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—
Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)): Order, please. We are now in public.

As you know, the purpose of this meeting is to discuss our future committee business and to discuss what was discussed at our subcommittee on agenda last Thursday. We also have some notices of motions that have been put forth, and after that we'll be discussing the motions.

Are there any questions on the agenda?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Chair, does the clerk have copies of these motions that he can hand around to us?

The Chair: He does, and he also has the letter I indicated I had received last time. I believe that has also been circulated to the members.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Say that again, Chair.

The Chair: I guess you weren't here, Mr. Lemieux. There was a letter I had received from the Library of Parliament in response to the concerns that Mr. Easter had raised at our first meeting about researchers and analysts. There's a letter that I believe answers those concerns. We can also discuss that as well as anything else someone wants to discuss. You should have a copy of it somewhere there.

J-F has assured me that it was sent to your offices by mail.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): It was sent to our offices. I noticed that at the last committee meeting Mr. Easter had a new staff member sitting behind him, so maybe Mr. Wilson just hasn't quite figured out the new position that you gave him.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, you had a point of order as well.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I know we did notices of motion in the last meeting, but aren't they supposed to be distributed amongst the committee members beforehand? I'm not sure, but I don't believe I received a paper copy of Mr. Atamanenko's motion here. So the tabling is good enough?

The Chair: Maybe I could have J-F speak to that.

When Mr. Atamanenko's motion came in to the clerk last Friday, it was circulated by e-mail, which basically—

Mr. Randy Hoback: I just talked to my staffer. He said he did get it, and he did forward it to me. I must have missed it somewhere, so I apologize.

The Chair: No problem.

Okay, we'll get into the report and open up for discussion the results of the discussion at the subcommittee last week. Who's up?

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Do we just talk on this, then?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: We have the first report, which says the first two meetings of our committee will be on listeriosis. I think this depends on what happens with my motion. If my motion passes, then obviously my understanding is we just move the agenda up, because then there would be a separate group dealing with that.

That's my first question. Is that correct?

The Chair: I guess that's at least partially correct. Are you suggesting that we should deal with the motions?

•(1115)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: No, I'm just saying that if in fact we deal with them and the motions go through, then it would be my understanding that the subject of listeriosis would be dealt with by a separate committee, and we wouldn't have to have it as number one on our agenda here. Is that right?

The Chair: I'm not going to pre-empt the motion, so once we deal with it, we will be able to answer that better.

Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I think to make this meeting go smoothly, Chair, if it's proper to do so, perhaps you could just give us the overall intentions from the meeting with the clerk, including some of the scenarios on listeriosis, and then maybe we could open it up. The way I see this, these are the priorities as we agreed to them, in order from one down to the bottom, and then we also had a bit of an agreement on how to deal with the motions, but I know that's for the latter part.

I think if we get to some of the scenarios for listeriosis, then that could change and set us on the right track. That's my suggestion.

The Chair: Just so I'm clear on what you're suggesting, Mr. Eyking, are you wanting me to read what's in this?

Hon. Mark Eyking: No, I think it's self-explanatory. It doesn't have the number, but I guess everybody realizes that was numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Those were our priorities and these are the meetings, but this could change, depending on the clerk's findings. But some of the people at this meeting do not know what we are talking about—the health committee and things like that—so I think that should be dealt with first and then we can go on. That's my suggestion.

The Chair: It is a fair statement.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, is it possible to deal with Alex's motion? If listeriosis is in item two, let's deal with it at the same time.

The Chair: I'm at the disposal of the committee, if that's how you want to deal with it.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I think the steering committee's report is before us, and listeriosis is the first item up before the committee—two meetings generally.

On Alex's resolution—and Alex, you can correct me if I'm wrong—that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food establish a subcommittee, I understand that's the full committee operating as a subcommittee. Anyway, not to get into the detail at this point in time, I would agree with Randy that while the recommendation of the subcommittee is to deal with listeriosis, I think Alex's motion is basically saying that we have to be broader than that, that two meetings may not be enough. Alex will have to explain how he wants the subcommittee set up. I take it from Alex's motion that it's a bigger hearing process than just two meetings. The structure of the committee he can explain, but I'd suggest that we should deal with Alex's motion first, because it is the first item that even the steering committee has recommended. And we might as well deal with the two at once.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Just as an explanation, my feeling is that we can put listeriosis on our agenda, and as Wayne was mentioning, one or two meetings, or three, may not be enough. We will talk about the other items the steering committee had for our agenda. There's a whole pile of items that we should be discussing with the cattle industry and the program review. We need to get on that as soon as possible.

My feeling is that we could do a joint committee with the health committee and our committee, move it on track, and just have them run with it. For example, in my case, Malcolm would sit on that committee because he's our point person on CFIA. It would be up to the whips and the committees to decide who would be on this committee, and then we would run with it.

I was back and forth with Jean-François, and maybe I'll get you to explain a bit, but it is my understanding that this is the simplest way of doing it, rather than trying to do a joint committee, which has certain.... If we do this, we pull in our colleagues from the health committee or others and we run with it. We give them the power to do what they want, take as much time as they want. I think this would be the way to go, given the scope of this whole topic.

That was my intention. Maybe I'll get Jean-François to explain the details of why we're doing it this way.

• (1120)

The Chair: Maybe we'll deal with that when we actually get to the motion.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much, Chair.

I think listeriosis is of concern to Canadians and I think it's a very appropriate subject for the committee to study, but I also think the committee needs to look forward. What I mean by that is that there are times when we look backwards. The listeriosis crisis or event happened and we should look at it, but we should also look forward, because Canadians want to know where all of this is going and what the future holds, not just with respect to listeriosis but also with respect to food safety.

Food safety is probably the issue that most concerns Canadians. Listeriosis would be an example of a food safety issue in the past, but I'd like the committee to discuss making this a little bit wider than listeriosis, so that while the committee is doing work that references something that happened in the past, which is quite appropriate and, as I said, would be of concern and of interest to Canadians, we're then able to move forward and talk about what's happening in the future, particularly when it comes to food safety. Food safety would cover more than just listeriosis. I think this would give us the opportunity to talk to different witnesses with respect to listeriosis, yes, but also with respect to other issues of concern.

I would propose an amendment to the motion that we're now discussing. I don't know if I can word it in exactly the way I'd want to say it, but it's that the committee should investigate food safety, and then we can discuss the other aspects of the motion as well.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, if we're going to amend the motion, I'd need to have a written amendment.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, that's a fair request, so let me put something down in writing.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Are we formally discussing Alex's motion now?

The Chair: Correct me if I'm wrong, but it's been indicated, I think by both sides, that maybe that's what we should be doing.

In order to discuss the motion, we'd probably need it formally presented. Do we need unanimous consent?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-François Lafleur): We are actually on the report.

The Chair: As I suspected, and as the clerk just said, we're actually dealing with the report right now. If the committee wants to go for it and bring forth a motion in conjunction with this report, that's certainly not inappropriate, but again, I need that direction from you. Then, of course, once the motion is read, which it hasn't been at this point, it would be appropriate to bring forward the amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, my understanding was that we were discussing the motion, because I think Mr. Easter had raised it, and Mr. Atamanenko was concurring with that, but if we're discussing the report, that's okay. What I would do, then, rather than make an amendment to the motion, if we're not technically discussing the motion, is continue with my comments and make an amendment to the first report.

The amendment to the first report would read "two meetings on food safety". Right now, it reads "two meetings on listeriosis". I would remove the word "listeriosis". My amendment would be "two meetings on food safety".

The Chair: So you're not increasing it from two to four; you're just changing the wording and sticking with the two meetings.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes. That may come out in further discussion, but my amendment for now would be just to say that listeriosis would fall under food safety. I think that if we put the words "food safety" in there, it allows us to investigate the listeriosis event that occurred earlier, but it also allows us to move forward with the larger concern that Canadians have, and that is food safety.

• (1125)

The Chair: Okay. So the amendment is to change it, to take out the word "listeriosis" and add "food safety".

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's correct.

The Chair: First of all, I have Mr. Bellavance, and then I have Mr. Atamanenko and Mr. Eyking.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): I did not think I would have to raise a point of order in order to speak.

I thought that we had just decided that because listeriosis was the first item in the first report we would deal with Alex's motion that could end up modifying the first report. If we agree on establishing the subcommittee—regardless of what it is called—that would change the first report. I was sure, as was Mr. Lemieux, that we were discussing Alex's motion. You need to make a decision so that we know what we are discussing, Mr. Chair.

I have something to say about Alex's motion on the first report. If we spend half an hour discussing the first report and we decide that two listeriosis meetings are not enough, and then we act on Alex's motion and establish a subcommittee, we will have wasted a half hour on discussing whether we want two, three, four or five meetings on listeriosis.

I thought that we had agreed with Wayne's proposal to first discuss Alex's motion and then move on to the other points.

[English]

The Chair: As I indicated before, until the motion is actually formally brought forth, which Mr. Atamanenko can now do, we're not on it. We've had indication from Mr. Bellavance and others that that's where you want to go, but it hasn't been formally brought forth.

Mr. Atamanenko, you have the floor.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Do I have permission to do that?

I think Pierre had some really good points, and we could discuss them under the framework of the motion if everybody is in agreement that I present the motion.

The Chair: I suggest that you formally read your motion right now, and we'll open it up for discussion.

[Translation]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Fine, I will read it:

That, given the listeriosis crisis that occurred last summer, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food establish a Subcommittee on listeriosis; and that the members of the Subcommittee be named after the usual consultations with the whips; and that the Subcommittee be granted all of the powers of the Committee pursuant to the Standing Order 108(1), except the power to report directly to the House.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Atamanenko.

Under procedure we need a motion to go from the business, which is the report we're on, to deal with the motion. Are you so moving?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Yes.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Next on the list is Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking: My suggestion at the beginning was to do it this way, and I'm glad we're back on track. Mr. Chairman, my compliments to you for getting this back on track. It's very important that we get this done first. Then everything else will flow from that.

I'm not going to comment more, other than to say I'm in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'll go back to my amendment. The motion is that given the listeriosis crisis that occurred last summer, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food establish a subcommittee on food safety.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is everybody clear on the amendment? Mr. Hoback, do you want the floor?

Mr. Randy Hoback: No, that's fine.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I tend to agree with what Pierre has said. If we have a committee devoted to food safety, which brings up the past and goes into the future based on the tragedy that happened, we could probably get some really good results for Canadians out of this.

I personally don't see a problem with changing that, unless some of my other colleagues have some comments. It would give the committee a mandate to decide who to pull in for witnesses and where to start. It would be left up to them. On the surface it sounds like a very good way to go.

• (1130)

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't have a problem with adding the words "food safety", Mr. Chair. I would support the amendment because I think the intention of the subcommittee is to use the case of listeriosis. I think it's a wake-up call to show us that there's something wrong in the system. That's not just looking back. We are looking ahead. The reason we have to do this, to be quite blunt about it, is the Prime Minister's investigation. Our understanding, when the Prime Minister first talked about an inquiry was that it would be an inquiry that had some teeth in it. Well, Ms. Weatherill has no teeth. She has no power to subpoena witnesses, no power to get documents, and no power to investigate the PMO or the office of the minister who was in charge. So that's why it becomes necessary for this committee.

I have a question on it as well. Maybe Alex can clarify this.

As I see it, this would be a committee of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food with all the powers outlined here. But calling it a subcommittee means it might be fully the same committee or it might be based on whip decisions. Some people also subbed into this committee from health, but both committees would operate...I don't want to say in parallel exactly, but I think the intent here is to do the work on food safety but also not slow down the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in all the other things it has to do. If we have people doing both, it means they're going to be having a heck of a lot more meetings. That's fine with me, because I think it's an important issue.

I think the agriculture committee needs to be in control of the committee, because CFIA is under agriculture. Members from the health committee could be subbed into this committee to assist. Am I right on that?

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Bellavance first and then Mr. Atamanenko.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I may be playing devil's advocate, but Mr. Lemieux's suggestion, that I agree with completely, is to broaden the mandate and to deal in general with food safety and food security. However, if we establish a subcommittee with a broader mandate than that of the listeriosis issue, and if we undertake the type of investigation that Ms. Weatherill did not carry out, then we may lose sight of the issue. Witnesses will speak to us about everything but listeriosis and we may end up having to meet more frequently than if we had concentrated our efforts on that specific issue.

Personally, I see our work as a follow-up to what I began last August, when we had union officials and Canadian Food Inspection Agency officials speak to us about the changes the government wanted to make. We are always being told that extra officers and inspectors are being hired, that we have realized that there has been a

move—and this is happening with pilot projects—to privatize these inspections more and more, etc. What happened was the whole listeriosis crisis.

I think this specific issue will be work enough. We should not increase the scope of the mandate by much. I also think that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food could have other meetings to deal with food safety in general. Perhaps I am wrong, but it is my feeling that if the mandate becomes too broad, our study will go on for too long. I do not mind having several meetings. I, myself am particularly interested in an investigation. Quite frankly, I would like to do the investigation that Ms. Weatherill will not do into listeriosis.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make a couple of points.

Maybe I shouldn't start out with a partisan point, but first, the fact of the matter is that I think we need to set the record straight. Sheila Weatherill is a very well respected professional in the health care field from my province. She ran the Capital Health Authority. If Mr. Easter has these concerns, maybe he should have her here and ask if she has the same concerns before we start ramping up subcommittees and all of these other committees.

The second point, Mr. Chair, is a technical one. Just to be proficient, J-F is right with this motion, but it should read, "pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(b)". I think that is the exact way it should read. If Mr. Atamanenko wants to have that as a friendly amendment, that's fine.

To the point of Mr. Easter, I think there is a concern here, at least on my behalf. Wayne, I think you're giving up control of this investigation when you develop a subcommittee in the manner in which Mr. Atamanenko is trying to develop it. If you read Standing Order 108(1)(b), it does clearly say that the subcommittee will have all the powers of the standing committee, which means the power to broaden this as much as it wants and the power to look at whatever it wants. I think it's very important that if we're going to have this investigation—or whatever you want to call it—done, it should be done by the standing committee.

Now, if you want it to have a specific mandate, really, you need to have it under a joint committee or something else, which obviously needs to come from the House leaders' offices. But by creating a subcommittee under Standing Order 108(1)(b), you are going to leave open the opportunity—and this goes Mr. Bellavance's point as well—to expand this beyond where you want it to go. Also, the agriculture committee will lose full control of this, because this subcommittee will have the power to present directly to the House without coming to us first.

I think we want to keep this within the agriculture committee. I think that's how our committee has traditionally done a lot of these things; for example, on product of Canada labelling. A lot of the stuff we've done we've tried to keep within the agriculture committee. Whether that means extra meetings or not, I'm not going to go there.

The Chair: I have Mr. Atamanenko, then Mr. Hoback, then Mr. Shipley, then Mr. Bellavance again.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I have a couple of comments. The way the motion reads, it's my understanding, Brian, that the subcommittee would not have the power to report to the House. That's according to—

Mr. Brian Storseth: If you don't mind, I can read you Standing Order 108(1)(b). It says:

Standing Committees shall be empowered to create subcommittees of which the membership may be drawn from among both the list of members and the list of associate members provided for in Standing Order 104, who shall be deemed to be members of that committee for the purposes of this Standing Order.

Therefore, you have to go to Standing Order 108(1)(a), which says:

Standing committees shall be severally empowered to examine and enquire into all such matters as may be referred to them by the House, to report from time to time...

It clearly shows they have the ability to report to the House without coming to us. That's my concern, because I think you want it to come here first, right?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: With regard to who reports or who doesn't report to the House, a subcommittee will obviously be influenced by this committee. Some of us may be sitting on this committee. We will be driving the agenda, together with our colleagues from the health committee, so I don't see that as a concern.

Whether the subcommittee be called the subcommittee on food safety or the subcommittee on listeriosis, once again I think the immediate area of discussion will be listeriosis, because that's the reason we're forming it. We can move on to broaden its mandate, so to speak, as we start here. All these things will come up.

As for how it's formed, I think maybe we should get Jean-François to give us a brief understanding of why it's worded as it is, as we did back and forth on the phone the other day. I wouldn't mind if we could do that now.

• (1140)

The Chair: I do know from discussions with the clerk—and he can certainly clarify this if I don't have it exactly right—that he tried to draft this motion on a broad basis.

As a note for Mr. Storseth, and maybe for everybody, a subcommittee can never report directly to the House. On top of that, it states at the end of the motion here that this is not part of it. This may or may not satisfy the concern, but I think it's pretty clear in the motion.

Next I have Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go back and agree with Mr. Easter. The CFIA is part of Agriculture. I know what Mr. Bellavance is saying about how he'd like to drive into this case specifically. But as a committee, can we not do both at the same time? Can we not do a review of the food safety system and, at the same time, look back at where the food safety system didn't work and evaluate why it didn't work, and have that part?

I'm really concerned about this going to subcommittee. I think this is something the agriculture committee should do itself, because it gives everybody in this room a chance to be part of that work. And it is all agriculture related. When you go to food safety, that's an agriculture issue; the CFIA is under the Department of Agriculture. As Mr. Easter said, I think we should try to keep it here. I don't know if we need a subcommittee.

Regardless of that, Mr. Chair, I think we have to go back to the amendment itself and decide the context. Are we going to stick to a study on just listeriosis, or can we agree on a context of food safety and then proceed from there?

The Chair: Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to follow up with my colleague, I think when we're looking at the issues that were on our list here, if we do not take the context of the motion.... And it has been amended. I believe Mr. Atamanenko agrees to the changing of the wording to “given the listeriosis crisis that occurred”, and then “establish a subcommittee on food safety”. I think you can't do one without the other, you can't do that. It would not only not serve this committee, but it certainly would not serve the people of Canada, as they will be looking at this report. You should never delve into something without developing what's going to happen, how we're going to move forward, because we do not want this to happen again.

I would ask that this be dealt with at this committee. When we look down at our first report of the six issues we have, obviously this one is sitting at number one. If it were number five, then I guess it would not have the same priority. The subcommittee in its deliberations obviously said this is significant not only to Canada but also to this committee. It would seem to me that it deserves the attention of the full committee looking at the listeriosis issue, all the things that happened with it. Also, we cannot just stop the dropping of the axe at a point without looking at: what have we done; what are we going to do; what should we do, if we have not? If I were a Canadian reading this report and found it stopped without looking at the recommendations, I'd think we had not served the Canadian people right.

My recommendation, Mr. Chair, would be to support the inclusion of the amendment Alex has agreed to, but that this be a full committee report. Obviously it carries that significance in terms of the priorities.

The Chair: We are basically discussing the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Atamanenko, you indicated support for this. Are you accepting this as a friendly amendment that would change your original motion, so we'd be debating or discussing the actual amended motion then?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: If I understand correctly, the amendment would be to substitute the second word "listeriosis" with "food safety". Is that correct?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Correct. Yes, that's my amendment.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I think that's a healthy compromise. I accept that.

• (1145)

The Chair: Okay. We have to vote on the amendment. Since the mover has accepted it, I would suggest, if it's okay with everybody, we have that vote to accept the amendment, then we still are open for discussion on the amended motion.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: It was carried unanimously.

For further discussion, I have five speakers here: Mr. Bellavance, Mr. Easter, Mr. Lemieux, Mr. Eyking, closing up with Mr. Atamanenko. I'll get Mr. Storseth on there, okay.

On the motion as amended, Mr. Bellavance, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I would like to put a technical question to Jean-François.

I imagine that under Standing Order 108(1) Alex's motion as drafted is in order. Otherwise we will not be discussing this.

I would like to know whether or not under this motion there will be a subcommittee made up of as many members as the standing committee, that is 12 members, and, after the study is completed—and Brian touched on this a little earlier—whether or not it is the subcommittee or the standing committee that will be reporting directly to the House.

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to ask Mr. Lafleur to respond.

[Translation]

The Clerk: You are absolutely right, Mr. Bellavance: the subcommittee will report to the main committee. Subcommittees cannot report directly to the House. That is a basic principle. The House creates committees and that is why committees report to the House. A subcommittee must report to the main committee. The only way it could act otherwise would be if everyone agreed or if the House made an order to that effect.

Mr. André Bellavance: I don't have a problem with that. I just wanted to understand.

Does the fact that some health committee members will be working with us prevent their committee from reporting to the House? Their members will be involved with the drafting of the report. It will therefore be recorded that members of the health committee were present.

The Clerk: It was my understanding that it was the will of the committee, as well as the mover, Mr. Atamanenko, to establish a

subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food to deal with listeriosis and food safety.

I want the following to be very clear. In this particular case, the subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food must be made up of permanent members of the main committee or associate members. If permanent members of the health committee are on our list of associate members, that is fine. Those individuals can be members of our subcommittee. If they are not on the list but we want to include them, then we will have to modify our list of associate members in order to include them. Then the subcommittee will be free to include them or not.

Furthermore, if the Standing Committee on Health wants to report on food safety, it can do so but it cannot use our mandate to do that. The subcommittee's mandate is actually created under the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. That being said, nothing prevents the Standing Committee on Health from undertaking its own investigation or study on that topic.

In terms of your last point, I would like to point out that if the standing committee would like to report on its proceedings to the House, it would have the power to do so. It would probably be possible because the committee will have studied the issue.

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'd like to apologize to Mr. Bellavance as well. I was going by the intent that Mr. Atamanenko had spoken to before, about it being more of a joint committee. The clerk is absolutely correct about what it says in the motion. We can have the debate later as to whether or not the subcommittee can or can't report to the House directly, but at the end of the day, he's right; it does say in this motion that this committee will not be reporting directly to the House. He's absolutely correct there.

I do have an amendment to the main motion, Mr. Chair. I don't know if you want to go through everybody first, go to my amendment, and then let everybody talk again. If you want, though, I can move the amendment now. It's up to you.

The Chair: Now would be the time then.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would make an amendment to the motion so that it reads: "That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food establish a subcommittee on listeriosis; and that the members of the subcommittee be named after the usual consultations with the whips;"—and this is where I would amend it—"that the composition of the subcommittee be proportionally the same as that of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, with the chair being a member of the government."

The Chair: Just to clarify, you read in "listeriosis" after we'd already changed it to "health safety".

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'm sorry, health safety. I just want to add that part in. I have it in writing for you.

The Chair: I thought that's what you meant, but I had to clarify it.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I think we all take it for granted, but if we're going to create a subcommittee, it's not necessarily taken for granted that it's going to have the same proportionality as we have here. Also, we want to make sure we retain the chair.

The Chair: You've heard the motion. Discussion is going to continue with my list of speakers, but now we're dealing with the amendment.

I have Mr. Easter next.

Hon. Wayne Easter: It all ties together, whether it's the amendment or not, Mr. Chair. I would point out, though, in regard to Brian's comments on Ms. Weatherill, that we've seen this time and time again when we question the structure of the investigation. We're not questioning the credibility of Ms. Weatherill. It wouldn't matter if it was Jean Chrétien doing the inquiry; when he knocks on the door of the Minister of Agriculture, we don't want the Minister of Agriculture to hide. We want an inquiry that has authority; that's the point.

On this committee I think our intent is basically to have the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food do the hearing and to allow, as the clerk said, some health committee members who are associate members of this committee or made associate members of this committee to be subbed in, some people who have some expertise. I know Brian has an amendment, but I'm wondering if we could drop the whole business of a subcommittee of this committee and just make the motion that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food establish a study on food safety and that it be authorized to hold extra meetings in order to deal with the issue.

I'm not moving an amendment, Mr. Chair, I'm just wondering if that would get us out of the difficulty we're in. We know we're scheduled to have two meetings a week, but if we just establish this committee, drop the whole subcommittee business on the understanding that we can sub in associate members who would likely have expertise on the health side from the various parties, then we don't have to worry about any of the rest, but we would need authorization and the understanding that the committee would hold extra hearings. There's you as chair, if you couldn't attend some of those, then there are vice-chairs, whatever, and we have no problem with the government chairing the hearings.

The Chair: I think Mr. Easter is suggesting another amendment that basically would leave this in the hands of the committee and not a subcommittee, but we have an amendment that we're discussing from Mr. Storseth. So I would ask Mr. Storseth, if it's appropriate, if he would change his amendment to that—

• (1155)

Mr. Brian Storseth: What I will do, Mr. Chair, that being the case, is withdraw my amendment and then we can vote on the main—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, before we move an amendment, can we bat it around a little bit, and if it's acceptable for us to go that way and if we're all of the same understanding, it would be the full committee. It could hold extra meetings but allow associate members to be subbed in. That's basically what I'm saying.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Storseth has said he's going to withdraw his amendment. How I would see this happening in order to do what

Mr. Easter has just suggested is that we would have to vote on the motion, and if the motion was defeated, then a new motion would come forth dealing with that.

Mr. Storseth has agreed to withdraw his amendment. I need the agreement of the committee in order for him to do that.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: I have a list of speakers here that we're trying to stay with. We're back to the motion, and Mr. Lemieux is next on the list, and then Mr. Eyking, I believe.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair.

I was listening attentively to Mr. Easter the first time he spoke, and now the second time he spoke, regarding the subcommittee. As an MP, I have the same concern, I think, as Mr. Easter has. If we strike a subcommittee, I may not be able to participate just because of the scheduling issues. I'm already on two committees.

I know that people don't feel sorry for me for being on two committees, but I'm just saying that if there's a subcommittee struck, I and my colleagues and people across the way may not be able to participate in the subcommittee. If we're saying that this is an important issue for the agriculture committee, then I just think it's very appropriate that the agriculture committee members participate in the meetings themselves.

I like Mr. Easter's suggestion that if a particular party decides to substitute members in and out.... I mean, that's the flexibility we all have. If we want some of our colleagues from other committees to replace us, or to replace one of our colleagues, I think that's fully acceptable. We normally conduct ourselves in that way.

I basically concur with Mr. Easter that if we feel this is important for the agriculture committee—I think Mr. Hoback had mentioned earlier that listeriosis, food safety, and CFIA all fall within the agriculture purview—then it would be a shame, I think, to strike a subcommittee that most of the agriculture committee members couldn't participate in, for whatever reason, be it scheduling conflicts or other reasons. I think we should tackle this as the agriculture committee. We're going to end up reviewing that report anyway. If anyone tables the report in the House, it will be the agriculture committee. If we weren't there during the hearings, it would make it all the more difficult for us to meaningfully review the report.

So I would like to concur with what Mr. Easter is suggesting, that we deal with this as the agriculture committee. We are the agriculture committee members, and this is important to the agriculture committee.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Easter are agreeing on a suggestion.

I do have speakers here, I realize that, and I don't know whether there are new points to come up or not, but I would see us at a point here where I think it would be good if we voted on the motion as is and go from there.

Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: On a point of order, are we voting on the motion? We've already voted on the amendment, and now we're discussing the motion—

The Chair: This motion is before us. If you wanted to change basically to what Mr. Easter is suggesting, then this motion would have to be defeated and a new motion come forward.

Mr. Randy Hoback: No, we can amend it.

• (1200)

The Chair: Mr. Easter has a point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I do think there needs to be more discussion. What I was trying to get to was that we should have a discussion before we make a motion so that we're pretty well on the same wavelength.

I know that some people are suggesting they still would like to see a subcommittee. I'm okay either way. I don't care whether it's the full committee and substituting people in, just as long as that committee, whichever one it is, has the authority to do a complete job of the study. And that means a heck of a lot more meetings.

In my view, it could be done as a full committee if that authority to have more meetings is there, or it could be done as a subcommittee as well. The key point is that there needs to be the authority to have enough meetings to deal with the issue without taking away too much from our regular committee work.

The Chair: The reason I suggested voting on the motion was that the questioners around the table have basically changed direction. I'd like to keep the agenda moving. There's a lot more to this subcommittee report than just the listeriosis. There are a number of other ones.

So unless you indicate that you want to put forth an amendment to this motion again to deal with Mr. Easter's suggestion, which I don't have at this point, then we're still with the motion. It's just to try to get something done here. We seem to be going nowhere.

Mr. Atamanenko, you're out of order on this list, but I'm going to give you that because it was your motion.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I don't know what you're thinking of here, Wayne. I think we're all on the same page. We want to do something to get to the bottom of this and to look at food safety. The reason I proposed the subcommittee is that we have things we have to address here. We have COOL, we have the cattle industry, and we have competitiveness and program review. There are all sorts of pressing issues that people in agriculture and farmers want us to address.

We can't address listeriosis or food safety in two or three meetings. This may have to continue for a number of months. Already this program takes us into June at the steering committee. We need to have a separate committee, and I don't care what it's called or who does it. I agree with Brian that it has to be the in the same proportions as here, with a chair from the government. That's what we have to do to get this going.

The Chair: I was giving you an in as I thought you might have a point of order on the suggestion. We're still on the motion. I'm going to go back to my list of speakers.

Mr. Eyking, you're up next.

Hon. Mark Eyking: I'd like to say a few things for the record here, colleagues. At the end of the day, 20 people died here this summer. We owe it to the lives of those people and their families to get to the bottom of what happened. When we were in the steering committee, listeriosis was number one, and we all agreed we have to get to the bottom of what happened and why it happened.

The Chair: I don't think there's any disagreement.

Hon. Mark Eyking: There's no disagreement. André is concerned, and he is right to be. Let's not start watering down the wine here. If we're going to get away from a subcommittee, I'm expecting that we're going to have almost 10 meetings, with five or six on listeriosis and four on food safety. That's what it's going to take to do this job right. We all have to realize that if we're not going to have a subcommittee, we're going to be into this for a while.

I have no problem with that, but it has to be the priority, and it has to be done right. If we're going to go in that direction, we had all better realize that this is not going to be done in one or two meetings. That's just so we know, if we're going to drop the subcommittee issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Storseth, you have the floor.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'm not on, am I?

The Chair: Yes, you are; but if not, we'll go to Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: To speak to what Mr. Eyking just said, as long as common sense prevails and goals are met... I don't think anybody in this committee wants to waste time doing an exploration of something that will go on and on. However, in the same breath, we want to get to the bottom of listeriosis and come up with some constructive recommendations that move our food safety forward. I think exploring listeriosis and what happened is part of the report on food safety. I think we're accomplishing that with the amendment that was just done.

I guess the question here is where it would be best to do this work. Is it in a subcommittee on its own, or is it actually here in this committee? Whose purview is this actually within? We've been arguing right now that it is within the purview of the agriculture department, so then should the agriculture committee not take this on? I'm just asking the question.

• (1205)

The Chair: Mr. Easter, I had you on next. Do you have anything further?

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, I was on. However, could you clarify this, sir: is there a motion on right now?

The Chair: Yes, we're dealing with the original motion as amended, which changed the wording from "listeriosis" to "food safety".

Okay, I'm going to call the motion.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, could we have five minutes or three minutes here just to sort this out?

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think it would be relevant to everybody if Mr. Easter and Mr. Lemieux had a chance to sit down. That way, when we come out of this, everybody knows the direction we're going in, so we don't have another half-hour discussion when we come out of this. I think it could be resolved in five minutes or even two minutes.

I move that we suspend the meeting for two minutes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have two options. I can do that or, if not, have an amendment proposed. However, I'm going to allow five minutes, and hopefully when we come back we can get something done.

The meeting is suspended for five minutes. I'm going to be calling you back at 12:13.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1215)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to the order.

I guess everyone realizes that I gave you an extra five minutes because I was hoping that an agreement was going to come about. I'm not sure whether it has. Unless directed otherwise, we have the motion on the....

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'd like to make an amendment to the motion, as I had discussed earlier, about the composition of the committee. If you want me to reread it, I can. I withdrew it because Mr. Easter said we were going to go with the full committee.

If we're going to do this, I think it's important that we establish what the composition of the subcommittee is going to be, so I would move that amendment.

Hon. Mark Eyking: If I may, Mr. Chair, on a point of order, there is a type of motion here, which started with Alex and ended up with Pierre adding food safety, which had the technical stuff that you had, right? I think that's the kind of motion we're looking at, isn't it?

The Chair: We have a motion—

Hon. Mark Eyking: I know, but is that where we're going?

The Chair: We have an amended motion, which was agreed upon. We now have another proposed amendment by Mr. Storseth.

I would suggest, Mr. Storseth, that you read it back in for the record.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Can you read it in?

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to read it.

Can he resubmit the same amendment?

The Clerk: Technically no, because it was—

The Chair: Okay.

Could I have everybody's attention? Mr. Storseth wants to present an amendment that he had previously presented and then had

withdrawn. In order for him to re-table that amendment, I need the committee's permission. Do I have that approval?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. I have that approval. I'll now ask the clerk to reread that amendment.

• (1220)

The Clerk: Here's how the amendment would read after the fourth line of the paragraph of the motion of Mr. Atamanenko. I'll read the last words. After "usual consultations with the Whips", it would read: "the composition of the Subcommittee be proportionally the same as that of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, with the Chair being a member of the government".

Hon. Wayne Easter: Could you read it again?

The Clerk: Okay, After "usual consultations with the Whips", on the fourth line, it would read: "the composition of the Subcommittee be proportionally the same as that of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, with the Chair being a member of the government".

Mr. Brian Storseth: It's just a technicality. That's the way you wanted it anyway.

The Chair: Just to be clear, Mr. Storseth, there was some indication over here, and over there, that you wanted to take the subcommittee part out of it. Is it your intention to have the subcommittee—

Mr. Brian Storseth: No. I just wanted to be clear on that. The way the subcommittee is structured would be proportionally the same.

That's not saying that there have to be 12, Wayne. That's just saying that if you guys decide to go to five, it's proportionally the same—

Hon. Wayne Easter: But you are saying there would be a subcommittee?

Mr. Brian Storseth: It's my understanding that that's where you guys were going anyway, so yes.

The Chair: You've heard the amendment. Is there discussion on the amendment?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Just to be sure, Mr. Chair, could we please read the whole motion with the amendment in it so that we're not missing anything?

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'm not trying to do anything sneaky.

Hon. Wayne Easter: We trust you.

The Chair: I'll ask J-F to read that, please.

The Clerk: The motion, as amended, would read as follows:

That, given the listeriosis crisis that occurred last summer, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food establish a Subcommittee on Food Safety; and that the members of the subcommittee be named after the usual consultations with the Whips; the composition of the Subcommittee be proportionally the same as that of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, with the Chair being a member of the government, and that the Subcommittee be granted all of the powers of the Committee pursuant to Standing Order 108(1) except the power to report directly to the House.

The Chair: Is everyone clear on the motion?

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just before we vote on this, I appreciate the suspended meeting you gave us to consult, but I want to clarify something now. Mr. Easter was talking about the subcommittee, whether or not we should have it, before the suspension. We discussed it again during the suspension. I just want to confirm through you, Chair, if Mr. Easter is planning to amend this motion to remove the subcommittee or not? I'm just following up on his earlier comments. It's still a little unclear to me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I've never been able to guess what Mr. Easter might say, so I'm going to ask him.

Hon. Wayne Easter: We'll be supporting the amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to the amendment, Mr. Atamanenko?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I agree with my honourable colleague, Brian, and it's probably time to call the question.

(Amendment agreed to)

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

The Chair: Now we can hopefully move ahead.

We need a motion to revert to the report.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: The composition of the subcommittee has to be decided. There's some thought that it should have the same number as the regular committee, so we should probably get clarification on that and decide.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth has a point of order.

•(1225)

Mr. Brian Storseth: I no longer have my copy of the motion in front of me, but I believe Mr. Atamanenko's motion called for there to be some discussion with the whips' offices. So I think they will decide.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Okay. That makes sense.

Mr. Brian Storseth: That way we don't have to debate this anymore.

The Chair: I need a motion to move back to the subcommittee report.

It is moved by Mr. Shipley.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Will the two meetings on listeriosis be going to subcommittee now so they will not be committees of the committee of the whole?

The Chair: My understanding—and correct me if it's not your intention—is that there will be two meetings on food safety at the agriculture committee as a whole.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: My intention is that we shift this over to the subcommittee. That will give us an extra couple of days to really get into the other items.

The Chair: Does that answer your question, Mr. Hoback?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much.

I'd like to take the opportunity to move my motion in the same manner as we did Mr. Atamanenko's.

The Chair: We need a motion again from the committee to move from the committee report to Mr. Storseth's motion.

Mr. Atamanenko is moving that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: There probably won't be a lot of discussion on these motions, so maybe we should get them out of the way and get right back to the—

Hon. Wayne Easter: On Brian's—

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I believe I have the floor, but if Mr. Easter wants to call a point of order, that's fine.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No. Go ahead, Brian.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food conduct a study of the Competition Act and make recommendations on potential changes in light of the global economy and the effect the lack of competition and pricing is having on the farmers' ability to produce and sell their products.

The Chair: You've heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't disagree with the motion, but I believe there are massive changes to the Competition Act in the budget implementation bill that is going ahead right now. It will change the Competition Act substantially when it's voted on today.

I suggest we have somebody come in—not from the Competition Bureau itself—to explain how those changes in the budget implementation act affect the Competition Act. There are a lot of changes there, and I don't understand them all.

The Chair: Mr. Easter, I was going to indicate that very thing from the chair. It probably would be part of it, or at least I would presume that. After hearing those changes, the committee always has the discretion on how they want to continue from that, in what direction. It may or may not satisfy the direction that the members here are hoping to go in. On a personal level, I see this competition thing going from the slaughter capacity to the fuel industry to fertilizers. I think there are a lot of things there that affect agriculture.

That said, we have the motion. I have Mr. Eyking next, and then Mr. Atamanenko.

I have Mr. Bellavance in there too. Sorry, André.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We'd discussed these motions in committee. I know we have to do one at a time. Maybe they stand on their own, but two of them have a lot of similarities, the ones from Randy and Brian. There was some thinking in our committee that we could do them separately, but they have a lot of similarities and they fall under the same category. It would save us time to do both of them quickly. I think we're on the same track, but it's up to Brian; it's his motion.

● (1230)

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I agree with what Mark has just said. At the meeting of the steering committee, we discussed Brian and Randy's motions. That is why the first report states that several meetings would deal with competitiveness. It is not as specific as the motions that my colleagues put forward, but the intent was to respond to the two motions requesting meetings dealing specifically with competitiveness. What I am trying to say is that we took your motions into account in our discussions.

I don't know if you are satisfied with our having included them in the first report. It is not as specific as what you were saying. I am not asking you to withdraw your motions but we did already decide that it would be a good idea to discuss this issue.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: As a follow-up to what André said, we have four to six meetings devoted to this in what we thought was a logical progression. The key in the motion is "to study", and that fits in with what we'd planned. I certainly support this motion and the other. If we can pass them, it will give more stimulus to look at competitiveness. I have no problem with that.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate my colleagues' support of the motion.

I'd first like to address a couple of things. One is that I'm glad to hear Mr. Easter give our government credit for making changes that we've been calling for for 10 years.

Second, I think they're two very different motions in the sense that mine is going to be very detailed, as Wayne said, very in-depth on the Competition Act. I believe Randy's talking about things like SRMs and some of these regulatory burdens our farmers have been placed with that they're paying for and other farmers aren't necessarily. That's not to put words in Randy's mouth, but I believe that's where he's going. I think those are two significantly different issues, and I think we need to devote time to them both.

The reason I'm moving this forward now is that I'm a little concerned to see this from the report, and that's why I wanted this motion because I wanted you guys to discuss it. We're talking about potentially 15 meetings down the road when we may get to this, if there's not some other issue of the day come up that we're going to want to discuss, or some other estimates, or whatever. You're talking about potentially 20 meetings away. That's 10 weeks; that's a long time. I'm hoping Mr. Easter will support me in moving this forward more quickly. I'm not saying this needs to be at the top of the list, but I would like to see it moved forward more quickly.

I noticed under Mr. Easter's document "Empowering Canadian Farmers in the Marketplace", July 2005, he has a whole section of recommendations on this that he could really sink his teeth into and look at some of the changes he wasn't able to get done when he was in government.

I would really like to see us move forward with this as quickly as possible. I think these are very serious changes that our farmers have been calling for for a long time.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, and then I'm going to call the question.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Wayne is actually right. If you have insomnia, read his report and you'll cure your insomnia.

I agree with Brian on the order of precedence. If we look at western Canada, the fertilizer industry might be a good example. It is a question of competition: is there enough competition in that industry? That is a timely question that needs to be answered before guys start planting. That's why I think it needs to move forward.

When I look at regulations, these are things we can do that are not trade compliant. Regulations have no trade implications, other than making sure that we meet the same safety requirements as other countries do.

Again, I think we should attack this altogether very strongly, because whether it's getting into plant breeding or SRMs, as Brian said, these are things that are making our farmers uncompetitive globally. These are things that we're imposing on ourselves, so the quicker we can address these things and try to assist the minister to get them changed, I think our farmers will benefit greatly, not only in the ease of their operations but also in their pocketbooks, which counts the most.

So that's why I'd request that we move these forward. I'd also request that we deal with them separately, because they are separate issues.

But I have another question, Mr. Chair, and I have a notice of motion that I want to present today.

● (1235)

The Chair: Yes, the intention is to deal with the motion I have. We're going to deal with the next two motions as well, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay, again, it's something that needs to be addressed in a timely manner.

When something like that comes up, how do we fit it in? That is the question or concern I have.

The Chair: I'll call the question.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Can you read it again, Chair?

The Chair: Okay, you should have it in front of you, but I'll ask clerk to read it again.

The Clerk: It's a motion from Mr. Storseth and reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conduct a study of the Competition Act and make recommendations on potential changes in light of the global economy and the effect the lack of competition and pricing is having on the farmer's ability to produce and sell their products.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): I have an amendment to the motion I'd like to make before we call the question.

The Chair: If so, read your amendment.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, I'll read it with the amendment included: "That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conduct a study, as our top priority, of the Competition Act", and then the rest of the motion would remain as it is. So I'm just adding "as our top priority".

The Chair: Okay, that's a technical amendment.

Is everybody clear on the amendment?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Okay, reread it.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Please read it slowly.

[English]

The Chair: You have the motion in front of you, and he's adding some words to the first line.

Mr. Blake Richards: It would read: "That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, as our top priority, conduct a study", and then the rest would remain as is.

The Chair: The first time you read it, Mr. Richards, and correct me if I'm wrong, you indicated that it was the top priority in the competitive part. Are you indicating that it be the top priority for the committee to study in general?

Mr. Blake Richards: Correct.

The Chair: Okay, I'll call the question.

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

The Chair: Mr. Storseth has asked for a recorded vote on the amendment by Mr. Richards.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chairman, I would like to amend the motion to say that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, after the meeting on supplementary estimates (B) 2008-09, conduct a study of the Competition Act and make recommendations on potential changes in light of the global economy....

Basically, what I'm doing is moving it up in the order of structure, so that it's actually something that we address more quickly rather than later. I'm not saying give it priority, as I understand that listeriosis has priority—and that shouldn't change—but that we move it up in the priority list from where it sits right now.

The Chair: I'm not clear and I don't think the clerk is either. Could you read that amendment again.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Now I have to read it again.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Point of order.

We cannot have an amendment every time we want to change the order of priority that the steering committee decided on. At the meeting of the steering committee, certain decisions were made and we are open to discussing them. That is what we usually do; we discuss them within the standing committee.

Why don't we take a moment later on to discuss the order of priority that we already set at the meeting of the steering committee, with you there, Mr. Chairman? At that time, we can decide together what our priority will be. We can make changes, but if an amendment is going to be made to each motion stating that that motion should be the first topic we discuss, I am telling you right now that I will vote against that, if we do not have a proper discussion. Let's do this intelligently please. Otherwise this will go on forever.

• (1240)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance may have a point there in the fact that the subcommittee report has some recommendations, and that amendment probably could come in while you're back to the report. At this time we are dealing with this motion. Anybody has a right to make an amendment, but I think Mr. Bellavance has a point on that.

If I'm going to take questions, I have Mr. Atamanenko first and then Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I think if we can deal with these motions quickly, that means we approve them, then when we come back and our subcommittee gives a report on the order then—as was pointed out, I think—we can see maybe that we should bump it up one or two, or take fewer meetings on some of the other topics and then see how it fits in. Then we can make that collective decision.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, can I interject?

The Chair: I have you next on the speakers list.

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

First of all, to André's point, this is exactly the point. We had an agreement—maybe it wasn't in committee maybe it was a handshake agreement—with the opposition critic on our having representation from this side in the subcommittee. We weren't given that. We have the chair, but he is neutral. He said he is going to be neutral.

To get back to the point, if the only way we're going to be able to have representation is to amend something constantly, then you're going to have to live with that. I think that's more to the point to what's going on. Mr. Atamanenko has given us his word that he's willing to fight in subcommittee to move this up a little bit. I think that's reasonable and at your discretion. I think our side feels that this is an important issue, and it should be moved up in the precedence of where we study this.

I don't know about Mr. Hoback, but I'm willing to take Mr. Atamanenko on his word on that.

The Chair: I should just remind all members, in terms of the amendment that's coming forth here—and it's the second one to change the order in there—that you still have the chance to propose an amendment dealing with that very issue once we're back to the report. It's 12:45 p.m. and I would suggest that we deal with the motions. You still have the opportunity to do what Mr. Hoback's amendment was trying to do.

Mr. Lemieux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to respond to Mr. Bellavance's comments.

I would like to point out that we do have a subcommittee. The members of that subcommittee do important work. They discuss and propose recommendations. However, it should be pointed out that the subcommittee only makes recommendations; it is the main committee that has the authority to discuss them, debate them and change anything on the report. We can take our time to do this. This is the first time the committee has seen the results. Yes, we would like to have a subcommittee. I already mentioned that its work is important.

Perhaps I misunderstood what Mr. Bellavance was saying. I think he said that we could not change everything in the subcommittee's report. What I am saying is that we can change anything and we can also have a debate.

Mr. André Bellavance: I said exactly that.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes? Then I apologize.

Mr. André Bellavance: What I was saying is that we don't have to move an amendment every time someone wants to change the order. I suggested that we deal with the motions and that we then discuss the first report.

If we want to make any changes to the meetings, or change the order in which we will have meetings or deal with the issues, then we can discuss that together. I agree with you that the steering committee sends its recommendations to the main committee to be discussed again.

I simply wanted to point out what would be faster, but the opposite is happening.

●(1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, if we want to deal with these motions and deal with the report—and I need to point out that until the report is passed as is or amended or whatever the case may be, our future business is in jeopardy of actually going ahead and being productive. I don't mean that in a facetious way. I mean that unless we get something decided here today—and we're quickly running out of time—we're not going to be able to even have witnesses at Tuesday's meeting. As chair, I think I need to point that out.

We do have an amendment on the floor by Mr. Hoback.

Are you leaving it there or withdrawing it?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I'm going to withdraw it after listening to Alex.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Hoback, having heard that, I appreciate—

Mr. Randy Hoback: Let me finish what I'm going to say, please.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Randy Hoback: In the spirit of cooperation with Mr. Atamanenko, I think he made a valid point; and being a new member, I didn't realize we could go back to the report and could move priority within the report itself. So if we have an understanding in this room that we can look at this when we look at the priority in this report, then I will withdraw my amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

We need the consent of the committee for Mr. Hoback to withdraw his amendment. Is that agreed?

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: We have the motion moved by Mr. Storseth, as it is written in front of you. There is no amendment.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion is carried unanimously, I believe.

What's the next motion? Mr. Hoback, you indicated you wanted to read yours into the record. Please so do.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just for the record, I don't believe that last vote was necessarily unanimous. I just want that on the record. There were opposition members who didn't raise their hands.

The Chair: It is so pointed out. I thought everyone had voted.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, do you want to read your motion?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes. Let's speed things up here, guys. We're wasting a lot of time.

My motion is that the committee study the effect of the current regulations on the competitiveness of farm products produced in Canada versus similar products that are imported from other countries, and that in this review the committee should study the current ability of existing regulations and identify those regulations that are no longer relevant in order to reduce the regulatory burden on farmers.

The Chair: The question is on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, do you have a motion? I thought we had a third motion.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, we do. I have my notice of motion here, Chair:

[*Translation*]

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food study international trade and market development to the benefit of our farmers.

[*English*]

The Chair: For discussion on the motion, Mr. Bellavance and Mr. Eyking.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Yes, as we said at the steering committee, Mr. Lemieux, that is a very commendable and interesting motion, but in my view, it is so broad that we could be discussing it for weeks and weeks.

I do not want to tell you how to do your work, but I would have liked the motion to be a little more specific. I would have liked to see some specific points included, such as a specific number of meetings on that topic. Otherwise there could be an endless number of meetings on this. It is interesting but the issue is too broad.

That is what I have a problem with. What will we do? What kind of report do we want to draft based on a motion worded the way it is?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking: I have some agreement with Pierre. We talked about this motion in committee, and it's too broad, but it's not that it's not important. I think there are over 20 meetings we can have this spring, and only 13 or 14 that are filled up. So I think it's not a bad motion, but it's just too broad. If it is brought back here when we get through this, we can look into it, but I think it has to be more focused on where we are going on this. Is it more WTO? Where is it at, and where is it going? As it stands now, I think it is too broad and it's unacceptable, but that is not to say it is not something we should be looking into in the future.

The Chair: A point that should be brought out, Mr. Eyking, is that whenever witnesses are asked to be put forward for whichever topic, that may look after that issue of its being broad and what have you. I just throw that out for comment.

Mr. Atamanenko.

• (1250)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I like the motion. I know it's general, but I think you will see as we move into the agenda, as we look at COOL, the cattle industry, and competitiveness, that kind of fits into this. Then if there are other specific items on trade and market development, we can add them. They would come in under those categories. So I don't think there's a reason not to support the motion. It gives us a bit of a focus, a philosophical focus, and I think it's a good one.

Pierre, I think you will see that some of the things we discussed actually start to fit in under this, and that we can pick up the loose ends.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, you can close out discussion on your motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I would like to explain why I tabled this motion. There is definitely a crisis happening in the cattle sector and we need to find other markets. Yes, we can find solutions here in Canada, but a good part of the solution could lie in finding markets outside Canada.

I wanted to have a discussion with these committee members because their comments are important. That is why the motion is a general one, and it's up to us to decide what we would like to deal with specifically. The purpose of the motion was to suggest an idea, to discuss it, and then as a committee to decide on the direction we would like to take with the time we have, for the benefit of our farmers, as I said.

I would like to point out that Minister Ritz has had a lot of success with respect to foreign markets over the past six months, especially in the cattle sector. That is a good start but I thought that the committee could advise the government on where to find other markets, why, and for which specific sectors, etc.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their useful comments. We can certainly come back to this later and make sure, within that discussion, to include more details in order to make sure that we're headed in the right direction.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

I'm going to call the question on the motion you have in front of you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I believe it was carried unanimously.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Are we looking at the report now?

The Chair: Yes, and we would need a motion to go back.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I'd like to move that.

The Chair: It is moved by Mr. Atamanenko that we go back to the report.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: You have the report in front of you.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: If you look at the report, we in subcommittee thought a good way to start off would be with the program review to see what's happening and how people are perhaps being hit with some of the programs or lack of them.

The thing I would like to emphasize is that if you look at COOL and you look at the cattle industry, in my opinion that's a logical way to move into competitiveness. If we look at what's happening in COOL, we could devote two meetings to that. Regarding the cattle industry, it was my proposal—and we agreed in committee—that at the first meeting we would tackle the report put out by Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union. We would bring him in for 45 minutes with his PowerPoints. At the second meeting we would bring in the Cattlemen's Association, some ranchers, and others to zero in on what's happening in the cattle industry. Then we would move into a discussion on competitiveness, and then we see how we can fit in program review.

That was kind of our intent during the steering committee meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I agree. I have read the report—I haven't seen the PowerPoint, to be honest, but I have talked to a number of people who have—and in order to understand that report and the depth and the numbers.... Alex has a point, that it would take that long to go through it and understand it. There would be no problem, then, in going to the hard questions. But I really do believe the analysis is very substantive and we really should give it the time it's due; you couldn't do it in 10 minutes.

I also had a question, though, on the four to six meetings on program review, and maybe Pierre can answer this. We didn't get an answer from the minister or the department the other day.

In the minister's presentation, he said the cost of production payment program is cancelled, I believe. Will that be part of this program review? Are we going to see those areas that were cancelled and where the money has supposedly gone? Has the cost of production payment program been cancelled? Does anybody know? How much money was left in it? Where did the money go? There was a commitment that the Prime Minister made the election before last that he'd go to a cost of production payment program, \$100 million a year. One hundred million dollars came out in one year. Where's the other \$300 million?

We know they cancelled the family farm options program, as well, in midstream. Where did that money go?

So we need some answers here. I'm wondering if we're going to have somebody come in here who can tell us. This money is announced but never comes out. Where does it go?

•(1255)

The Chair: Mr. Easter, to answer your question on where does the thing go, I think that's up to all of you committee members when you present your witness list on where you want to go. I think that dictates it. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Can the parliamentary secretary answer? Is the cost of production payment program cancelled or not? We asked the department; they didn't answer. I think the minister said it was, but I was shocked—

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much for the question.

Unfortunately, I wasn't here when the minister was giving his presentation. However, I think it's fair to say that if we tackle this issue, particularly considering programming, then as you quite rightly pointed out, Chair, it's for the committee to decide where they want to go with that, what questions they ask, and who they have as witnesses. So when we arrive at that agenda item, let's flesh it out.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, you're next on the speakers list.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chairman, Alex, I'll be reasonable, but an organization that has more dogs and cats as members than farmers...I'm not going to give them 45 minutes. If they want to come in for 10 minutes and do a presentation, and if they want to have a volunteer presentation that committee members can go to if they have time to watch, that's fine. I have no problem with that. But we agreed to 10 minutes per presenter and I think we should stick with that.

Again, it comes back to what I talked about earlier. If you look at competitiveness, if you want to do something for farmers right now, move that higher up on your priority list. You can review the programs until the cows come home, and nothing will help farmers. You can identify issues, you can identify problems, but in the short term, those identifications will not help farmers. But if you can remove some regulations, if you can increase competitiveness, that's money that will go into farmers' pockets this summer.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth is next, and then Mr. Atamanenko.

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

Alex, you seem to know the individual. Would it be possible to have a hard copy? If it's that extensive, would it be possible to have it even a couple of weeks ahead of time?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Chairman, you can have it today, if you want.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Okay.

The other thing is this, Mr. Chair, technically with witnesses. How long before we bring people forward would you like us to have lists submitted to you for witnesses?

The Chair: Well, we obviously need to pass the report, but the sooner the better. We can discuss that. I think we should deal with the report here, but ASAP would be my suggestion. And on the report, I have three or four copies of the report in my office—I believe it's a dozen pages or more—and Alex has extra.

There was some discussion about extending presentation time by presenters. As chair, I'm going to take direction from the committee. But I do want to point out that if you break from that tradition of 10 minutes per presentation, which has been the norm, you will be setting a precedent and you will make it very tough for me, as chair, not to go back to that—meaning that if you do it for one group, you have to do it for everybody else.

I think I needed to point that out.

Mr. Atamanenko, you're next on the list.

•(1300)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I understand your thoughts, Randy, and I understand what you're saying, Larry. I have read the report. I have seen the presentation. It's significant. It's not somebody coming here to bash the government. It's not somebody coming here to extol the virtues of NFU. In fact, I think if there is a crisis in the cattle industry, all of us are probably to blame over the last years. It's a good point of departure. It hits on some key issues. I would anticipate that there would be some really hard questions going to this researcher. We're not here to pat him on the back.

If there are points in the report that...you know, they seem logical, but if they're not, let's flesh them out. Let's look at it. I'll make sure everybody has a copy of it as of this week.

It is legitimate. A lot of work has gone into it. Let's use this as a basis, as we move into really finding out what's going on in the cattle industry. That's my rationale for that.

The Chair: A point of privilege.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I do take strong exception to Randy's comments on the National Farmers Union and cats and dogs. They are a national organization, chartered under an act of this Parliament. They have a membership list. It is an organization that is increasing

in size, especially in Ontario. They're honest about their membership numbers, which some other organizations are not.

The Chair: Point taken.

We are up to the time, so I'm going to call for adjournment of this meeting.

I declare the meeting adjourned for today.

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