



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

AGRI • NUMBER 038 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, June 5, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. James Bezan

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, June 5, 2008

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): Order. We're back in public session.

Mr. Boshcoff, could you please move your motion onto the floor, with the proper wording.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): I'd like to move the following:

That the Prime Minister recognize and respect the work of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and ensure that the work of the Committee will not be subverted and that the recommendations based on input from Canadian Stakeholders will be implemented and that the Prime Minister confirm his willingness to accept the work of the Committee.

The Chair: It is so moved.

Is there discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko, can you please move your motion onto the floor.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): I will read the motion and give a couple of reasons for the motion.

I move the following:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food make a recommendation to the government to move toward implementing measures to alleviate the competitive disadvantage facing Canadian agri-retailers and farmers as a result of the recently passed U.S. Farm Bill, wherein are provided tax credits and grants to enhance security upgrades at American agri-retail sites as required by Dept. of Homeland Security regulations.

This is a result of our contact with Mr. David MacKay of the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers, who asked us to see whether we could have a motion. It's this whole idea once again of a level playing field. In this case it's not the producer; it's the retailer.

In the U.S. they're getting some help to implement security regulations, but here, according to the association, we're not. It's the idea that if we want these folks to be competitive and have our people continue buying from them, we should try to get them onto a level playing field.

The report they made to the Senate committee says that the retail sector is left to bear the entire burden of security regulations and that this will be a burden on the whole sector.

They're suggesting something similar to what is in the ports. The maritime security contribution program reimburses Canadian ports

75% of all eligible expenses incurred for security upgrades identical to those that would be required at agri-retail sites. Whether by direct rebate or tax credit, the government would have ultimate control over expense, eligibility, and limits.

They're saying that perhaps a tax credit system might be preferable and more affordable than a direct rebate program, but the idea is that there should be some kind of assistance if in fact they have to follow these security regulations. There should be some kind of assistance to our agri-retailers to do it, and that's the basic thrust of this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

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

I want to thank Mr. Atamanenko for the sincerity with which he brings this forward. He's been contacted by the group, as I'm sure we all have, to bring forward a motion, and Mr. Atamanenko did it. I think it's rather unfortunate that Mr. Easter, on the other hand, just ran out and issued a press release with almost the exact same wording.

I have a problem with this. There are two points. One is that if what we've heard from the agri-retailers is true, my concern isn't that we put our guys on the same playing field. My concern is that our guys should be at an advantage, because this is not a national security issue. What I think we as a committee should do is undertake to have the decision-makers for this and the reasons for this regulation being put in place brought in front of us, so that we can understand it and take a real position on whether we should even be having these regulations put in place.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

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

I'll first start off by commenting on the press release.

Brian, the fact of the matter is that I raised the question on this issue in the House to the minister. I don't know who answered that day, whether it was Mr. Lauzon or someone else. In any event, I didn't get any answer, and that was the reason for the press release. The fact of the matter is that on this issue—

What did you say?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Why would you issue a press release and not bring it to the committee?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Listen, I have a right to issue a press release any time I want to, guys. The fact of the matter is that the question was raised in the House, the agri-retailers met with us, and it is a serious issue.

I support this resolution, Alex. The problem here is that Canadian agri-retailers are being put at an extreme disadvantage, which is going to impact on primary producers as well, because they will pass that cost on.

The Canadian agri-retailers association has basically said they expect the cost of this added security will be about \$75,000 for a small operation on the prairies. They have to put the security fence around. They first were supposed to put lighting around, but I think that's been withdrawn as a requirement.

In any event, they figure the cost will be about \$75,000. It is being demanded by the Government of Canada. It's not a cost that should come out of agriculture; it really should have come out of the security measures, which billions of dollars have been put in place for.

Last week or the week before, the United States Farm Bill was passed, and they overrode the veto of President Bush. In that Farm Bill, for these similar security measures, it's \$100,000 per unit, up to a maximum of \$2 million for multiple units. That is being covered by the U.S. Treasury. In Canada there is no assistance.

Therefore, support for this bill...because if we're going to be in a level playing field, and security is the issue, then the Government of Canada—not out of its agriculture budget—should be assisting these industries.

That's where we're coming from.

The Chair: These are regulations that come forward from public safety, actually.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Brian, I think we're on the same page, and I agree with you; however, I think until we can stop that, until we can get those people here, it doesn't hurt to have this motion passed so that at least we underscore the difficulty that these people are facing.

So I would continue to ask that we pass this motion. At the same time, we can make a recommendation to call some of these other people and try to pick that apart. But that's going to take time. It may not happen before we get out in the summer. That's the problem here.

• (1155)

Mr. Brian Storseth: That's fine, Mr. Atamanenko. I accept that explanation. So could you put an addition or amendment onto it saying that the committee requests to call forward...just as you were saying?

I mean, I understand that it takes time, but if you were to do that, I think we could support this, or at least I could. My problem is with these regulations in the first place. I think by agreeing to this, unless we have something else in there, we are agreeing with the regulations. And I can't agree with that until I see more details on it.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Do you have wording for that?

Mr. Brian Storseth: No, you're usually good at that.

The Chair: I have a suggestion. I know that everybody just received their farm input study report yesterday, or the day before. Recommendation five actually does....

Oh, I can't read it aloud because we're in public.

At any rate, it does deal with this issue, since we did hear from CAAR on it. We might be able to, in that report, make a suggestion that we have further witnesses or testimony from industry and the regulators on the specific issue. So we could either do it in this resolution or on a recommendation in the report.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Alex, it seems we're very close on this. In the interest of time—I myself have to be out of here by 12 o'clock—maybe we could deal with this and transcribe an amendment to this that's suitable over the weekend and deal with it first thing at Tuesday's meeting.

Would that be acceptable?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Well, it shouldn't take too long to do that.

Mr. Larry Miller: That's unless you have that wording now.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Brian brought this up: what's the amendment?

The Chair: What are you suggesting, Mr. Storseth? Then we can move along here.

Mr. Brian Storseth: We've heard from the agri-retailers on this. So we should call in the officials to explain their....

The Chair: If you're making an amendment, where are you sticking in the words?

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Why do we need to...? We can call them in anyway. We don't need it in the motion. It's our right to call them in.

What Alex is saying in his motion is that basically the Government of Canada needs to alleviate the competitive disadvantage facing Canadian agri-retailers and farmers as a result of the recently passed U.S. Farm Bill. We know that to be a fact. We can call public security in and have them as witnesses, but I think, if we call them in, we're better having passed this motion beforehand because we have some foundation to work on. It's not locking the government in.

The Chair: Are there other comments?

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): I would suggest we call the question.

The Chair: I can do that. I'm only looking for speakers.

Are there any speakers? I see none. Now I'll call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Since we have a couple of minutes left, there was a motion that was circulated yesterday by Mr. Storseth.

Do you want to deal with it right now?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Seeing that we do have time, I would like to read it into the record anyway, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Move it onto the floor, please.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I move the following:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food send a letter to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry informing the Senate Committee that the House Committee has recently completed a study on Bill C-33 in which they heard from a wide range of witnesses and stakeholders, and that as a result of the study is firmly of the position that biofuels production in Canada is beneficial both for the environment and for Canadian agriculture. Furthermore, the House of Commons encourages the Senate to expedite the passage of this important legislation.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): I find it a little much to say that biofuels production in Canada is beneficial for the environment. We need to be a little more subtle.

You will recall that we in the Bloc Québécois proposed several amendments when we discussed this issue. They dealt with the environmental and energy balance sheet, the life cycle analysis and the social and environmental impact.

In order for me to be able to vote for this motion, I would like to amend it by adding, at the very end, after the word “legislation”:

provided that it also pass the amendments proposed by the Bloc Québécois at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

With that addition, I will support the motion.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Do we have any comments on Mr. Bellavance's amendment?

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller: It's pretty hard to vote on something that we're...you know, we're deferring to that and we don't even know what the wordings are. If they're the ones that...or the amendments that he's actually talking about.

The Chair: You remember the amendments that the Bloc presented that day in committee. Those are the amendments that

he's suggesting. He's simply saying that they adopt the Bloc Québécois amendments.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Easter—and we're speaking to the amendment.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay, I'll pass.

The Chair: We'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: We're back on the main motion.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: While I don't disagree with the sentiment of the motion, Brian, we already passed Bill C-33 through committee. We passed it in the House. Definitely the Senate knows much of what you've stated in this motion. Although I support the motion, I would worry that we might get a backlash that here we are, as an agriculture committee, trying to tell those folks of sober second thought what to do. It may gain a backlash. It may not do what you intend it to do.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleague's comments, but I do feel it's important that we have our voice heard from the agriculture committee. We've heard Mr. Easter say many times the importance—and I know he supports the importance—of biofuels. I also know that with the Liberal-dominated Senate, Mr. Easter is well respected in those circles. I think his voice being added to this would help expedite the passage of this legislation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I would like to have a recorded vote on this.

The Chair: That's fine.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Chair: Is there any other business?

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.