



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

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AGRI • NUMBER 068 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, May 29, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. James Bezan**

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## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

•(1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion that the committee conclude its deliberations and complete its report on the APF before it considers any other business.

There are a couple of reasons for that. One is that we now have four motions before the committee and a number of others I think that are coming to the committee over the next couple of days.

Also, I'd like to read into the record a letter that was received by the members of the committee from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which will make it clear that this motion is a good motion and one that we should support.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** That's all right, we have it. All members of the committee have received the letter. There's no need to read it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think it's important that it be read into the

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Easter on a point of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** If Mr. Anderson is putting forward a motion, we require 48 hours' notice on that motion.

**The Chair:** I don't believe we do on this. If this is a procedural motion, it doesn't require notice. You're out of order.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** It's written to the chair:

As you know, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and its member organizations are very much involved in the ongoing process to develop the next generation of Canadian agriculture policy. We strongly believe that development process must happen in partnership between government and industry, with the maximum possible amount of input and consultation from all partners in the industry. The next generation of agriculture policy is critical for the future success and sustainability of our industry.

CFA believes the work of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture has done a meeting with witnesses in Ottawa, and holding cross-country consultations is an important part of the process. The outcomes of those consultations will no doubt provide additional valuable input for the development of the new policy framework.

CFA is concerned that with the other issues before the committee and with reports in the media of a possible early end to the parliamentary session, the committee will not be able to prepare and table a report on its work this spring. The current government timetable will see the major work on the new policy framework taking place this spring and into the summer. If the committee's report is not released until the fall of the year, its ideas, conclusions, and recommendations will come too late to be included in the development process.

The CFA therefore strongly urges you and the members of the committee to make the next generation of agriculture a priority. We ask you to make your best effort to make sure your report is released in this parliamentary session, so that we can include and build on your work as we head into the most important phase of the development process. We believe it is in the best interests of Canadian farmers.

It's signed by Bob Friesen, president, Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Mr. Chair, I bring this up because in the past, on at least two occasions, I've made the point to the committee that we needed to move quickly on this issue. I think it was probably last October or November when I first raised that and said I thought it was important that the committee begin to focus on this issue and get the APF hearings and consultations under way so that we could play an important part in giving the minister advice on the new programs. That did not happen, because it got derailed by a number of other issues through October, November, December.

When we came back after the Christmas break, I remember also urging the committee to do this as quickly as possible and to make sure that we have our APF consultations done, so that we once again could still have the ability to influence the APF conclusions that are being reached.

I'm afraid from what I'm seeing that we're going to find ourselves in the situation that our report is going to come out too late to have a major influence on the direction of the policy framework. Members opposite have brought forward a number of motions, and of course we're going to take time to debate those motions at the appropriate time. We think this is not the appropriate time, that it would be better for us right now to focus on the APF report, to work our way through its conclusions, and then, in that way, be able to have an influence on the government's decisions regarding the policy framework.

That's why I've brought this issue up, Mr. Chair. I think it's important that we continue to work on the report. I think it's important that we do that ahead of anything else. So I'm asking the members on both sides of the table to do that and to work with us to get this report done as quickly as possible. It would be unfortunate if we're going to focus on motions for the next two weeks in this committee when that's not necessary.

**The Chair:** I have Barry, Larry, Wayne, and Alex.

Barry.

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** I want to agree with David that we as a committee should focus on finishing our report. We put a lot of time and effort into it and a lot of expense travelling across the country. I think we had an agreement at the committee that this was a priority for us this spring.

Quite frankly, I have two or three issues that I personally have strong views on that I'd like to get on the agenda as well, and if the way to do that is to bring forward motions, I guess I'll be compelled to be drawn into that process too. I'm not suggesting that motions shouldn't be dealt with, but I would agree with the notion that we should make the report our priority to work on getting that done. Once that is tabled in the House, then we ought to still have time to deal with these motions.

**The Chair:** Larry.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I am, of course, going to support the motion, simply for the reason that to come up with APF-2 is something this committee has worked very hard at, as have staff, for months now, and really, probably more like the last couple of years for parts of it. For us not to deal with the report, when we all know there's a looming deadline—at some point, the House is going to shut down for the summer.... I think there's no doubt that most of us here have a very sincere worry about the state of agriculture and how to make it better. If we don't deal with this report, gentlemen, around the table here, I think we're not just letting farmers down, but letting the process down and ourselves.

As far as the motion is concerned, Mr. Anderson's motion still leaves room to debate the motions that are on the agenda. I have to point out that there's no doubt there's a difference of opinion on some things from time to time, and I respect that, but there's no doubt that at least the motion we're debating at the present time is about politics. I think for the good of agriculture and the work we've done here.... It'll all be for naught if we don't spend the majority of our time here dealing with the actual report.

I'm leaving it at that, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to support the motion and go from there.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Was Alex first?

**The Chair:** No, it's you and then Alex.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Okay. Thanks.

First, before making remarks on this, Mr. Chair, I'll speak really on a point of order, partly based on the performance by Mr. Anderson here just a moment ago with his motion. I've had fairly strong confidence in you as chair, Mr. Chairman, but I do need you to tell us whether we're following Jay Hill's rules of procedure, which is to basically disrupt committees and prevent them from getting their work done, or whether you're following the regular rules.

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

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think we're trying to have an intelligent discussion here about the priorities of the committee and the way

we're going to proceed, and I'd appreciate it if Mr. Easter would stay on that as well.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I asked you a question, Mr. Chair, and I expect an answer.

**The Chair:** Well, we're definitely following procedure here. Mr. Anderson was compelled to move a motion. He got my attention right off, at the beginning of the meeting, to move this motion. This doesn't require notice. This is about, in his opinion, as I'm listening here, wanting to get back to finish off the report before we deal with other business.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, I'm not just talking about this motion, Mr. Chair. We've seen a lot of obstruction by the government that is quite unusual. We saw it the other day at committee from Mr. Anderson as he filibustered the motions. We on this side need to know whether we're following the manual, as I understand, put out by Jay Hill or whether we're following the rules of procedure as established by committees, on which you get advice from the clerk. That's what we need to know before we start.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** On a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I think this has already been cleared up once. Every government—past governments, the present government—has different strategies they use. I suppose that's the document Mr. Easter's referring to. There are procedural rules, and I think it's insulting to the chair and to our clerk sitting beside him, who has acknowledged that the chairman has said it's dealing with our procedure bylaw, and I think that's enough said on the issue. Let's get on to business.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, I was on a point of order, and it's a simple question that I asked the chair. I'm asking the chair whose rules we are following.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** He already answered.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, he didn't.

**The Chair:** I'll say it again, Mr. Easter. The committee has a will and its own power to set its own agenda, and that's what we're debating here right now. The motion is in order, and we're debating the motion—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm not talking about this motion, Mr. Chair. On a point of order, it's well-known around this town that a manual has come out about how chairs are supposed to operate at committees. Now, are we operating under Jay Hill's manual of procedures, or whatever you want to call it, or are we operating under the normal rules? That's a point of order. You can tell me that we're operating under normal rules and I'll accept that, but that's what I need to know before we start.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** On a point of order, I think Mr. Easter is being ridiculously political here, trying to make some strange point. We want to move ahead with the agenda, which is to go to the APF report and to discuss it and its recommendations. If he wants to delay the work of the committee, that's his option, and he can continue to do that, I guess.

**The Chair:** Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** I'd like to say that I have confidence in you, James, to run this meeting correctly. I think you've done it so far and I don't anticipate that changing, in spite of all these manuals and things that are circulating.

However, I think the question is very clear. We have four motions. We have two that have been here for very close to a month. It's very simple. We can get on to the APF. It shouldn't take more than about 20 minutes maximum to quickly look at.... At least on these two motions, we probably know where we stand. Let's get them out of the way. If we want to leave the two last ones for a while later.... If not, I think we can get them all done in 10 or 15 minutes, or 20 minutes, and let's get on with it.

If we don't want to do that as a committee, if we don't want to finish these and get on with this report, then I think we have to then decide who doesn't want it to happen.

My recommendation is that we finish the motions and get on with the APF and whatever other business we have.

**The Chair:** André.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I read the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's letter carefully. I can tell you that I agree entirely with the wording of this letter. I believe it is very important to make the report our priority.

Furthermore, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and all the members of this committee are clearly aware of the way in which the committee works. In a normal, democratic manner, the members of the committee may table motions before it, motions that we usually discuss in a reasonable way for a few minutes, after which we hold a democratic vote. In passing I would like to say that I do not agree with Larry that these are procedural motions. First of all, there has been a lot of politics here and that is normal. Secondly, I can tell you that in my case—and I am convinced it is the same thing for most of my colleagues from the other parties—when I table a motion, it is following discussions and requests from agricultural producers who want to see some progress in their case.

That is just as commendable, and equally important. The CFA knows it, the government members know it and the opposition members do as well. We have every right to table motions. It is ironic that the parliamentary secretary would ask us to work diligently and set aside these motions in order to work on the report, whereas he is filibustering the first motion, Mr. Easter's. If we conclude the debate and move democratically to the vote, we can carry on, move on to the following items and quickly do what we have to do, that is to work on the report. That is the way it works and the way it has always worked. That is the way it must be.

• (1545)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On the motion, Mr. Chair, the first point was a point of order, and I think that has been resolved.

But on this motion, I really find it unbelievable that we've had a motion tabled and we've started to debate it, and the second speaker

on that motion was Mr. Anderson, who talked it out until the end of the committee. He's a little late, in my view, coming to consideration of wanting to do the report on the APF. We support doing the APF report. We want it done.

There is other business by way of motion that is already partly discussed. The government's parliamentary secretary filibustered time away at a meeting and we lost that time to get that order of business behind us so that we can go to the agricultural policy framework.

The fact of the matter is I've seen the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's letter and I agree with it. But I have also seen a number of letters from farmers who are basically destitute as a result of the government's decision on the family farm options program. They're concerned that the government took \$246 million out of their pocket. They want that issue discussed as well. Tax accountants are saying they've never seen such an outrageous decision by the government. They want action on that motion. So I think proper procedure should be that we finish the motions, as we were already partly through the discussion on them, and then we'll get to the APF.

If the government wants to move right away on these motions, I think we could get to the APF discussion before this meeting is over—unless, of course, the parliamentary secretary is going to continue to filibuster.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** This is just on some of the comment after mine around the table here. There are a lot of issues, but to the most recent one with Mr. Easter, there are a lot of things that I have to say when it gets to be my turn on the motion by Mr. Easter, because this is a very important decision. So it isn't going to happen in just a couple of minutes—not for me. I have time to talk on it.

We have more important issues than beating the daylight out of the farm family options decision, and Mr. Anderson's motion speaks to that. I think the sooner we get to it, the better.

**The Chair:** Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** I'd just like to comment on process. You're right, it is standard process at a committee for members to bring motions forward, but it's also standard process at committee that individual members have the right to speak to them and have the right to address the different issues they raise.

On the first issue from Mr. Easter, I don't agree with this motion, and I want to take every opportunity, when it's my turn, to persuade other members of the committee to vote against it as well. I think there is a good list of reasons out there to not support that.

In terms of the second motion, dealing with the Wheat Board and the Auditor General of Canada, that's another interesting notion, and maybe if the Auditor General is going to look into something at the Wheat Board, she should take a broader view. That's something that I think is an important question and something we'll need to discuss and possibly to expand the scope to look at what the Wheat Board is doing, in terms of what the Auditor General could find out for us.

On the third motion, from Mr. Boshcoff, regarding the feed ban that's going into effect on July 12, we've actually already heard on this a couple of times, but I also think that's important and whether those things are going to happen by July 12.

Finally, on Mr. Bellavance's motion regarding the future of the poultry industry and the need for an article 12, we haven't studied that. I listened with great interest, both when we were travelling in eastern Canada and at a recent committee meeting, to people coming forward saying something needs to be done to protect egg and poultry producers in Canada. One of them was one of my own constituents whom I have met with at other times on that subject.

I don't see these as simple slam-dunk motions. I see them as substantive motions. While there is nothing to stop any of us from bringing motions forward, I think when members bring forward motions that have a broad reach and may have a large impact on what we're suggesting ought to happen, it should come as no surprise to other members of the committee that some of us want to speak to them and we want to take the opportunity to persuade our colleagues sitting around this table to our point of view on them.

I don't know when this session is going to end. We could have as few as four more meetings and maybe as many as eight. It's probably somewhere in that range. I was, frankly, quite looking forward to discussing our report and getting it in, and I think that should be a priority. In that context, I don't see dealing with all of these options in a pro forma way, that we just kind of let them slide by and vote and don't speak to them, as really being an option at this point.

I have said before that I sit on another committee in this place that's dysfunctional almost all the time, and I always enjoyed coming to the agriculture committee because there seemed to be a common bond in terms of an interest in the subject matter and actually trying to get something done. I certainly sensed that when we were travelling, that we want to get that report in and we want to do the best things for Canadian farmers.

We have four motions today. Who is to say there will not be four more tabled tomorrow? I think it's a reasonable approach at this point to decide, with limited time, what our priority is.

I, for one, would argue that getting to work on our report is my number one priority, and I sure hope I'm not compelled to spend a bunch of time here over the next couple of weeks talking to some of these motions and dealing with them properly.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, let me just say at the outset that what I'm about to say is not diminishing my respect for you as chair. I think you've done an honourable job as chair, and I realize that being chair in a minority situation, when you don't have the majority, on your side is very difficult. So from time to time we have to give, and we have to learn to take it on the chin sometimes. We sometimes give a lot to get a little; sometimes we give a little to get a lot. If we learn to do that, I think we can continue to do that.

But I think there's been a bad spirit at this committee for the last meetings. I think we have to go beyond that and get beyond that kind

of thing. If we're going to continue to do that, then we're going to go nowhere.

I, as much as anyone around this table, and those of us who travel with the committee, know it's hard work. A lot of work went into this. A lot of farmers are depending on us doing this, and whether, even when we get the report in, we can really effectively put together an APF framework in time for March 31, 2008, is even questionable at best. But I think we need to attempt to be there.

I would suggest, in the spirit of working together, that we move to dealing with the motions. I think there's adequate time.

I've been at meetings where we've had to adjourn the meeting because there was a disagreement among members at the table, and I supported the opposition, the Conservative Party at that time or the Reform Party at that time, to shut down the meeting because we weren't going anywhere. We came back at the next meeting and did the work in two hours. So we can do this work that has to be done in terms of this APF study that we've done.

I believe that today, in the spirit of working together, we can decide we're going to deal with these motions, but if we're going to take an acrimonious attitude about everything and we want to fight and debate and talk these things out, we're going to go nowhere. If we're going to have that over our shoulders going through this APF, we're going to have the same thing there, and I don't think that's where we want to go.

I would, in the spirit of cooperation, seek the cooperation of all parties here today to work together and get these motions out of the way, if it takes today to do it, but then move forward in a new spirit as we try to get to the APF, because that is the important one, the one we want to get right. Moving forward, that is going to be the policy we work from for the next five years.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Chair, we're trying to give the opposition the opportunity to do that. Barry has laid it out clearly. We have four motions here, and pretty well all of them need serious debate, and they actually need some more information, because a couple of them are bringing completely new information into the equation, and there are others we've heard a limited number of witnesses on.

So, clearly, I think part of that debate is going to be a request to get more information, because, particularly on Mr. Bellavance's motion, we haven't heard from the government witnesses and we haven't heard from industry witnesses. We've heard from producers. We've made mistakes at this committee before because we didn't consider things and get the whole picture before we made decisions. So that's one example.

Mr. Boshcoff's motion brings in some new information that I think the industry is requesting. We haven't had those witnesses here at committee, so those are the kinds of things that I think we need to consider before we go ahead.

So clearly these four motions are not going to pass today. That's why we wanted to come in that spirit of cooperation that Mr. Steckle was talking about and give the opposition and ourselves a chance to do the right thing, to work ourselves through the APF report and get that out of the way, and then come back to these motions. Then we can have that debate and discussion that everybody wants to have on the floor of the six or eight or however many motions we have at that time.

We sent our agenda months ago to try to get this done, and there seem to be constant interruptions. Then we keep putting this off and putting it off, until we're going to find ourselves in a situation where we don't have any influence on the policy framework and we're not going to have anyone else to blame but ourselves.

We're trying to find a compromise here, and our compromise suggestion is that we deal with the agriculture policy framework report first and then come back to the motions. I think that will give everybody what they want.

The one other point I wanted to make is that procedurally there's no reason why we can't do this just because we were discussing the previous motion or whatever. I wanted to make that point as well.

**The Chair:** Roger, then André, and then Charlie.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My friend David, if I can call him a friend, has said that there have not been enough witnesses for us to vote on Mr. Bellavance's motion. I have been an MP in Ottawa for four years and I have been hearing about section 28 since I got here. I'm wondering who is not listening. Is it me or is it the others? Quite frankly, I have been hearing about this for four years. Whether it is the Liberals or the Conservatives does not change a thing.

I believe this is very important. I do not mean that the report is not important, but I believe there are a number of concerns. I have been hearing talk about section 28 for a long time, and I believe it is as important as the report. Unless I am mistaken, unless somebody tells me otherwise, I believe they are both equally important.

Earlier on, Larry said that if we continue to wait, there will be 24 motions next week. In his opinion, this would be motions to create more motions and yet more motions again. André's is a good one because in truth, we would protect our agriculture even more. I am not implying that the report is not good, because the contents of the report apply indirectly. In my view, we must work on this as soon as possible in order for it to function. If not, there's something wrong at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food.

Some people tell us that we will never be in power, but my objective is the well-being of farmers. In countries where there is no more agriculture, things are not going well. We saw that in Russia: when the bottom fell out of agriculture, everything else fell. I think agriculture is essential and of great significance. I come to work for the well-being of farmers and not for the good of some party or my party.

Thank you.

• (1600)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I think it is up to each of the members who tabled a motion to decide if they are flexible enough to set it aside for a certain period of time in order to move on to other priorities. That does not bother me.

Some members on the government side have made good arguments; Barry mentioned some that were very commendable. However, we must not forget that the parliamentary secretary of the Minister of Agriculture has been filibustering the first motion that was tabled.

Personally, I did not table a motion to waste the committee's time nor to filibuster. I do not intend to table seven or eight more by the end of the session, not at all. I feel that my motion is very important, as Roger stated so well a while ago.

However, I am aware of the fact that we have not heard from certain witnesses, particularly because we had a few from Quebec on the subject of poultry and eggs and we dropped the meeting with the officials in order to be able to continue the discussion on Wayne's motion.

On this subject, I am prepared to set aside my motion today, but when I feel the need, as every other member of the committee has the right, I will want to hear my colleagues' opinions on the issue. In my case, we can hear from other witnesses.

It is up to each of the members to decide what they want to do with their motions. I repeat, these motions are not tabled to cause problems, they have been tabled because agricultural producers have made requests, I am convinced of that. It is our duty to discuss them and it is our duty to put them to a vote and not to filibuster, which will prevent us from discussing the report that is so important to everyone.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Hubbard.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, we're in a minority government, and around the table we have four different parties. I think we have to recognize that no one party is going to be able to impose its will on other people and other parties. Whoever wants something around this table has to take a democratic vote and they have to rely on the goodwill of others. The sad part, in terms of committees also, is that any one of us, of the 11 sitting around the table, can see that nothing happens at this committee. One person can filibuster this committee until the end of June.

Already, at the last meeting, Mr. Anderson spent the best part of an hour giving his position on Mr. Easter's motion. Today, we've wasted another 30 minutes and we've done nothing. We spent a lot of money crossing the country hearing witnesses, and they're expecting some report from us to indicate what our suggestions and our gleanings are.

As the chair, I know you are in a very difficult position. I dealt with a committee one time that filibustered 27 hours straight, but at the end the will was there. If we have to sit 27 hours, maybe we can sit, Mr. Chair. There's no reason why we only have to meet for two hours. We can continue into the night and into tomorrow morning. In fact, we start in the afternoon and we finish the next day around noon. So let's get on with the work.

I'm not sure what you, as chair, can do. You have the parliamentary secretary bringing in a procedural motion, but the committee's intent for some time has been to look at the two motions, two in particular that have been sitting before this committee for some time—Mr. Easter's and Mr. Atamanenko's. So if Mr. Anderson wants, I suppose we can all sleep here.

But there's no way, David, you're going to win this, because you only have four people and there are seven or eight here on the other side.

I think, Mr. Chair, you have to let David make that decision.

**The Chair:** We are the master of our own domain.

I have Mr. Devolin and then Mr. Gourde.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** In response to André, I was not suggesting that you brought your motion forward to make mischief. Quite the opposite. I think this is an important issue. I listened carefully when the poultry producers were here talking about the issues they're facing and their belief that article 28 is the right remedy for them. I remember when similar arguments were made in the past regarding dairy, and the government has decided to go down that path. I also know in both cases there's been some debate that an article 28 remedy under WTO could actually have some unintended and negative consequences in the realm of NAFTA, and I'd like to hear answers to those questions.

My point was simply that, using your motion as an example, when we get to that I'm going to be hoping that we can amend it and that we can actually hear from other people and have a fulsome hearing on it. That's why the suggestion of "let's just pop through these four today quickly and then move on to the APF report".... I'm just saying, as an example, I think it's the substance of the motion that causes me to want to deal with it. To just pass it as is, in my view, would be irresponsible. I want to deal with it.

So I don't know where we land here, and I'm certainly no expert on process. But I think in committees it's been pointed out a couple of times that this is a minority government, and whether it's in the House or whether it's in the committee, different members or caucuses have different tools at their disposal. Certainly members of the Bloc and the NDP would appreciate that there are times when in a minority you use your right to speak extensively to an issue as a way to influence outcomes or to try to change other people's points of view or to try to convince them to your point of view.

While it may be unusual in the Canadian context that government members are doing this, I think that's because it's unusual in the Canadian context that we have minority governments like this. Typically the majority and the government is the same group of people and the minority is the opposition parties. We're in an unusual situation here. I do not think it is at all inappropriate for any individual member or any caucus to feel that it's within their rights to

speak to a motion and to speak extensively to it, if they think that may alter the outcome.

● (1605)

**The Chair:** We'll have Jacques, Wayne, and then Alex.

Go ahead, Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Above and beyond everything that has been said here, everyone present cares about agriculture. This committee represents all farming in Canada, which means 250,000 farms and the families that live on them. As a result, almost one million people will need a new agricultural policy. We must produce our report because our department has to have a solid foundation upon which to base the development of the new agricultural policy framework. That foundation must reflect all of the work that was done during our travels and that has been done since I have been sitting on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food.

The people who will be developing this agricultural policy will need to have something in their possession that represents all of the work that has been done. I believe that we all have an obligation to deliver, as quickly as possible, our report. I am currently sitting on another committee. We drafted such a discussion paper and it was long and arduous work. It is therefore very important that we begin because if we do not do so and we are not in a position to deliver it, it will be the holiday period and we will have to come back to this issue in the fall. The department does not have much time left to develop the agricultural policy and make it ready for 2008.

I think that beyond all partisanship, we must think about the interest of farmers. In their day-to-day lives, they are really affected by the deliberations of this committee. It is of the greatest importance. All of those from the agricultural sector know that often the policy thrust can bring about a new vision for agriculture, and the decisions that farmers make are often dependent on the policies that are established for the next 5, 10, 15, 20 or 25 years. If we do not take the time to lay a really solid foundation, we could put one or two generations of farmers at risk for the next 20, 25 or 30 years. I believe that this mission is more important than all of the political and partisan games that we are currently playing.

I therefore agree with Mr. David Anderson; we must as soon as possible begin working on this draft. As far as the motions are concerned, I understand and I have a respect for democracy. Every member of this committee may table motions so that we can discuss them, for the well-being of future generations, particularly the next generation; that should be our guidepost. We talk a lot about the next generation in agriculture. The young people who want to establish themselves in the agricultural sector for the next 20 years are made up of young families in rural areas. Imagine if they were to decide to leave agriculture! We already have a problem, we are going to be short of farmers over the next few years. A young 25-year-old man or a young family will decide whether or not they will remain in this sector or whether they will work elsewhere. They will make their decision according to the agricultural policies that are laid out before them for the next years.



I therefore believe that beyond what we think here, we must make a good decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

•(1610)

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll have Mr. Easter.

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

In terms of Mr. Gourde's comments, this is not about partisan politics. This has nothing to do with partisan politics for many members, at least on this side of the table.

Let's call this for what it is. The motion that was in debate that was filibustered by a member, a parliamentary secretary of the government, was brought forward as a result of the government's action in retroactively changing a program—retroactively, as I said—that, based on the financial advice of financial planners, would have put up to \$18,750 in quite a number of farmers' pockets.

What do you think the debate would be in the House of Commons if the Minister of Finance, after the fact, changed the RRSP structure retroactively so that \$18,750 of tax benefit they get out of RRSPs no longer meant anything?

So that's an important motion too. There are thousands of farmers out there who were planning on that money. It's of an urgent basis. That motion is important too.

We agree. I went through a lot of this draft report. I haven't completely gone through it all yet. There's a lot of good stuff in that draft report. I want to see it completed and get to the ministers prior to their federal-provincial meeting.

Let's call this for what it is. This is another delaying tactic by the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture to prevent us from dealing with a motion that benefits low-income farmers. That's a tactic the parliamentary secretary is using. He's using a procedural motion, and that's all well and fine, but it's already halfway discussed, and it could soon be completed if we went to the motion, moved on it, and got it behind us.

I'm just saying, Mr. Chair, that this is clearly another delaying tactic by the PS. I think it's sad that we can't get to the APF, but the government holds full responsibility for this.

I'll say this. Nobody knows when the House of Commons is going to adjourn, but the government is responsible for when the House of Commons adjourns. If we want to stay here till June 22, that's up to the Prime Minister. If it takes us that long to go through this, then I'm certainly willing to stay, but that's the Prime Minister's call. We can adjourn on June 8, but we could also stay till June 22. It's entirely in the hands of the government.

If we don't get to the APF, there's one party that's responsible. It's called the Government of Canada. We're trying to accommodate the APF. We're also trying to accommodate the other needs of farmers who are out there whom the minister left in a lurch by retroactively changing the program. As the department answered the other day, \$246 million that should've gone into their pockets right now is not going into their pockets because Chuck Strahl, the Minister of

Agriculture, cancelled the program in midstream. That's an important issue too.

**The Chair:** Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Yes, if I have a chance later, I'll speak to my motion.

I think if we cut through all this talk, all the discussion, basically, we have in front of us two motions that are very critical of the government and two that aren't, the two latest ones. Then we have the decision, I guess, by the minister of the government not to have these motions debated, and in my analysis, this is in the hope that soon we will be out of here for the summer and then it'll be forgotten and we may not bring it back in the fall. That's my analysis of it.

Sure, they're critical of government policy, but we're in a minority situation. They deserve to be voted on, and then we just get on with whatever has to be done. That's all I have to say.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I would like to bring some new direction to this. I have spoken to my colleagues who had the two latest motions before the committee. They have agreed to stand their motions for now until we deal with the first two, deal with the APF, and then move to further motions, theirs being the priority motions going beyond the APF.

If we look at that consideration, we might find ourselves moving very quickly to those two motions, dealing with them, and then continuing on with the APF. We'd stand all motions until such time as the APF is finished.

**The Chair:** We have a motion on the table right now to put the motions behind the report.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** We need to vote on Mr. Anderson's motion.

**The Chair:** We can't amend that motion.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I put the question on the first motion.

**The Chair:** That's out of order; you can't put the question.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Our position has been clear that we want to set the four motions aside, so we can discuss the APF. We see that to be the priority right now.

I appreciate that the two members have been willing to set their motions aside, but the other two.... Alex's comment was that there are two motions critical of the government. That's true, and he said that we're not going to have them debated. Well, we are going to have them debated; that's what we're in the process of doing. We are asking if we can put that off until after the APF, so that we can have the debate on them, perhaps later today—or who knows, perhaps tomorrow or whatever.

Why don't we work on what we can agree upon: that we need this APF to go ahead. If a couple of members on the other side will support our motion, we can move ahead. We can come back to the motions and deal with them in a fair fashion when we finish the APF report.

We're willing to make that commitment. We just want to get this report done; we don't want to spend the next two or three days talking about these two motions.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller.

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

As well as Mr. Anderson, I commend Mr. Boshkoff and Mr. Bellavance for standing their motions.

Mr. Easter just indicated a few minutes ago that he was trying and willing to—and in his own words—cooperate to get the APF through. So I would respectfully request that Mr. Atamanenko and Mr. Easter do the same as Mr. Boshkoff and Mr. Bellavance have done, and we will get on to this.

To Mr. Easter's comments, if he is cooperating to get to the APF, how in the world are you going to convince me that this is what you're actually doing? The motion here is very clear. If that's what you'd like to do, then I'm sure you're going to support Mr. Anderson's motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Cooperation is a give and take, Larry.

I support the proposal that would leave two motions until after APF and put two motions before it. That is meeting halfway.

Therefore, I would have to oppose Mr. Anderson's motion, so that we can deal with the others that are of an urgent nature, and in fact they're partway discussed. The parliamentary secretary had a lot of words in that first motion the other day.

That's where I stand. It's a pretty good compromise. Deal with two motions, then deal with APF, and then deal with the final two motions, and no other motions should come forward in the meantime.

That's a pretty good compromise. I could support that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** We don't support that, Mr. Chair, for a couple of reasons.

Clearly, if we give our commitment to treat all of the motions fairly once we're done the APF, that is a fair compromise as well.

So I'm asking Mr. Bellavance, Mr. Gaudet, and Mr. Atamanenko to consider supporting our motion, because Mr. Easter is apparently speaking for the Liberals when he says they're not going to.

If they would do that, we can go ahead with the APF. We'll come back, do the four motions one after the other, and treat them fairly.

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** In order to do that, Mr. Chair, I was proposing to put the question to Mr. Anderson's motion. If that vote fails, then I would put the question on the second motion.

The motion is to hear Mr. Anderson's motion.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** We will deal with this motion and see what the outcome is.

Then you can move the second motion.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** The question has been put on Mr. Anderson's motion.

**The Chair:** I'm not seeing any speakers.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Mr. Chairman, going back to some of Mr. Easter's comments earlier, it's been pointed out by Mr. Hubbard and a few others that we are in a minority government situation. Canada has had them before. At the same time, the ministers of the day over the years have in previous governments, including this one, made decisions from time to time. They make those decisions based on consultation with their groups. Sometimes programs come in and they take flak over them. The minister obviously, with the farm options program, was responding to that kind of feedback—including feedback from every member around this table; that needs to be noted. So I think there's a lot to be said on this. I'm just touching on some of the points I have a problem with in this motion of Mr. Easter.

Let's get on with the APF, as everybody seems to say they want to do, and we will get something done for the good of agriculture. We can beat around this all we want, but we all know that the most important work we could all be doing right now is dealing with this report on the APF.

**The Chair:** I have nobody else on the speaker's list, so we'll call the question. We know what the motion is.

All in favour of Mr. Anderson's motion to change the order of business to deal with the APF—that the committee conclude its report on the APF before studying the motions on the agenda—please signify.

(Motion negatived)

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** How about the second question?

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle is putting forward a motion, meaning that we—

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** The motion would be that we stand the last two motions and come to the conclusion of our APF; that we deal with these first two now and then proceed directly to the APF.

**The Chair:** Okay. The motion is that we deal with the motions from Mr. Easter and Mr. Atamanenko and conclude the APF report before dealing with any other business, including the two motions that we have—

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Nothing would come before the chair until that work is done.

**The Chair:** So the motions from Mr. Boshkoff and Mr. Bellavance would be set aside until after the APF report is concluded, and then we'd move back to business.

Are there any speakers?

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Obviously, Mr. Chair, we're not prepared to support this, and for many of the reasons that we've given already. We think it's important that we get to the APF immediately. It's been clear since the beginning of the meeting that the first two motions were not going to be supported by us. We've already had some vigorous debate on it, and we're going to debate them further.

I want to point out that I think the member is making a mistake by bringing forward this motion and not having supported the last one. Clearly, we want to begin to move forward on the APF; we want to bring the report forward and get that done for farmers.

As I pointed out previously, we've spent probably seven or eight months now trying to encourage the opposition to focus on the APF report, and at virtually every opportunity they've stirred away from it into other issues. We tried to get them to focus on it in November and December; however, there were a number of issues that they were bringing forward at that time, so we didn't get to the hearings at that time. Four or five months ago, we also brought this up and talked about the urgency of bringing the report forward as soon as possible. They again have chosen to throw roadblocks in the way of it.

We've now had our hearings. The only thing that's standing between us and getting this done is to go through the report, and it would certainly help if they would take, as Alex called them, the two critical motions off the table so that we can get to the report immediately. The sooner we get to it, of course the sooner we can get it done and get it into the hands of farmers, who will be glad to see some of the recommendations there, I think.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I have a last point that I have to make because of what the parliamentary secretary said, which is not accurate. The fact of the matter is that we've all been very cooperative at this committee in terms of trying to get work done. If you go back to when the government first came in, we were extremely cooperative in terms of getting the Advance Payments for Crops Act through, practically just by motion, so that could get out there and money could get into the hands of the farm community. I think the committee worked reasonably well on the Canada Grain Commission, getting that report done and up and going.

We do differ from the government on the Canadian Wheat Board issue. There's no question about that. For the parliamentary secretary to suggest basically that when anybody differs with the government's position those issues shouldn't be debated is about as ridiculous as you get. We felt it necessary to debate the Canadian Wheat Board issue and we did hold hearings. I'd keep in mind, Mr. Chair, that we haven't dealt with that report either, and that report is written in draft. We could, if we wanted to be forceful, say that we should complete that report before we get to APF, but we're not. I'm suggesting we stand that aside. It is an important report; we held a lot of hearings and a lot of witnesses came forward. That's an important issue too.

For the parliamentary secretary to try to lay the blame on the opposition for our not being near completion on the APF is unfair and not quite accurate. The fact of the matter is, we put a motion in the House for the committee to travel. I think you would have to agree, Mr. Chair, that the motion went through faster than probably most committees get motions to travel, with strong support from us. We wanted to get that done. I think it just stands to reason that we have a good compromise here—deal with two motions, do the APF, get it done, and then go to the other motions eventually.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Again, I can't support this. I do very much appreciate the compromise that's taken by a couple of our members around the table, and I think it needs to be pointed out that it's unfortunate that not everyone is willing to compromise. The bottom line here goes back to what's the most important work that could be on our agenda today, and that's this APF.

As Mr. Steckle and others have pointed out, the travel we did around the country, which was a gruelling trip but very rewarding, for me anyway, in what I learned, and I think for every other member, to see some of the things affecting agriculture across the country... It's important for us all to see it. Those things are still relatively fresh in our minds, and I think it's time to get on with that. We'll get to these motions, but let's prioritize. That's what this initial motion that's now defeated was requesting, and I don't think we should vary from that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I just want to mention a couple of comments that Mr. Easter made.

I think it's not a question of debating the issues, because we've certainly done that. It's been a question of priorities. It's been a priority of our government to try to get this APF organized and get it in place, and it's been a priority for us on this side of the committee table to try to get the committee out and to do these hearings as soon as possible. That could have been done six months ago.

One of the reasons travel was approved so quickly is because we were so late in the season we were able to convince the people who need to be convinced that we had to get out and get this done or it would have been too late. Here we are again, sitting in a situation where we are going to have some delays because the opposition doesn't want to deal directly with this today. We think it's important that we go right to the APF report and work our way through it. We probably could have been, what, five pages into it by now if we'd just passed the motion at the beginning of the meeting. I don't think we're the ones who can be blamed for holding this up. We brought what I think is a reasonable solution to the issue, and unfortunately it seems that the opposition doesn't have an interest in that solution. I just want to make those points.

Mr. Easter is right. We've talked about other issues at length, but the problem has been that they've become a priority, ahead of the APF, for the opposition, and that's been a concern to us for quite some time.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** It is wrong to say that the opposition refuses to discuss the report. I can even prove it. I had annotated most pages of the report and I was prepared to work on that from today forward. The government is filibustering. It is targeting a motion that was tabled a long time ago and which we have had ample time to discuss. The members of the opposition whom, I would point out to you, constitute a majority, have compromised. In order to speed things up, they decided that it would be a good idea to deal with two motions that were tabled a long time ago. The way to deal with them is to wrap up the debate and move to a vote. We have always worked in that way.

The parliamentary secretary has the right to filibuster. We have seen that often. He has the right to do so, but he should not come and say that it is the opposition's fault because they do not want to discuss something else. He is the one who decided to discuss the issue at length. We must be very careful what we say. The compromise we made appears perfectly acceptable to me. It is a question of dealing with two motions in order to move as quickly as possible to deal with the report.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the committee the fact that the government has carried out its own consultations. They have a draft report that will potentially become the national agriculture policy. This trip meant complementary work that the committee decided to carry out. I am not saying that it was not useful or important, but the fact remains that many of these aspects will match up. The people we heard from in Montmagny, in Quebec, also went to Saint-Hyacinthe to say what they had to say during the government's consultations. All will not be lost, even if we decide to not study this right away, but I don't believe that setting aside this work is the answer. We did not do all of this for nothing.

As far as the agricultural policy framework is concerned, I believe that the committee has a contribution to make, but the parliamentary secretary will have to accept that we vote on these motions and that we do our job.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

We have a motion from Mr. Steckle on the floor, that we set aside the motions from Mr. Boshcoff and Mr. Bellavance until after the APF report.

All those in favour, please signify.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I think you need to be clearer on the motion, Mr. Chair: that we set aside those two until after the APF report but that we deal with the other two first. That's the compromise.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** We're going to be dealing with the two by Mr. Atamanenko and Mr. Easter today. After we've concluded that, we will move directly to APF and stay on APF—absolutely APF only—until we have concluded that work. Then we will proceed directly back to the two motions that are before us.

**The Chair:** The way we have it worded here is that the motions from Mr. Boshcoff and Mr. Bellavance are set aside until the committee concludes the report on APF. Is that clear?

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Yes, and they become the priority or the first items on the table following that.

**The Chair:** Do you want to add that we deal with the motions from Mr. Easter and Mr. Atamanenko before we deal with the APF report, at which time...?

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** That's my....

**The Chair:** That's what you'd prefer? Okay.

So it is moved that we stand the first two motions and then deal with the report and then set aside all other motions.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We have the motion from Mr. Easter, which again has to be put back on the floor.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It doesn't carry on from previously? I don't know how many times I've read this motion, Mr. Chair.

I move:

that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommend that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food immediately rescind the changes announced to the Canadian Farm Families Options Program on April 20, 2007, and restore the provisions of the program as originally announced; and

that this motion be made a report to the House.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Is there discussion?

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back at this point after an hour of discussion about whether we could have moved on to the APF report.

**The Chair:** We did two motions in an hour, I should point out.

• (1635)

**Mr. David Anderson:** There you go. Unfortunately, we're not going to be getting to the report, I don't think, for some time. We have a couple of motions that are going to take a fair amount of debate.

I want to come back once again to the fact that virtually every member on this committee has spoken out against the family farm option program at some time. It's been a while since I read some of these statements into the record. I just want to remind members opposite of the position they took themselves on this program.

Mr. Steckle said:

I'm hearing from a number of farmers who have called me about the program, and they...draw their conclusion that this is an exit program from farming—getting out of agriculture. It's a welfare program. Once farmers in the business, if they call themselves truly farmers, realize that their incomes are at that level, then they're basically not farming anymore. So this is an exit program.

That's one of the statements Mr. Steckle made.

Mr. Bellavance said when this program was created that of course the Bloc Québécois said it was not enough to solve the farm income crisis.

Mr. Atamanenko took major exception to the fact that there was a business plan required in the program. He said:

One is the idea of a business plan and skills that are compulsory to participate in a program, the assumption being that these people aren't good farmers and that it's almost an insult, for want of a better word.

So Mr. Atamanenko was clear that he did not support the program. He actually said: "...isn't the assumption [of the program] still that they're not victims of the market or they're not doing something right...?" So again he was clearly not supportive of the program and did not appreciate it.

Mr. Easter had a number of things to say about it. I remember him talking quite a bit about how it was making victims of people. In reality, the minister was trying to bring a positive solution for farmers and those who've been on the farm.

One of the statements that I thought was revealing was Mr. Easter's statement that, "My concern also is that you see the low uptake." He's concerned, Mr. Chair, about the fact that farmers weren't participating at a reasonable level. He goes on to say:

You see exactly the same questions coming from at least three of the four parties, saying that they've heard from people that it isn't working and it's still in its pilot stage. Can't we be flexible enough...to say, okay, with a 10% uptake, clearly it's not working?

The minister listened to the members opposite, and it may have been his mistake, because once he listened to them and acted on some of the recommendations they made, they made a decision that they were going to turn on him and didn't like what he was doing with the program after all.

I think most of the people on this committee were aware that the program had some of these issues from the beginning, and I think we need to commend the minister for making the changes he made to it.

I'm going to come back to that in a bit, but I want to talk a little about some of the accomplishments of this government, because of their importance. Family farm options is one of those programs, and I think it's important—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, while the parliamentary secretary is going on about the minister's decision, would he be so kind as to inform us what studies the minister did prior to dropping the program, and could he give us the numbers of how many intended to participate this time around? By the letters I'm receiving, I believe there are thousands.

We know the figure is \$246 million taken out of their pockets, but I would like to know what he did in terms of statistical analysis of how many people, given the fact that they knew it was coming forward at the end of the tax year, had done actual planning towards utilizing that program, which now is not available.

Would the parliamentary secretary give us that information on what studies the minister has done? I wouldn't think a government would, just because the opposition said something.... They didn't jump when we talked about the Wheat Board. It seems funny that we're getting the words back on this one.

But those words are accurate: it was a bad program, poorly designed. The problem is, the minister made it worse by the actions he took, cancelling it retroactively and virtually taking money out of farmers' pockets. So could we get a little more detail, while he's talking substantively?

**The Chair:** I don't know that this was a point of order, but there were good questions.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'm pretty sure it wasn't a point of order, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting, because he wanted to bring up the issue of the Wheat Board and the fact that we haven't paid attention to the opposition on that issue. I think there are a couple of major differences; that is, one, in terms of the Wheat Board and the changes we've made, farmers have clearly been supportive of the changes the government has moved ahead with. We have two-thirds of farmers on the prairies who grow barley who wanted change and they've come forward and said they'd like the option to be able to market their own barley, and it actually looks like, going into the

new crop year, that they're probably going to be able to do well marketing their own barley. I think that has a lot of people anticipating better things for the future.

The other aspect of support for this, as contrasted with the Wheat Board, is again that there were no major farm organizations that came out in favour of the farm families options program that I'm aware of. I know there are a lot of farm organizations out there, particularly the ones in western Canada where the Wheat Board exists, who want changes to the Wheat Board and who were very supportive of the policies that we've brought forward.

Those are a couple of the differences between the farm families options program and the position we've taken with the Canadian Wheat Board. I thought it was enlightening that the opposition was very aggressively criticizing this program, and then when we made the choice to actually make changes to it, they were ready to jump on those changes as well. But the farm families options program is just one program in a whole number of things that this government has done.

As you're aware, and I think most people in the room would be aware, right off the bat, as soon as we were elected, one of the things we did was deliver \$755 million to our grains and oilseeds producers. That was quite a contrast to what happened under the Liberals, who promised the money but never delivered it. We had the election, and one of the first things that happened, of course, is that farmers got the money delivered by the Conservative government, Canada's new government, and more than 120,000 farmers have received a payment from that program. I know it's been well received, and it is an indication of the fact that we keep our promises. We made the commitment during the campaign and kept our promise, even though that money had been in place for quite some time.

As another example of what we've done—we've gone the extra mile for agriculture—we made an extra \$1 billion commitment in Budget 2006. We had in the campaign promised a half billion dollars, and we were excited to be able to promise another \$1 billion, Mr. Chair, to farmers so that we have \$1.5 billion in commitments through Budget 2006. Once again, not only did we keep our promise, we actually exceeded it and tripled it. I think farmers are aware of that, and they're excited about the fact that we're dealing with agriculture. I know that's probably one of the reasons why they would have liked to have us dealing with the APF report today and getting it ready, so that its recommendations can go out and begin to make even more of a difference in their lives.

We've committed actually a pile of money to CAIS. We made some changes to CAIS that the previous government did not seem to want to make. We were able to get in and listen to the farm organizations when they said we needed to change the inventory valuations, cover some negative margins, so we did that. Farmers told us they wanted those changes. We said we're going to move to do that for you. They said they wanted a bit more money. In the election campaign we said we were more than willing to do that. Also they said they wanted those negative margins covered, so we committed another \$50 million to covering those as well.

It's been an interesting and I think a good time for farmers in the last year and a half, to have the Conservative government in place, bringing these promises forward and keeping their promises to our Canadian agriculture.

Another thing that happened, of course, was that the CAIS deposit was eliminated and replaced with a fee so that farmers were able to get away from that. That's something that was asked for for years. Any of us who are on this committee know that was a request that was made for a number of years as well.

Then the farm families options program was introduced as well, and immediately the opposition, as we've heard today, came forward and said this is not a good program. Farm organizations were not stepping up to say it's a good program, so the minister made a decision that he wanted to move away from that program. Actually, Mr. Easter brought up the \$240 million. That's going to be reallocated to other programs, and I think farmers are going to be excited about the fact that it's going to go to a wide range of producers so that people are going to have an ability to access that money as well.

As Mr. Easter said earlier, we did improve the cash advance program, and that was—

• (1640)

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Bellavance on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Chairman, I will give the parliamentary secretary the opportunity to have a sip of water and I will take advantage of that to remind him that CAIS wasn't working any more and we often spoke out against it. We never stopped saying that the program did not work. Agricultural producers said so as well, but the program still exists, as a decision was made not to withdraw it without any warning. It was said that it had to be modified. We are therefore all working together to change and improve it. However, that is not at all what was done in the case of the options program.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Atamanenko, on a point of order.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I would like to say that maybe the parliamentary secretary could let us know if he's getting hoarse or tired of speaking. We can kind of have a break and take over, and this would show the spirit of cooperation, as we move on in the committee.

• (1645)

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

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle, is this a point of order?

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** In the spirit of cooperation, I would like to commend the parliamentary secretary for at least recognizing that they delivered the \$755 million, but basically this money was committed by a previous government.

It should be on the record as such, because Canadians ought to know where that commitment was made. They lived true to their

commitment to deliver, but it's pretty easy to deliver someone else's money.

I want Canadians to know that this money was committed by a previous minister. I believe it was Mr. Mitchell.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, that wasn't a point of order, so you have the floor.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting, and I think even Mr. Steckle knows there's a difference between a promise and a commitment. Of course, as everyone is aware, there were lots of promises made prior to the election, particularly by the previous Liberal government. This commitment was kept by Canada's new government, and farmers thank us for that. They know where it came from.

I want to talk about the cooperation, as Mr. Easter said, we had with the cash advance program. It was good to be able to work with members of the committee to make sure this passed through quickly, so that farmers could have access to the improved cash advance system that was so important to them. That has proven to be a good change for farmers, and it gives them access to some credit, which they wouldn't have had otherwise.

One of the things that's important to many of us is that production insurance needs to be solid. Some of the provinces seem to have very good programs right now; others don't have programs that are as steady. Alberta is a neighbour of ours, and when I talk to farmers there, they're very happy with the crop insurance program with the enhancements the provincial government brought forward.

Manitoba seems to be happy with their program as well, for the most part. It's frustrating to be in the middle of the two provinces with a program that just does not work. We hear this constantly from farmers.

Most of us on the agriculture committee would like to see production insurance programs that work for farmers, because so many of them are directly affected.

The Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act was a program the Liberals were going to shut down a couple of years ago, and there was enough of an outcry about it. It wasn't a big program, but there were a number of people accessing it.

**The Chair:** A point of order, Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I have a point of order. I would like to make a suggestion to the parliamentary secretary. From now until 5:30, he could read us the report entitled "Fact-Finding Mission on the New Agricultural Policy Framework in Eastern and Central Canada". In doing so, we the members of the committee could interrupt him during his reading of it. As I was saying earlier on, I have taken notes. I would therefore have something to say on the subject.

This would mean that we would save some time. Mr. Anderson could continue his filibustering on Mr. Easter's motion, and we could do the work that he said he wanted to do, that is to work on the report. That is a suggestion. We could begin the work.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we can't act on that suggestion, because we are not in camera and this is a confidential report. We would have to go in camera to deal with it. We're debating a motion, and this is on the record.

With that, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I object to the notion that we're filibustering here, Mr. Chair.

That would be a long way down the road from here—

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

**Mr. David Anderson:** —because clearly we're laying out some of the agriculture initiatives that we've taken. The farm families options program is one of those initiatives. It's important for people to understand that we're talking about the important initiatives this government has taken in trying to set the framework to talk about the farm families options program.

Mr. Bellavance brings up an interesting point, because his producers benefited from a quick response from this government. When the issue of the golden nematode hit an area in Quebec, this government responded very quickly with a \$5.5 million commitment to federal potato producers in Quebec. This situation was handled quickly and well by the new government that was willing and able to respond to producers who needed help.

Another commitment we made was an additional \$1 billion in the 2007 budget, and this came with some new direction in the farm program and planning. As you can see, this minister has been very proactive. He's bringing forward a contributory style of producers savings accounts as part of the business risk management program. Rather than just saying that we're going to do this, he put \$600 million into that program to see that it gets started.

That wasn't enough, because the minister announced another \$400 million, Mr. Chair, that would be paid directly to producers to help address the cost of the production issues they're facing. So as the cost of production goes up, our producers find themselves in a situation where they are gaining some extra money from this government to face those costs of production.

Mr. Chair, I could go on for quite some time. Maybe we can come back to some of this later, but I want to make an amendment to Mr. Easter's motion. I think it's important to do this. So rather than deal with the motion as it is, I'd like to amend it to say:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food commend the minister for taking the advice of the three opposition critics who unanimously criticized the farm families options program, and that we express our thanks to him for committing to deliver this money through programs that will benefit a wide range of producers.

We're talking about the farm families options program and the changes that are being made to it, so we need to make that amendment.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Can we get a copy of that, so the clerk can take a look?

**Mr. David Anderson:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** We're calling into question whether or not it changes the intent of the motion and if it would be out of order.

Unfortunately, we are going to rule that out of order.

Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, that is indeed unfortunate. It would have been nice to add on the record that the parliamentary secretary is congratulating the opposition parties. They are indeed to be congratulated for their work, while he continues to filibuster the work of the committee.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, you have the floor. Your amendment was out of order.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a second amendment then to the motion, in that the minister be commended for making changes necessary to the farm families options program so that the money can be redirected to programming that will benefit all producers.

**The Chair:** We'll take a look at it here quickly.

Again, we're going to call it out of order for being contrary to the overall scope of the original motion.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'll continue then with my discussion, but I respectfully—

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a point of order from Monsieur Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Mr. Chairman, I am having some difficulty. The parliamentary secretary has been talking to us about the benefits of agriculture and the things that government has done for an hour and a half now. So how is it that farmers are not satisfied? Would it be because we are talking about a defective policy?

He mentions millions and billions of dollars in expenditures, but I have the impression that this money has never left the government coffers. In fact, from year to year, we always talk about the same billion dollars, but it never comes out of the coffers. However, everyone seems happy. I am really wondering if he has not become like his minister, if he is not some kind of a joker. I am tired of talking to jokers. Even during question period, he acts like a clown. I do not want to deal with a clown, I want to do something specific to help farmers.

Currently, everything is rosy. The parliamentary secretary says that the government has paid out millions of dollars. Then why aren't farmers happy? That is what I want to know. I do not want to hear them tell me that his minister is wonderful and intelligent, because we know that is not true. I want him to tell me that farmers are happy with our government. Whereas currently, that is not what they are telling us. In fact, he says that his minister is wonderful and intelligent, but it is not true, he is not wonderful and he is not intelligent. He is a joker. Therefore, I do not want him to table any other similar motions, because we will take him for a joker as well.

[English]

**The Chair:** That wasn't a point of order.

Mr. Anderson, you have the floor.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Actually, I'm more than happy to address that question at the beginning, because you want to talk about where the money has gone out. I think we went through some of that, but \$755 million has gone out to more than 120,000 farmers, so that's significant. Three-quarters of a billion dollars has gone out from this government that was never delivered before. It was promised but never committed. That's a significant commitment by this government.

The \$900 million has gone out through retroactive change to CAIS inventory evaluations, and that was asked for by the industry. That money is flowing out. I think all of us know that CAIS has not been as smooth as any of us would like, but the money is going through there and it is going out to farmers. There was \$50 million that was committed to the negative margins coverage. That money is going out as well. There was \$137 million that went out through the farm families options program last year.

The cash advance program is a place where people can directly get credit from the government, and we've expanded that program to the point that farmers find it's a significant part of what it is they need to do. There is a federal commitment of \$5.5 million to potato producers. There's \$2 million in federal support through a golden nematode disaster program and \$3.5 million that went out through CAIS in the renewal program. That's money that's being delivered to producers as well.

The \$1 billion extra that was in the 2007 budget, as I said, is being split between \$600 million through the contributory-style producer savings accounts, which are just being set up, so that money hasn't gone out yet, but it will be going out; and the \$400 million is going out this summer and fall to farmers to cover their extra costs of production.

Those are just in the areas of the business risk management that we've—

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Monsieur Gaudet, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** The parliamentary secretary says that \$755 million has gone out to 125,000 producers. Do you know how much each producer received? They received approximately \$6,100 each. If we calculate that agricultural producers have assets that come out to \$2 million or \$3 million, \$6,000 in comparison with \$3 million in investments is not very much.

It is all well and good to say that we gave out millions of dollars, but the fact remains that 125,000 producers received an average of \$6,000 each. That is not very much for someone who invests a million dollars per year. Six thousand dollars will not fill the pockets of a producer at the end of the year, I can guarantee you that. They will not be able to pay their taxes with that amount.

[English]

**The Chair:** On a point of order—

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I know some payments are not being made, but apparently you do not know that.

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson:** That's certainly \$6,000 they didn't have without the program, and we stand behind that program. We think it was a good investment in our farmers. I don't know if the member opposite thinks that or not, but we do believe that.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to continue going on here. I have some other things we could talk about and hopefully we can come back to it later. We've only spoken for about 25 minutes on this, and it is important to let some other folks have the floor for a while as well, so I want to do that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion as well, which has been brought forward by Mr. Easter regarding the Canadian farm families options program.

I oppose the motion Mr. Easter has brought forward. I suspect that comes as no surprise.

In fact, I'm just going to read the motion back onto the record here in case some have forgotten it:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommend that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food immediately rescind the changes announced to the Canadian Farm Families Options Program on April 20, 2007, and restore the provisions of the program as originally announced;

Mr. Chairman, I remember when the announcement was made about this program and I remember at the time having mixed feelings, because on the one hand I recognized that farm families need to have options, and for some of them, staying on the farm is what they want to do. There might be others who would like to move on and do something else. I could see the logic of the program and the intent of the program, but at the time, I guess on an emotional level, it made me uncomfortable, and from a communications point of view, I was concerned that it might be sending a message that we, being the government or the Parliament, were actually encouraging people to leave the farm.

That's something that made me very uncomfortable, because in my area in central Ontario, the Kawartha Lakes area and Brock Township and parts of Peterborough county, we have a lot of small farms, a lot of mixed farms. Farmers are struggling to make a living, and they're pressured from all directions. In our area, ironically, one of the pressures is urban development. The price of land is going up, so that small farmers can't really afford to buy more land to expand their operations. It's tough for them, and I certainly wouldn't want to do or say anything as a member of Parliament or as a member of this committee or as a member of the Conservative caucus to suggest that we were actually encouraging people to move off the farm. I was concerned at the time that that is how this program might be interpreted, even though, clearly, that was not the intent.



It's interesting that I also remember at the time listening to other members of Parliament, and those from outside Parliament, with their comments on the program and their complaints about the program. I have here a list of some of the comments made by colleagues sitting at the table here today. I'm not going to read them all, but the thrust of a lot of those comments was that they didn't support this program.

I don't remember opposition members saying that, by and large, it's a good program, but we should fine tune it. What I recall people saying was, it's a bad program and we should get rid of it and we should do something else with the money.

At the time, I remember feeling a tug back and forth between this program that I thought would help some families that were ready to shift gear in terms of their family and their life and the business they were in, how they made their living, versus, as I said, this concern about sending the message that maybe we were encouraging people to leave the farm. That was where this message sat. At the time I certainly thought the complaints that were being raised by opposition members were sincere and that they truly had the best interests of farmers and farm families at heart, and that was why they had brought these concerns forward.

I'm relatively new in this place, but it was interesting to see that the minister reacted to that, and when Minister Strahl made the announcement that he was making a change, it seemed to me at the time pretty clear that he had obviously been listening. He made the statement that the money was still on the table, so to speak, that those dollars were still there for Canadian farmers, but that he was going to free those dollars up to do something else and that there were going to be significant changes made to the program.

• (1700)

I remember thinking at the time that the reaction I was initially expecting to hear from the opposition was that he hadn't gone far enough. Given that they had been saying it was a terrible program and never should have been introduced in the first place, and he made a partial change, I presumed the calls would be for the minister to cancel the thing totally.

So I can't say how surprised I was to hear the opposite: that the opposition members basically did a one-eighty, going from savaging the program and saying it was terrible—and when an announcement was made that there was going to be a substantive change—

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I have a point of order, and I think this is a genuine point of order.

Barry is generalizing when he says that opposition members on the committee have done a one-eighty on this. I would like him to read the press release I put out when the program was announced. David Anderson actually quoted me a few times, and the quotations were absolutely accurate. I said that this program did not deal with the farm income crisis—and that is what we were asking the government to do—but we obviously could not say that there were no farmers in difficult situations. Consequently, giving the farmers \$500 million was an attractive option. So I would not want it said

that I was trying to destroy this program. Once again, the member need only read the press release I issued when the program was announced to see that that is not at all the opinion of the members of the Bloc Québécois.

However, I did say that this was not the solution, that this program would not deal with all the problems. Saying that a program is not perfect does not mean that it should be destroyed. The government's decision to simply suspend the program is quite disgusting.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** A point of order, Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** We want to have a turn; I'd like to speak.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** I stand corrected. I will be more precise in my language.

Specifically it was the comments that Mr. Easter made. I'd like to read one that was made back on.... That can't be the right date, but the quote is from Mr. Easter:

My concern also is that you see the low uptake. You see exactly the same questions coming from at least three of the four parties, saying that they've heard from people that it isn't working and it's still in its pilot stage. Can't we be flexible enough, even as a public service, to say, okay, with a 10% uptake, clearly it's not working? If we have to extend it and we're only going to get a marginal increase, why don't we re-examine the criteria? Why don't we re-examine what we're trying to do here? And, above all, does the farming community need a lesson in business management to do business plans now when they're thinking about surely just getting through the year?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The member doesn't know the date when that statement was made, but it was made last summer. The program was announced on July 31. I believe that statement was made sometime in the fall.

You have to keep in mind that the program was announced seven months after the end of the fiscal year for which the moneys would apply. Therefore, for people to take advantage of it this year...tax advisers then knew how to take advantage of the program.

So if the government was going to change—take my recommendations, which they should have done—then they should have done it well in advance of the end of the tax year, around which farmers were doing their financial planning. I believe the minister made his retroactive cancellation of the program on April 21, after they already did their financial planning.

As I said earlier, what would the uproar be if they did the same thing retroactively regarding our RRSPs? There would be a revolution in this country.

So I just want to straighten the member out regarding the date. The quote is correct, but it shows how poorly this government planned, and it failed to give advance notice to farmers to take advantage of a financial program that could have helped them but isn't there now.

**The Chair:** He was correct on the date, so he clarified that.

Thank you, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** In fact, I misread the date here. According to my notes, it was November 7, 2006.

My point is that to go from that position to the point where that member is now suggesting that the changes be rescinded and that the program be reinstated in its original form is an unusual conclusion to draw from that series of events. That's why I disagree with this motion.

In his talk, my colleague Mr. Anderson drew on the broader context of what's been going on and what the government has been doing for farmers over the past year and a half. I'd like to take a somewhat different approach; I'd like to focus on the fact that the money initially allocated to this program is still there. I think a more productive use of our time would be to actually come forward with some ideas or recommendations on where those dollars should go. That's something we could be doing for farmers. I think the money is still there.

What I'd like to do is make an effort to persuade my colleagues to change their minds if they're currently considering supporting the motion—to actually switch them, so that if they were planning to support it, they would change their minds and oppose it.

I have a couple of ideas I want to put on the table, some ideas we've heard recently that maybe we should be pushing the minister on to get him to use some of this money to address some of these issues. For example, when we were doing our hearings in Atlantic Canada, in Quebec, in Montmagny, one of the ideas that came forward had to do with helping young farmers get some kind of capital assistance. We heard from young farmers that one of the real challenges of getting going was figuring out a way to actually get on the land and be able to buy a farm in the first place.

This is certainly something I've heard in my riding, and I'm sure we've all heard it in our ridings. That's something I think the government could look at. That's something we could look at as a committee. We could put forward a recommendation to the minister suggesting we take some of this money that's been allocated and earmarked to help Canadian farmers. Now some of it is available, given the change in this program, and maybe we could come up with something that would help young farmers.

Mr. Chair, in a previous life I worked in the real estate business and spent a lot of time working on financing deals for developments and for individuals to figure out ways to get people into owning property that, when they first went to the bank, the bank said they couldn't afford. When the young farmers were here that day, I thought to myself that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation was created for young homeowners many years ago. One of the tools they put forward for home ownership was basically underwriting mortgages. About 30 or 40 years ago you had to have 25% down to buy a house; when CMHC came along, what they basically did was underwrite the mortgage for the bank. That way the bank would be prepared to go above 75% financing, to 80%, 85%, 90%—in fact, 95% in some cases. That allowed lots of young families to get into home ownership, ownership that otherwise wouldn't have been possible.

As a Conservative, I believe there's a limited role for government, but I still believe there is a role for government. I think some of the

work CMHC has done with helping young families get into home ownership has been very good. I think maybe we could look at that. Maybe we could explore some similar structures to help young farmers. Whether that is underwriting mortgages with lower down payments—

• (1710)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

What the member is talking about is really not on the topic. Government members seem to miss this point, but the fact of the matter is that the motion is all about trust. It's all about a government that has thousands of people out there who made financial planning decisions based on the government's word, based on a pilot program. They did that financial planning, effective December 31, with their financial advisors.

Now the government has broken their word. They changed the program. The whole point here, in terms of the motion and rescinding it, is to ensure that those farmers, those specific low-income farmers who did the planning and who had seen \$246 million disappear...

We're not talking about money for another program in terms of this motion; we're talking about keeping the commitment that was made to those low-income farmers specifically. We're not talking about a dream world or about another program. That's what we can discuss in terms of APF. We're talking about trust and the word of the government.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Mr. Chair, I'm considering the motion that's before us, as it's written. My purpose here today is to put forward some ideas that are so attractive and so compelling that my fellow committee members will seize on them and will say, Barry, that's a great idea and that's the type of thing we should do and....

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that the members opposite, especially the person who made the motion, listen to Mr. Devolin's suggestions, because he's making some very good suggestions as to what could be done with the money on the farm families options program. I think it's important that Mr. Easter consider this, because he's not playing around here; he's trying to do something constructive and make some suggestions of what can be done to improve that program and the distribution of the money. I think it's important that Mr. Easter listen and maybe learn something from Mr. Devolin here.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I might say this, Mr. Chair. I'm willing to listen, but keep in mind I would like to know how he targets this money at the very specific people who had planned on utilizing the moneys. In fact, I really think the reason the government cancelled this program in the beginning is not because the opposition was opposed to it. It was because when the minister really did the calculations on how much it was going to cost, there was going to be greater uptake in the program than there were finances available, and the government just didn't want to see that money go out. If he did his homework, he should be able to tell us that—how much was going to go out?

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, are you on a point of order?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I think it is, Mr. Chairman, in the fact that Mr. Easter is trying to surmise something that's.... I don't know whether he dreamed that up or if that was somebody else's idea that the minister.... That's not the reason at all. He made the comment as well that people were planning on using this. This program, or any program, is set up for people who need it, not people who plan to use it. I think that's a point there. I've never met a farmer yet who planned to live out of the mailbox. He'd far sooner get his cheque someplace else. So to say that people planned on using it would almost say that people were cooking their books or something. I don't know whether that's what Mr. Easter meant or not, but that's what it sounded like. As a farmer, and a lot of people that do, I resent that comment.

**The Chair:** We're getting into a whole different debate.

Mr. Devolin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Great.

It's—

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I have trouble seeing the clock, but I would suggest it is 5:30, if the chair could see it that way.

We had it that at 5:30 we would adjourn. You can see the clock at 5:30.

**The Chair:** According to my time, it is 5:15.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Charlie's always ahead of time, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Charles Hubbard:** I don't see the point in going through all of this. It's a beautiful afternoon.

**The Chair:** Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have about a dozen here. I'll try to get one on the record before 5:30, and then if we have to come back, we can get through the other eleven.

I'm concerned, though, with what Mr. Easter said. He was suggesting that when an exit plan was proposed after 13 years of Liberal government, there were so many farm families in such terrible shape that there was going to be all this unanticipated demand for the program. I know he was the parliamentary secretary, and maybe he knows some inside information that I don't know, but that wasn't my impression.

Getting back to my young farmers capital assistance program, to a degree I lost my place. I don't want to have to go right back to the beginning; I think we were discussing how the CMHC had made it possible for a lot of young families to get into home ownership, and that maybe we should be discussing and proposing to the minister the idea that we come up with something similar that works for young farmers, perhaps with the federal government assisting with interest payments over the first number of years. Basically the banks love the CMHC home ownership loans because the government takes the risk off their hands, and that's why they're willing to lend money. If something in a similar vein could be done for young farmers, they would be able to actually go out there and borrow most of the money that's needed.

As we all know, in the short term, Mr. Chair, being able to manage the interest on your debt is your first challenge; the second challenge is figuring out a way over the long term to actually pay off the capital on that debt. But the first hump you have to get over is managing interest, and I think there's possibly a role there for government.

My wife's family comes from Switzerland, and there are farmers in their family over there. I can tell you that farm loans in Switzerland are often 30-, 40-, or 50-year amortizations, because the price of land has gotten to the point that it takes that long. As overwhelming as that might sound to us in Canada, where we are used to 20-year mortgages, that's the way they do things over there—yet people still do it. Actually figuring out a way to help them manage that is one of the ways to keep people on the land and to get young people into agriculture, and as I said before, when we were in Quebec, that was one of the questions that came forward.

Mr. Chairman, before I leave this idea, I'd just like to clearly put that on the table. Maybe we should be going back to Minister Strahl to say that we heard a good idea when we were in Quebec, and we think we'd like to make it work. Maybe we could have some witnesses in from CMHC or from other organizations, such as Farm Credit Canada or people like that, to help us come up with something like that.

Another area that I think is really interesting and that presents a lot of opportunities has to do with Canadian genetics and exporting, whether it's semen and embryos or live animals. Unfortunately, I learned about this subject largely through the BSE crisis, and it wasn't happy news coming from genetics exporters; unfortunately, it was sad news. The beef guys were hit, and we were dealing with them, but the dairy guys and the sheep and goat producers were also sideswiped by it. I had a sheep breeder in my riding who was exporting high-end, high-value breeding stock. He had a big contract set up to send a bunch of animals to Mexico and was sideswiped through BSE. It didn't wipe them out, but it wiped out a lot of their capital, and he ended up sending some of those animals off to the slaughterhouse. It's a real shame to have high-value breeding animals sold.

Maybe what we should be proposing to the minister is a program to help our genetics people—those who raise animals as breeding stock or who export semen or embryos—to help get them back on their feet. That's something we could put forward to the minister as a way to spend some of this money, if it's available. We could help with that.

● (1720)

I can tell you that in my area some of the smaller dairy farmers in Ontario tell me that obviously the milk cheque is their primary cashflow, but that selling genetics was an important secondary income stream to them. While it might not have paid the monthly bills like the milk cheque did, it was what they used to invest in their facility or maybe to buy a new car or truck.

Given the way supply management works—and there are a lot of farmers in this room who know more about this than I do—one of the interesting consequences of supply management in dairy is that it has created a large incentive for farmers to work on their herds and to develop higher-producing animals. There's a good reason for that in Canada, but an ancillary benefit is that those are much in demand; there are countries around the world that want to import Canadian genetics.

Just last week we had one of the first exports to Russia. We sent 2,000 animals to Russia. We've started down that road, but maybe that's another idea. Maybe that's an idea some of my colleagues will grab a hold of and say we should be talking about—talking about how to help our genetics people in Canada, how to help our genetics exporters to take advantage of some opportunities and quite frankly give them a fair shake that they haven't gotten as a result of the BSE. They're some of the hidden victims of BSE, and I think that's something we could work on.

•(1725)

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance has a point of order.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** On a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

I am not saying that Barry's comments are not interesting, but I just finished reading the report, and I would like to congratulate Jean-Denis on his fine work.

In addition, since the work was done by committee members as well as by our excellent researcher and others, it would be a good idea to take the last five minutes to have Mr. Devolin call for the vote on Mr. Easter's motion. Then we could read the document quickly and vote on Mr. Atamanenko's motion on the Canadian Wheat Board. Since it has been before us for some time, I'm sure we all have made up our minds about it. Finally, we may have a few minutes left to finally discuss the report, which is what everyone here wants to do. Of course, we will have an opportunity to discuss this in full during the other meetings scheduled for this week. That would be interesting.

Congratulation on a job well done, Jean-Denis. I will definitely have further comments. For the time being, I am in the process of making notes on the report.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** It is not perfect!

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Exactly. Some things could be improved.

[English]

**The Chair:** That is out of order. That is not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Thank you.

I appreciate the suggestion, but at the beginning of this meeting we discussed Mr. Anderson's motion, which was that we should move directly to our report. I'm in a way a soft-spoken fellow, but I thought at the time that I made it pretty clear that I had some significant comments to make about all these motions. Before they came to a vote, I wanted the opportunity to lay out what I thought were good reasons to oppose this first motion by Mr. Easter.

I don't sense the excitement. I said I wanted to make my colleagues excited enough about some of the ideas I put forward that they would decide to vote against Mr. Easter's motion and come with me to try to work on some of these new ideas, and I don't sense that yet. Maybe the ones I've come up with so far aren't good enough. Hopefully, as we get down through the list here, I can hook them.

**The Chair:** Mr. Miller, do you have a point of order?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Yes, I do—or I think so. I'm just reflecting back on Mr. Bellavance's most recent comments. I'm just wondering if maybe you and the rest of us missed something; maybe he was insinuating that he wanted to revisit the first motion we dealt with today. Was that...?

**The Chair:** I don't believe that's the point he was making. He did—

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Are you sure about that?

**The Chair:** Yes.

That's not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Devolin.

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Anyway, that's what I mean. Put your hand up when you want to say, "Barry, I agree. We should defeat this thing and we should talk about these other topics that you're putting forward."

I talked about a young farmers' capital assistance program. I've heard about Quebec. My second idea was maybe coming up with some ideas to help our genetics exporters from Canada. A third idea that I think is really timely and compelling and may in fact grab the attention of my colleagues is the whole area of biofuels. I mean, the government is doing a lot on biofuels already, and it's creating interesting opportunities for Canadian farmers. In Ontario, anyway, it seems to be mostly the corn producers who are directly involved with it at this point, but we're hoping in the future there are other crops that will also become more involved in Ontario.

Two weeks ago, when we were in Washington, it was interesting to hear all the discussion about biofuels down there and the impact the U.S. Farm Bill would have on that, but I think that's another area. Maybe we should be coming up with a proposal for the minister and for the government, saying, listen, this is an exciting opportunity for Canadian farmers, biofuel research. Maybe we should be working on that. Maybe we should be encouraging the minister to direct a portion of the funds that are being saved with the changes to the farm families options program and put it towards a biofuels strategy. That's something that would help farmers across the country. It's a positive thing for the environment as well if we use biofuels instead of fossil fuels. I think that's another place where we could make a positive contribution and actually—

•(1730)

**The Chair:** Mr. Devolin, the bells are ringing. We were scheduled to go till 5:30.

We have a motion to adjourn from Mr. Devolin. All in favour?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We're adjourned.







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