsible for doing its duty in ensuring that there is a balance of power and proposing a way to either hold a hearing process or allow the community and producers to have a say.

I strongly support the motion.

● (0945)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Easter.

Before we go to three or four more speakers, let me address the clerk. The meeting scheduled on the railroad issue is on the 9th. Who are we planning to have here?

Hon. Wayne Easter: That, though, Mr. Chair, is a separate issue. It's not on producer cars, but it could come up.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Whether or not this motion is going to be dealt with, I think we would want to make sure that the right people are also there at that meeting. Isn't that right?

Is it all right with everybody that the people who can address this are also going to be at that railroad meeting on the 9th?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): It's just another issue before I go back to the speakers' list.

Mr. Brian Storseth: We need to make sure that this is a separate issue.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Yes, I know. It's a separate issue.

We're going to go to Mr. Atamanenko.

● (0950)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chair, on the mandate of government, I would like to submit that the mandate of government is to protect farmers. The key word here is “farmers”, you know, and it's to uphold their rights, not the right of the companies to do what they want.

I think it's time for this government to say yes, we're going to put this in place, and if we have to, we'll amend legislation to ensure that these guys don't arbitrarily close down producer car loading sites. It's as simple as that. Let's get on the side of the farmers and not the corporate friends.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Mr. Chair, when this is discussed...I can't help but remember the presence of several witnesses before this committee—I think at the end of last year—on the issue of producer cars and the railway. I remember the alarm on a lot of people's faces, on all sides, at the rather arbitrary, arrogant, and insensitive responses we were receiving from the representatives from the railways with respect to this issue.

I recall that the legislation, in my opinion, wasn't adequate to protect the interests of the farmers when it came to railway producer cars. I'm not suggesting that at no time will there ever be a prohibition on closing down these producer car sites; sometimes it's valid and warranted and sometimes it's not. But I certainly think we need to have this review.

If there's an amendment to the motion that's acceptable to everyone, I'm content to have that amendment, but I think that having the review serves two purposes: one, it will allow us to make recommendations to the minister; and two, it sends a clear message to the railway industry that they're in our sights, they're on our radar, and that unfair treatment of farmers is simply unacceptable.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree essentially with the position that's being taken. I agree with what Francis is talking about, but this isn't a review. This isn't a study. We're being asked to report this immediately to the House, as if we already know what all the answers to this are. That's why we need to take the time. This is a very important issue for western Canadian farmers and it's important that we take the time to review this properly. It's important that we have witnesses. As Francis has said, there are two sides to it, although as decision-makers we need to, I believe, be tilted on the side of farmers, as Alex has suggested. But there are two sides to this, and we need to make sure that we take the time to at least call some witnesses forward on this.

That's why I would propose that we do a study on this. Now, you can pick how long you want to do it for, and we can talk about that, but this is something that is important enough that we should be studying it and making sure we do the right thing on it. I'm sure that we'll all agree on our recommendations at the end of the day, as we have with other issues with CN and CP, but on these issues, we can't just take them and say okay.... Otherwise, we might as well vote on all of this stuff, and we can clear our whole schedule up. If we already know all the answers to everything, we don't need to listen to the farmers' point of view and the industry point of view, and then we can just vote on all this stuff today. We don't need to go forward with one meeting on each thing.

This is something that affects western Canadian farmers. We need to have more than one meeting or one reporting of this to the House. We need to have real, substantive recommendations that we believe need to go forward. It's the same with the costing review.

Anyway, I would propose that we do a study of this. I'm flexible on the timelines on that.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Would you propose an amendment, then, before we bring this to a vote? Is that what you were thinking? Because—

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would like to see if that's.... I mean, there's no sense proposing an amendment if it's just going to get shot down on the other side.

But I would propose an amendment, Mr. Chair, that the committee study the rights of farmers to load producer cars and look into changes in legislation that need to happen to prohibit the Canadian railway companies from arbitrarily closing down producer car loading sites. Basically, the spirit of it is that I don't want to take anything away from Alex's motion; I just think we should study it before we turn it into this motion so that we can have substantive recommendations behind it. If Wayne is right and these are all things that need to happen, then we should put those in the motion to the House.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Atamanenko, do you have any appetite for this?

• (0955)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: No.

I think we've all been guilty, over the years, of studying issues to death. Often these studies wind up gathering dust somewhere and then we go on to another study. We feel good, we've done it, and we make recommendations, but nothing happens.

I think it's time on many issues, and this is one of them, to be a little more firm with these guys, with the railways. We can do it nicely, but we can show them that we mean business.

It's a recommendation. It doesn't mean the government is going to act—that's the key here—but it also shows that we're serious. So I speak against the amendment.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): There is an amendment brought forward to me.

Mr. Easter, do you want Mr. Lemieux to comment on this amendment?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, and then I'll go.

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

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I just basically wrote out an amendment.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Do you want me to read it?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Sure, go ahead and read it, as proposed by Mr. Storseth.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): It is moved that the committee study the right of farmers to load producer cars to ensure that the Canadian railroad companies do not arbitrarily close down producer car loading sites.

So technically it's acceptable.

Go ahead on your amendment.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: On this amendment, Mr. Chair, it's important that we amend it in this way, because I actually disagree with Mr. Atamanenko. He's saying it's an important issue. He's saying it's so important we shouldn't study it, we should just pass this motion, for heaven's sake. I would say that actually undermines the credibility of the motion. If you're not going to look into the facts, then the motion is a half-baked motion.

So, again, Mr. Chair, and I want to be very clear on this, we support the intent of the motion; it's the wording of the motion. To be fair to the committee, we've only had, I think it was, a portion of a meeting that dealt with this issue. We had basically one set of witnesses, the railway company, and that was it.

I think if we want to pass a motion, if we're going to talk about amending legislation, then I think we owe the respect to this committee of doing a study on the matter and having a wider diversity of witnesses come in front of the committee.

That's the problem with this motion. It's proposing a solution without actually having looked into the matter. We've looked into it for a portion of one meeting.

That's why this amendment is in front of you, Mr. Chair. I think Mr. Storseth brought up an excellent point. I'm simply reinforcing it.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Are there any more comments on the amendment?

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, I strongly oppose the amendment, Mr. Chair. The study will only be another delaying tactic by backbench members of the government. In the meantime, it leaves all the power on the side of the railways. The fact of the matter is, yes, we heard from the railways, but we also heard from producers on this issue; they were before the committee on this issue on producer cars. I believe one of them was the Canadian Wheat Board, was it not?

The motion is really not that complicated. It doesn't order the government to stop; it makes a recommendation to the government to provide the necessary legislation to prevent railway companies from arbitrarily closing down producer car loading sites. That, in my interpretation, means that a process is found so there's some balance of power when the producers, who want to load grain at producer car sites, are faced with the railways closing them down. Right now they can close them down in 30 days with an ad in the paper. This motion was put forward way back on March 12, pretty nearly a year ago. I think it's time we made a recommendation to the House of Commons, to the government...we couldn't get the motion moved

up before because you folks on that side want to delay any action on the part of the government to stand up for farmers.

As well, Mr. Chair, the producer car sites that are there are really not costing the railways any money when they're not being used. Once they're gone, they're gone forever. Already under the current legislative arrangements the railways are getting some funding for those producer car sites. We know for a fact—and this is the other one the government wants to deal with—that right now a survey has shown about 62% of shippers have suffered financial consequences as a result of poor rail service, yet at the same time, the rail companies are trying to close down producer car sites on their own, arbitrarily, without any balance of power. The Wheat Board—I found the figures I'd mentioned earlier—found out in their study that railways received excessive profits of \$123 million in 2007-08 and of \$275 million in 2008-09. That's money that comes right out of the producers' pockets, Mr. Chair. At least in this instance we have an opportunity to make a recommendation to the House for the government to do something that is on the side of farmers. Let's do it.

● (1000)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We're starting to pick up a list here. I'm almost sensing that people have their minds made up on this, and Mr. Easter's point is a good recommendation.

We've got three people on the speakers' list. I'm hoping we can get to voting on this amendment, but we've got Mr. Valeriote, Mr. Lemieux, and Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: First of all, I apologize to the committee if I left the impression that I thought we should be conducting a study. I would not have understood that the government would conduct its own study, consult with farmers, and consult with the industry before it made any amendments to the necessary legislation. It's clear, I support the motion, but if you wanted to add the words, "that the government consult all stakeholders and conduct a study and amend the necessary legislation", I would be content with that. Failing that, I have no intent of our doing a study. We've already talked to the industry. I don't think we'll get anywhere talking to industry again and making any further recommendations. I think we've got to send the bold statement and hope that of course the government will conduct their own study that would include all stakeholders.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux, and then Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I just have to take a moment to point out the irony of Mr. Easter's comments regarding a study. Earlier in the meeting certain subjects were so important that this committee had to study them. We had to call witnesses in front of this committee because these are important matters that affect agriculture, Chair. He was saying these words. When it comes to government programming, we must study these matters, but when it comes to loading sites, this is such an important matter, Chair, that we should not study this, we should just pass the motion.

The irony here is unbelievable. On the one hand, things are so important that we must conduct a study and on the other hand, things are so important that in no way should we conduct a study; that would be obstructing and that would be delaying, and of course the government would be blocking.

Of course, Mr. Easter knows full well that on the steering committee we're outnumbered three to one, so—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Are you bringing that up again?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's only to point out that when it comes down to votes, we are outnumbered three to one on any steering committee decisions, and when we sit here in committee we're outnumbered again. So the government is not able to delay, obstruct, and defeat—

An hon. member: It's a minority Parliament.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'm trying to point out that when Mr. Easter says that by proposing a study the government is trying to block the intent of the motion, that's absolutely untrue. We cannot block it; we don't have enough numbers on our side of the table to do so.

On what we're recommending—as he recommended earlier in the meeting—if this is an important matter that affects farmers and agriculture, we should bring witnesses in front of the committee to give their different concerns. That would allow the farm community to express themselves and allow the rail companies to explain their point of view. Then we can make an informed decision. We can make an informed recommendation to the House.

Right now, the only reason that I think Mr. Easter is so opposed to the amendment is because it came from the government side. If it had come from one of his colleagues, it would have been great, but it came from us. I'm pointing out the irony in his position regarding whether or not the committee should study important matters: yes if it's coming from him; no if it's coming from us.

My point goes right back to the essence of what Mr. Atamanenko is proposing. This is an important matter that affects farmers, particularly western farmers, and we should look into it. I agree with that. So let's build it into the schedule and look into this. Let's do a proper job on this, not just fire a half-baked motion into the House.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

To study or not to study, that's the question.

We have Mr. Bellavance, and then I hope we can vote on the amendment.

Mr. Bellavance.

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: We have had to look into this issue from time to time here at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. If it comes back here, around this table, it's because the problem hasn't been resolved.

In light of the clear testimonies that the legislation was insufficient, as Frank said a moment ago, I think that the railway companies have to leave it up to the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, which doesn't have too many criteria. In an entirely arbitrary fashion, at any given time, on any given day, they decide that they'll close facilities.

I don't think the government will ever be able to prevent private companies from closing facilities. But I think that the legislation could be much stricter and show that these companies should fulfill some conditions before facilities are closed.

For example, consultations should be held with the main players concerned, in other words the farmers who use these facilities. Are they still using them? Or not, as the representatives from the railway companies are telling us? This still needs to be determined.

All sorts of criteria can be applied to determine whether the companies can close facilities or keep them open. But we know that these companies are deciding to close facilities arbitrarily, for reasons that are often vague, because we have heard from their representatives here, in committee. In fact, they felt that the reasons for closing the facilities weren't as clear as that, perhaps apart from the economic reasons.

After hearing all these clear testimonies, as I've said, now is the time for us, in committee, to simply recommend to the government that it review its legislation on the matter. It's a recommendation. It makes me laugh every time. It's as if we expected far too much of the government and its hands were tied on some issue or other. The committee simply has to determine that this legislation should be reviewed.

I don't see how anyone can be against Alex's motion as worded. We don't need to amend it.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you very much, Mr. Bellavance.

We're going to bring this to a vote. The recommendation from the government side is to have a study, and the other motion recommends that the government pass the legislation.

Let's deal with the amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can we have a recorded vote?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Sure.

I already read the amendment asking for a study. Is everybody clear on it? Does anybody want me to read it again?

Hon. Wayne Easter: It's amending the motion for a study, rather than doing something right now.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We'll have a recorded vote.

The clerk informs me it's a tie vote. I will be voting no.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): It's very unfortunate that the amendment didn't pass, but I would like to propose another amendment. It's along the lines of—in the spirit of non-partisanship, of course—what Frank had suggested. It's certainly unfortunate that we don't have more non-partisan spokesmen from the other side—rather than Mr. Easter—in the form of Mr. Valeriote, because I think he is really, truly, trying to come to some ground here where all people can support a motion to try to help farmers in this particular issue.

So I would like to move the amendment that he mentioned. Basically it would be along the lines of the amendment that we just voted down, but rather than the committee studying it, my understanding of what you were suggesting, Frank, was that we would ask the government to consider and study...rather than the committee. Is that—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Richards, so I'm clear, Mr. Valeriote doesn't have an amendment—

Mr. Blake Richards: No, but he made a suggestion that there be an amendment along those lines, and I'm moving that amendment.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Valeriote, just for clarity, do you have an amendment?

Mr. Francis Valeriote: No, I don't have an amendment.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): He doesn't have an amendment.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm proposing an amendment along the lines of what he suggested.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Well, state your amendment then.

Mr. Blake Richards: Could you read the exact wording of that again?

•(1010)

The Clerk: Of the motion or the amendment?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): The amendment we just voted down.

The Clerk: The amendment that was just voted down was that the committee study the right of farmers to load producer cars to ensure that Canadian railway companies do not arbitrarily close down producer car loading sites.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

What I would propose, then, is that we change the.... Let me just have that in front of me.

I propose that the committee recommend that the government study the right of farmers to local producer cars, to ensure that Canadian railway companies do not arbitrarily close down producer car loading sites, and then take any necessary action.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Is there any seconder on that amendment, or do we need a seconder on amendments?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I do think that amendment is out of order. It changes the intent. This committee is recommending to the government an action. The government can determine how it wants to do that action. If they're going to amend legislation, then I expect they, in their own approach, have the option of doing a study. But we're asking the government to amend the legislation to prohibit railway companies from arbitrarily closing down producer car loading sites. This is going to a study rather than a recommendation, so I believe the amendment is out of order.

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

Mr. Brian Storseth: Unfortunately, I know Mr. Easter was maybe not paying attention, but Mr. Richards' recommendation, in the first part, was exactly as Mr. Valeriote had said. In the first part, it's to recommend that the government study this, and then take the necessary action, he stated at the end of it.

So this motion is still asking for the government to take action. Mr. Valeriote wisely said that the government should first be studying this and then take action on it. There's a definitive difference there—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): In all fairness to both sides, I think the line in the sand is pretty well drawn. One way or another, you guys want a study—

An hon. member: No, it's different.

An hon. member: We want action.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Well, I can read the motion. It says “study”. It says “that the government study”....

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Not the committee, “that the government”....

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): But there's still a study. This side doesn't want studies. Maybe I'm....

Mr. Blake Richards: I think “take action” is pretty clear.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. Are there any more comments on this before we bring the amendment to a vote?

An hon. member: You should read it, Chair.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'd like to know exactly the words that Mr. Richards has added and where he's added them, and if he's prepared to put a time limit on it, because a study could take one year.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just to respond to that, all I've done is to take the suggestion you made, Frank, that we have the government study, and then at the end I've added “and take the necessary action”. So I've made very clear in there that the government will take a look at what needs to be done and then they will take action. As far as a time line, yes, I'd be open to considering that. It's just simply a matter of....

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Four months?

Mr. Blake Richards: I think that would be appropriate, wouldn't you?

Hon. Wayne Easter: First of all, is it in order, Mr. Chair?

An hon. member: Of course, it is, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't think it is. Where's your big green book there, Brian?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Well, I'd just as soon we vote on it, and vote on the amendment. It technically says "the government will study".

Hon. Wayne Easter: So is it in order? What's the clerk saying?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): She said it's up to me, so I'm going to bring the amendment forward and we'll vote on it.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I need to know where he's added the words "conduct a study". If it says "that the committee recommends that the government conduct a study to uphold the rights of farmers to load producer cars", etc., and report, and take the necessary action and have it done in four months, then you have my support.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would be open to that. I would consider that a friendly amendment, yes.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Perhaps you could put the timeline amendment in there, Francis.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: It would read, "that the committee recommend the government conduct a study to uphold the right of farmers to load producer cars", etc., as it reads right now. Now, I'm not sure what legal requirements we can impose on them—"and to report within four months". Is that to report to the committee within four months? No, it's to report to Parliament within four months.

• (1015)

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't know how they could do that, guys.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I don't know how you put a time limit on it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I don't think we can either.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't know how they could report. You could say "completion of the study within four months", but they don't need to report it to Parliament. I mean, all we're doing in here is reporting this motion to the House. What you're asking for under the amendment is for the government to do an internal study, or to do a study, complete the study within four months, and then come up with the necessary legislation after that. Basically, that's what you're saying.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Is that what your sense is? Is that where you want to go?

Mr. Blake Richards: I would have no issue with adding a time limit in there, certainly. I would consider that friendly.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Personally, I'd like to see us coming out with something unanimous here, ideally, on this.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Might I add, Mr. Chair, that if this motion should pass with the time requirement, I would ask the clerk to determine by the next meeting whether or not the imposition of a time limit is enforceable and is appropriate. If it's not, I would like Alex to be able to bring his motion back. I don't want to see this shelved and delayed because of improper wording of a motion.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): So my understanding from you, Mr. Valeriote, is that we'll park Alex's.... We'll come with this one, and we'll find out if they can work within the timelines. If they can't, we'll go back. Is that what you're suggesting?

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Yes.

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

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: On a point of order, Chair, I don't think you can park the main motion, because the main motion is being amended. If the amendment passes, the motion has been dealt with. It can always come back in front of the committee later, perhaps, but you can't vote on the amendment and park the main motion at the same time. I think we have to deal with it.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Yes.

Mr. Atamanenko, maybe you get the final word on this.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: It's such a complicated motion. You were right, Chair, that either you study it or you don't study it.

It's clear. The way it's amended, whoever studies it, the committee or the government, it's another study; it takes time. Then there will be recommendations, and in a year from now nothing will be resolved.

I don't agree with that. I agree with this motion. We vote and we say this should happen. We recommend that this happen. We don't need studies. We've heard from people. It's either we study it...so we're voting on a study to do a study on another study. You know, that's what the amendment is on, basically. What I'm saying is that we simply do this.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Alex, this is a serious question. Why didn't you propose to change the legislation, then? If you already know there are no studies that need to be taken, why didn't you simply propose the changes that need to be made?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Vote on the motion.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Don't be mad at us. They didn't have enough members in the House to support you in the end. That's what happened. That's why your bill went down.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I understand that. You guys shut the debate down.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay, so don't be mad at us. We don't have enough votes to defeat anything, Alex. You know that. The Liberals were playing games.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We're tidying up the motion here.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, on the amendment—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Go ahead quickly, Mr. Easter, because we're almost ready to go.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I oppose the amendment, Chair, for this simple reason. Look, Alex is right. The government can handle this proposal, after we have reported it to the House, however it decides to. They can have a study. But for all this law and order legislation we've seen coming forward, has the government done a study on every single piece of legislation?

The proper procedure here is that if and when the government acts on this particular motion, they will then prepare amendments to legislation. I would expect they would have to bring those amendments before either the transport committee or the agriculture committee, and either one of those committees would study the issue at that time. This is just a way of delaying instead of getting something done for farmers. So I think we should move it up; we should pass this motion, and the government will deal with getting legislation together. Then proper procedure would be for the committee to have a quick look at it, and it would go to the House—

•(1020)

Mr. Francis Valeriote: For the record, Mr. Chair, there seems to be a lot of doubt right now about the efficacy of time limits and otherwise, and I'm having doubts about that amended motion being able to be properly conducted and it being Parliament appropriate.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you very much, Mr. Valeriote. It seems as though I'm not getting too much entertaining of this amendment on the opposition side.

Anyway, Mr. Richards, you have the final word on your amendment, and then we're going to bring it to a vote.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I find this very frustrating, because we're trying to work together cooperatively in a non-partisan manner here. I think we all agree there is an issue here that needs to be dealt with. We all agree on that.

I think where we disagree is on whether, as worded, this motion Alex has put forward is the correct way to deal with it. I think what we're trying to do here is come up with a way to determine the necessary steps and take that action. We all agree that's what needs to happen. It's just that some of us disagree with the way this motion, as it currently exists, is worded. I was certainly making an attempt—and I believe that Frank, with his suggestion, was making an attempt—to be non-partisan here and to come up with a way that we can all work together and agree to do what's best for farmers. Unfortunately, the rest of the other side, the coalition, seems to take its direction from Mr. Easter. And it's very unfortunate that by making the suggestion that we not support these amendments, he has chosen to take this and turn it into something partisan, rather than trying to look at what's in the best interests of farmers. Certainly when it came from Frank, it seemed like a good idea to him, but when it came from this side, somehow or other he has now decided it's not a good idea.

It's very unfortunate, because we're all trying to find a way to deal with this issue so that farmers' best interests are taken care of. That's certainly the intent behind this motion. I would say to Frank and those on the other side, who I believe have the ability to play non-partisan—and certainly I think there are some who often do—let's take a look at this amendment. My understanding is that there is some doubt as to the timeline. Why don't we pass this amendment and see if that in fact is enforceable? I think it would be very

unfortunate if we couldn't find a way to all move forward to do what's best for farmers. That's what we're trying to do here.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. We're going to bring this to a vote.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, could we have a recorded vote, please?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay, folks, it pretty well boils down to this. The amendment states that we have a study and Alex's motion doesn't. When you get down to it and take action...

We are going to have a recorded vote on the amendment, and we're going to start off with—

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I just want to make clear that it was Mr. Richards who proposed the amendment.

I'm looking at the original motion, and I see where your amendment would come in. I have here that with your amendment, everything after “and amend” in the initial motion would be gone. Is that correct?

The amendment you're proposing would read as follows:

That the committee recommend that the government conduct a study to uphold the right of farmers to load producer cars to ensure that Canadian railway companies do not arbitrarily close down producer car loading sites, and take the necessary action.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think it is “within four months”, but it is “necessary action”.

The Clerk: Is it “within four months”?

Mr. Blake Richards: I think that was accepted as a friendly amendment.

The Clerk: Okay, and the section in the initial motion that talked about amending necessary legislation is not part of your amendment. You would strike that part out.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just as you read it.

The Clerk: Just as I read it. Okay. Perfect.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We're going to start the vote and it's going to be a recorded vote.

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Now we're going to move on to the main motion from Alex. I'm guessing you want this recorded again.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

•(1025)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Chair, it is close to closing time, but I have two comments.

One, let it show on the record that the government members, especially from western Canada, failed to stand up for western producers in that last vote and challenge the railways.

Two, I wonder if the clerk could find out and report back to us what meeting departmental officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada attended in Toronto and who was there from the department such that they were unable to come before this committee to answer some questions on safety net programs. I wonder if that could be reported back to us fairly shortly.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. We'll look into that.

We have 20 minutes left, and there is probably a good chance we're not going to get every one of these done, but I thought we might get the easier ones done first. There is one by Randy Hoback, who is not here, and by Francis. It's together. I think we're addressing that, but maybe Francis wants to step up to the plate on that one. I'm just trying to get the low-hanging fruit done here first.

Francis, do you know which one we're talking about?

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Yes, I do.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): It's pretty self-explanatory. Are you comfortable with where we're going with the committee on it?

Mr. Francis Valeriote: The motion is self-explanatory. It will be an effort to:

...conduct a study on the status of the Canadian biotechnology sector, in which it travels to the universities across Canada where this technology is primarily being undertaken, and that it recommend, where necessary, legislative, policy and regulatory changes in order to foster an innovative and fertile biotechnology industry in Canada. And that the committee report its findings to the House.

I'm hoping we'll have a vigorous view and review of all areas of the biotechnology sector, Mr. Chair, and I'm hoping this committee supports that study.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you very much, Mr. Valeriote.

Just for the record, because Mr. Hoback is not here, in order for this to go through we need unanimous consent. So unless there are some problems....

Alex, and then Brian.

A point of order.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have a point of order first. I think Mr. Hoback has introduced this as well, so I don't know why we would need unanimous consent if both movers have tried to move this.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Yes, you do apparently.

Go ahead, Clerk, and explain.

The Clerk: Mr. Hoback had talked about the motion in committee, but he hadn't yet officially moved the motion in committee. So if Mr. Valeriote is intending to move officially and then proceed to a debate and a vote on this motion.... Because the standard only requires us to have one person's name, my minutes can only reflect one person's name. If it is the desire of the committee for the motion and the minutes to be done in both parties' names, it just takes the unanimous consent of the committee.

An hon. member: So we should move forward with that right off the bat.

The Clerk: If we are just discussing it, it's not necessary; but if he's moving it and we're going to proceed to a debate and a vote, I require unanimous consent for both names to appear there.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. Does everybody agree with that?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Is it not true, though, Mr. Chair, that we've already in effect...? I don't know why we're dealing with this motion.

• (1030)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I just want to get it off... because it's there.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, but we've already agreed that we're going to commence a study on the biotechnology industry starting December 14.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): That's right, but in all fairness, because Randy's not here, we just have to agree with it, I guess. This is just housekeeping.

Mr. Brian Storseth: We give unanimous consent, right?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Yes.

Mr. Atamanenko, do you have anything?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: You don't have my unanimous consent for the motion as it stands.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, then we can't move forward with this.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. Let's park it.

Just because of time constraints, there is no use getting into it, because Mr. Hoback is not here and we don't have unanimous consent.

Mr. Brian Storseth: So we have unanimous consent?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We don't.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Who didn't give consent?

An hon. member: Alex.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Alex didn't?

An hon. member: It's payback.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I'm just going to move on. Let's move to the motion on fertilizer.

Mr. Easter, do you want to speak on that? It's on page 5.

Could you read it?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, it reads:

That the committee begin a study on consolidation of the fertilizer industry in Canada and its impact on Canadian farmers. And that the committee report its findings to the House of Commons.

I don't see us doing this right now, Mr. Chair. You're using the words "park it", till the new year, I guess.

But I do think one of the things that has certainly come out of the potash takeover proposals is that you want to talk about a supply management system. It's interesting that so many people in big corporations attack the supply management system in Canada, but there's nothing like the supply management system run by the potash companies of the world, and one of the big players in that is Canpotex, which really is the single-desk seller for Potash Corporation and Agrium and Mosaic. They're the single-desk seller for potash. In fact, there was the article in *The Globe and Mail* that starts this way: "For nearly forty years, it was the cartel no one talked about. Then came the food crisis, runaway prices and BHP Billiton's hostile takeover bid for Potash Corp. Now there is a harsh spotlight on Canpotex."

I'll not read any further than that, Mr. Chair, but when you start to look at the amount of power that Canpotex has in terms of pricing, you will see that they basically shut down mines when they don't get the price they want to get. It's not a free market in the potash industry. The people who pay the excess prices for that potash are the primary producers who use it as fertilizer, and not only farmers in Canada but also everyone around the world.

So I do think that at some point in time we need to look seriously at the consolidation in the potash industry, how it's affecting the cost of production of our producers in Canada, and how it's affecting food supply around the world. In fact, they're reducing the supply of potash at times, not because they're not making a profit but because they are not making big enough profits for their shareholders. They could in fact be accused of creating a food shortage in some areas of the world.

So this is an important motion. I think we have other priority issues at the moment, so I will "park it" until the new year. But I want to leave it on the books, because after this takeover bid, now we know how powerful Canpotex is and how they manage supply at the expense of primary producers and food suppliers.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Okay. We're going to park that.

We're now going to go to Francis Valeriote and his motion on animal welfare.

I don't know if we're going to have enough time, but—

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'll try to be brief, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, you'll recall in the spring of this year that a report was made public respecting the issue of animal welfare. That caused alarm among certain stakeholders in the agricultural industry. I know this is an extremely sensitive topic among all stakeholders in the industry; nevertheless, even sensitive topics need to be discussed. I believe issues associated with animal welfare should, and ought to be, brought before this committee, at least so that this committee is better informed about the state of animal welfare in Canada.

I think it's important for us to have a better understanding of animal welfare to determine on our own, through this study, whether or not any changes need to be made to regulations or policy. For that reason we recommend that we undertake a study of animal welfare, including, without limitation, the number of animals dying or severely injured during transport, overcrowding transport conditions, overcrowded living conditions, the adequacy of the number of

animal inspectors for the enforcement of animal welfare conditions, and the adequacy of animal welfare regulations.

We may find—I'm hoping we'll find—that these regulations and policies are in a good state and they perhaps need only minor tweaking, if at all. Frankly, I'm uncertain, and I would suggest that most of us around this table are uncertain as to the current state of animal welfare in Canada.

I think it behooves us to at least bring witnesses before this committee, to have a better understanding of animal welfare in the country. For that reason, I brought forward this motion.

● (1035)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): It states here that we undertake a study.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You don't like studies. You're against studies.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Order.

Do you want to go forward or do you want to park this thing?

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'd like to place it before the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Are there any comments on this?

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, on a point of clarification on the last notice of motion that was put forward, did Mr. Easter bring it forward, or did he—

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, I parked it until the new year.

Mr. Brian Storseth: So you didn't bring it forward at all?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Right. We'll leave it on the books.

Mr. Brian Storseth: It's still a priority, but not until the new year?

Hon. Wayne Easter: It's not a priority. There are too many other issues at the moment.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Valeriote has moved this motion and now we're going into discussion.

Is there any discussion on this motion before we bring it to a vote?

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Sure, I'll bring up some discussion, Chair.

The first is that, once again, a study is important. I find this quite baffling, actually. We just went through a 10-minute discussion: if we were to have a study, this would delay and obstruct the important work of committee in making forceful recommendations to the House.

Within minutes of having voted against a study, Mr. Valeriote is asking the committee to vote for a study. At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Easter was asking for a study on a number of different matters. He was advocating quite strongly for a study because it's important for the committee to do that work and to ensure it has the facts in front of it. But when it came to the last motion, the study was considered to be an obstructionist tactic that would slow down and delay the work of the committee and somehow water down the important recommendation the committee should be making to the House.

I'd love to hear the explanation for this. How is it that in certain circumstances, when we're discussing opposition motions, studies are critical? They're absolutely essential. We must have them. But when we're discussing amendments to these motions from the government side, studies are a waste of time and should not be conducted; we should be delivering strongly worded messages to the House without studies.

That's the first point.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Lemieux, I hope we don't get into debate about why we should have a study or not have one.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's important to raise these points.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Can you speak on the motion?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'm getting to it, Chair. I cannot be rushed on these matters.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I can see that, but I'm hoping we can deal with this one. Maybe we can't deal with it within our time constraints, but go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, what I want to bring up, of course, is that no one condones cruelty to animals. Animals must be treated in a humane way, whether that be on farms, in transport from farms to processing facilities, or at processing facilities. I don't think any MP sitting around this table would condone cruelty to animals.

But I think it's important, too, to underline that the vast majority of producers and processors transport livestock safely. Sure, a few need to do better, but the majority do so and are very responsible. Of course, not only is it ethical and not only is it important to treat animals humanely, but it's also just good business sense. If livestock is injured or livestock dies in transport, this goes against the business model of everybody who's involved in that value chain. So in a sense, there's a driving force behind this, aside from the ethics of it and aside from the good judgment of it, and that's just the business case that supports treating animals in a humane way as well.

I do want to point out, Chair, that very recently our government has given to the CFIA the tools it needs to impose tougher fines to improve animal welfare. If there is a case of an animal not being treated properly, if its welfare is taken for granted, then there are fines that can be imposed by CFIA. We have more than doubled the fines. The previous limit was \$4,000. That was set by the Liberals. We've more than doubled it to \$10,000. So I think, Chair, that's a very good step in the right direction. As well, we've extended the amount of time that CFIA can consider multiple offences—from three years to five years.

So again, CFIA has more tools at its disposal to actually enforce good animal welfare practice. These are changes that were just passed recently. In fact, stakeholders have recognized that these are good changes. If I remember correctly, I think the opposition may have recognized that these in fact were good changes that were made.

I'll end my comments there for now, Chair. I do want to underscore that, sure, it's an important issue, but I have not heard of widespread problems regarding animal welfare, and there has been recent action taken by the government to give more tools to CFIA to act in cases where animal welfare is at risk.

• (1040)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Valeriote, you have about one minute. That being said, I don't know if we're going to have time to vote on this today, because there are other speakers.

Go ahead, Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make it clear that in no way am I questioning the ethics of the producers or the processors, nor their responsibility. I know they take that responsibility very seriously, and of course it does make good business sense that they do so.

In fact, I'd like to thank Mr. Lemieux for his comments about the efforts the government has undertaken so far. I was at a presentation where the minister delivered money to the University of Guelph to undertake research in animal welfare, and I'm grateful for that as well. But I—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You can thank him personally on Thursday, because he's going to be here.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I will.

The point is that there have been recent reports, and as a committee we have never undertaken a review of the circumstances. Why is a study important and why not a study on the previous issue? Well, on the previous issue, we in effect did have a study on loader producer cars, when the rail industry did appear before us and, as I said, presented with arrogance and insensitivity their position. We conducted a study. We passed a motion. We sent it to the minister and nothing was done. In this instance, no study has been undertaken whatsoever.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We just have a minute left.

Mr. Storseth, do you want to make a few comments? Then I'm going to wrap up.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Can we vote on this, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): I don't know. It doesn't look like we have enough time, but—

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Well, there is time right now.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Mr. Storseth has four minutes. I'm only going to have comments for another 30 seconds or so. If he goes longer, then we're not going to be able to vote. I think that's the rule of the House here.

Go ahead.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Off the bat, I'm not opposed to what Francis is talking about or asking here, but I have several questions in regard to this. One is timelines. What do you see in this motion as timelines?

You mentioned several things in here, Francis. You're kind of taking on a massive undertaking here. It seems to me you're kind of lumping everything in all at once. Do you have priorities within this when you're talking about overcrowded transportation conditions and living conditions?

Then you get into the adequacy of numbers and animal inspectors for enforcement. It just seems like you're putting a lot in this, or maybe not. I'd like to hear your comments on that. How much of a priority do you see this as? How long do you think this is going to take?

I'd like to know about the types and number of witnesses you're receiving here, because obviously, if what we're talking about is another one of the Liberal Party's drive-by smears, where we look at things for one meeting and then make a recommendation, then, quite frankly, I'm not interested.

• (1045)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): Excuse me, but I have to adjourn the debate. Time is running out.

Mr. Brian Storseth: As long as I have the floor when we come back, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking): We will resume it.

We got a lot done. We've gone through our steering committee report and we have most of the motions. I think there are only one or two that we didn't do, so I commend everybody this morning for working together.

The meeting is adjourned.

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