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Thursday, March 10, 2011

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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1150)

[English]

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

We have a whole list of motions. In order to speed this up, I'll just refer to them. If you don't want to—

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Larry, I'd like to move number 16 first. I feel this is an urgent motion. I'm going to take most of my other ones off the list.

I see the genetically modified Roundup Ready alfalfa as an urgent motion that I think this committee needs to deal with before we leave. I don't want to see it fall off the list, so I am moving it first—

The Chair: I think we can get to it in very quick time here if you—

Hon. Wayne Easter: —to ensure that it doesn't fall off the list.

I think that's our right to do so, Mr. Chair. You can ask the clerk, but I'm sure it is.

So I'd like to move it now and have it out of the way.

The Chair: Okay, but remember, there's a whole bunch of motions, Wayne. You have the first two, and if you want to pull them off, just...

Hon. Wayne Easter: I know, Chair, but we can pull them up whenever we so desire, under the rules. We could have pulled them up at any committee meeting, for that matter. We haven't done that, but I do see this as an urgent motion. God knows what will happen over the next couple of weeks, and I'd like to see the committee deal with this one so that it is a recommendation to the Government of Canada immediately.

I am moving it, and I think if you ask the clerk, it's within the rules for me to do that.

The Chair: We need the committee to....

Pierre.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Chair, I'd just like to know what Mr. Easter is up to. I ask the question because we all know....

Chair, we've been working together for roughly two or two and a half years, and we have well-established procedures here on committee. One of the procedures we've always agreed to is that we would handle motions in the order in which they were presented. We've held to this time and time again.

There have been other times, Chair, when a Conservative member has had something on the table that he feels is extremely important and should be moved ahead. We've always deferred to our committee practice. We've always had discussion and then we've always deferred to our committee practice of motions being dealt with in the order in which they were presented.

Now, that doesn't mean that the movers of particular motions... they can pull them off the table. We have here a list of 16 motions. Mr. Easter feels he's special today: somehow his sixteenth motion should rocket right to the top, right to the front, number one, for the first time in two and a half years....

So I think my question is a valid one in terms of what is—

The Chair: I have a point of order—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'm on a point of order. You can't interrupt a point of order with a point of order.

An hon. member: Actually, you can.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, you can't. Why would your point of order be more important than my point of order?

An hon. member: You never know.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's not.

Chair, I have the floor on a point of order. The point of order is that we have a well-established tradition, and it's something that we've reinforced time and time again in terms of how it is that we actually deal with motions.

I actually find the approach that Mr. Easter is taking is somewhat disrespectful to the committee. Why do we try to work together to establish well-agreed-to principles if we're going to cast aside those principles? It doesn't make any sense to me.

For example, Chair, the first motion that's in front of the committee right now belongs to Wayne Easter. So Wayne Easter can remove that from the list. In fact, he could have removed it from the list—it's somewhat dated—a long time ago, but he did not remove it from the list. He can do that today, though. If he decides, in order to save time, in order to get to motion number 16 first, he will remove his motion one, he can either continue to have it tabled, meaning that we'll come back to it at a later time, or, as you well know, he can actually remove his motion, and that's it. It's over with. The committee doesn't have to deal with it.

It's the same with motion two. Who does that belong to? Wayne Easter. Wayne Easter can remove that motion from the list or he can table it, meaning that we'll get back to this at a later time.

Who does motion three belong to? Wayne Easter. It's the same concept; Mr. Easter is sitting on the first three motions. In fact, most of those are very dated. They shouldn't actually be there, but Mr. Easter has decided to leave them in play, so to speak, for the committee. He's right that he could have moved on them at any time up until today, but he can also dispose of them in a heartbeat.

Monsieur Bellavance owns the fourth motion on specified risk materials. We can either debate his motion today or he can actually withdraw it or he can table it another time.

Chair, we have Alex Atamanenko sitting on motion five. Wayne Easter has, again, motion six. Wayne Easter has motion seven.

As I work through the list, Chair, we have Wayne Easter, motion eight; Wayne Easter, motion nine. Number 10 is by Randy Hoback; Francis Valeriote has number 11; and Blake Richards has number 12.

The point is, Chair, that most of the motions actually rest with the opposition right now, and my point is that we should continue in the same tradition that we've always had, which is deal with the first motions first. If they want to save time then they should remove them from the agenda, and the committee can then move to the next motion and then to the next motion in an orderly fashion.

As I just pointed out, out of the first nine motions, all nine belong to the opposition. So if they're united in their approach in wanting to advance this quickly, then remove those from the table; they should have done it a long time ago. As I said, a lot of these are dated. Their relevance has passed, but for some reason the opposition has kept these motions in front of committee.

So my recommendation, Chair, is that this committee proceed in the way in which it has always proceeded, which is that first motions are dealt with first.

• (1155)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I have a speakers list here.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): I'll try to be a little briefer than the parliamentary secretary.

Look, we had my bill. It didn't pass. Although I was skeptical, there was a tour of the biotech industry, and I think thanks to that we have been able to flesh out aspects of the biotech industry. One of the things that we've seen in the last while with the witnesses is that a number of people explained the urgency of the situation in regard to alfalfa. We're not talking about GE...we're talking about alfalfa and its effect on farmers.

So I think it would be appropriate for us. This is an urgent situation. It's more urgent than any other potential GE crop. The urgency is there.

For example, I'm willing to defer my motions. Perhaps, in the spirit of cooperation, all members would be willing to do this. Let us hammer this one out and vote on it, and then we can come back.

I'm willing to let other members have their motions discussed after that. I have no urgency for my other motions. I think it's crucial that we have a chance to debate and vote on this motion as soon as possible.

The Chair: So you and Mr. Easter are both indicating that you're willing to bypass your motions. Okay.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

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

I simply want to tell Mr. Lemieux that I agree with him when he says that, normally, motions are dealt with in the order they were presented. This is quite commendable. However, unless I am mistaken, the rules allow a member to move a motion at any time on an urgent matter in order to have it debated in committee.

A member can move a motion on any topic, even if 25 other motions have been moved earlier. Sometimes, I believe, urgent matters must absolutely be taken into accounts. I remember having moved a motion that was never put to a vote because the Conservatives did not agree. There has to be some fair-play here. We may decide to deal with the motions in the order they were tabled but that will not prevent anyone from playing political games.

Fortunately, a member is indeed entitled to move any motion. Like Alex, I have no objection to having my two motions debated after Wayne's.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'm a little surprised to hear that all of a sudden everybody is willing to give up their motions. I'm not willing to give up my order. When I brought forward my motion I respected the committee's order of precedence. I did not push it. I did not ask to jump the queue, as Mr. Easter is asking now.

When you look at the details of my motion on the Canadian Wheat Board and the purchase of lakers, that is a "time of essence" motion. They've actually spent \$65 million of farmers' money without consulting the farmers. It may or may not be a good deal, we really don't know, but that's why it's important to have all parties come forward here. If we're going to do something, we should be discussing that motion first before we move on to other business.

So it would be totally improper to do what Mr. Easter is proposing to do. As Mr. Lemieux said, we've had an order of precedence. They have made motions that they've done on purpose, I think, to just try to bog down the committee. He has a motion on the hog industry. All of a sudden the hog industry to Mr. Easter is not an important topic, I guess. The livestock sector all of a sudden to Mr. Easter is not an important topic.

• (1200)

Hon. Wayne Easter: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm asking for a ruling by the clerk on the motion.

Mr. Randy Hoback: We're talking about the motion.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: The clerk doesn't rule, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: The clerk knows the rules.

I've seen you guys filibuster before, and this is what you're up to.

An hon. member: You're trying to pull a fast one, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I moved a motion. Is it in order or not?

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I would just clarify for Mr. Easter that the clerk doesn't make motions. The clerk advises the chairman, who also knows the rules.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Sometimes he abides by them, and sometimes not.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Wayne, you're getting feisty because you're not getting your way.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I wish you'd recognize the fact that Mr. Easter is now trying to bully the committee to get his own way. I don't think it's appropriate. We've had very good working relationships at the last few sets of meetings, but all of a sudden, he's playing shenanigans, playing games. Now he thinks he can bully his way to the top, and I'm not going to let him do that.

As I was saying, he's brought forward reports. Mr. Bellavance brought forward a report on SRM products. I think that would be a good motion to look at.

Mr. Atamanenko, you talked about producer cars. Again, this winter we're moving grain with producer cars. It would've been a great motion to bring forward and look at.

But you're saying that now, for farmers who load producer cars... obviously you don't think they have a priority over other issues.

As I said, I'm not prepared to give up my place in line. If they're willing to pull their motions...and I don't think they should be allowed to table them so that they sit there forever and ever. I don't think it's appropriate. In fact, I think we should talk about a timeframe that motions can't sit there before they actually come before this committee and are addressed or tabled...or disappear.

We've seen here that Mr. Easter has bogged down the committee with motions—some of them good, some of them bad—and now he's trying to bully the committee into hearing one of his particular pet interest motions. I don't think that's something we should be entertaining at all. It really is not helpful to the good nature that we've had around the committee table this spring. I'm disappointed that he would think he can do that off the cuff. It's very disappointing to me.

One thing that both Mr. Valeriote and I tried to do this spring was to make sure we did not politicize the committee. We focused on items that were important at committee.

Of course now Mr. Easter—I guess he's sensing the winds of an election and his own defeat—is trying to put through some of his own games, so I'm very disappointed in that.

There is one other point that I'd like to make, Mr. Chair. I sat on the health committee earlier this week, and they were talking about antibiotics in feed. I was very disappointed in how Mr. Easter did not control his own colleagues. When the chicken farmers were there, they did a proper job of explaining how they go about the feed process, why it works, and how they go through checking it and so on. The members of the opposition parties, especially the Liberal Party, proceeded to attack them. It was embarrassing to watch. I was very disappointed to see that.

I don't know what they have against chicken farmers. It sure seemed that they wanted to make the point that they would rather go for the highlight or the spin, rather than actually dig into the facts and realize that the feed our chicken farmers use is actually very safe. The antibiotics they use are actually done in a process and in an order that is actually beneficial to human health.

I went out that night and had some KFC, because I'm confident in our chicken.

An hon. member: Right on.

Mr. Randy Hoback: But I'll tell you, if the Liberals would have had their way, we would have been throwing chickens off the shelves and putting farmers out of business left, right, and centre. And that's very disappointing.

Mr. Easter, I wish you would have controlled that. You are supposedly the agriculture critic. You should have been there, talking about and defending farmers' interests, and you were not. I find it very disappointing.

I was there. We talked about it. We tried to help the chicken farmers explain how they go about conducting veterinary practices. They do it in a very safe and secure manner and in cooperation with the CFIA. Why they even were in front of there is just beyond me, so....

The Chair: There is a point of order.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): I can appreciate that people have, given the current rules of the House, the ability to rag the puck and drag out debate and filibuster. But can you, as chair, please insist...?

I have the greatest respect for Mr. Hoback, and he knows that. But under these circumstances, can he keep his remarks to the issue at hand and not other events that are not relevant to the issue at hand?

I would ask you, Mr. Chair, to keep people's comments directed to the issue at hand.

The Chair: It's a good point.

Mr. Hoback.

●(1205)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, he's right, and I apologize. I was just so upset. It was unbelievable what I saw going on in that committee. I had to get it off my chest. But I apologize. I'll go back to the matter at hand.

My motion is on the Canadian Wheat Board and the purchase of lakers. The Wheat Board had an election for directors last fall. In an election for directors, you would think it would be a good time to consult with farmers on a vision for what you're going to do with the board, what the goals are for the board, and how you're going to bring benefits to farmers. They didn't do that. They hid it.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Again, Mr. Chair, on a point of order—

Mr. Randy Hoback: It's relevant to my motion.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: —we could sit for another hour and listen to everybody debate their own motions. It's not the issue at hand.

An hon. member: It is the issue at hand.

The Chair: I have a list here, Mr. Valeriote, that includes you.

What I'd like to do is not take any more on this list. I'll make my ruling, and we'll get on with this.

And you're on there. All I'm trying to do is be fair to every—

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I will be brief, believe me.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Valeriote, what I'm trying to do is explain why I feel my motion is as important as other motions on the table.

In fact looking at the timeline and the venture that the CWB has gone into, we should have actually brought this forward and had an emergency meeting on it. Hindsight is always 20/20. Maybe we should have pushed this thing a little harder and done that. Maybe we should have a special evening meeting to bring in the members of the Canadian Wheat Board and other industry professionals to talk about this motion.

It is an issue in western Canada that farmers have bought ships they had no say in, and no consultation. Some farmers who are going to retire next year are going to be paying for ships that they'll never get benefit from. They did this in secrecy behind closed doors. Nobody here can agree to that. Nobody can say that's how you run an organization like the Canadian Wheat Board. That's insulting to farmers, as I have said.

We had directors' elections where there were members of the board running for re-election who were aware of the purchase and could have talked about it, but decided not to. The reason they decided not to is they didn't want to take the risk or trust farmers that their decision was a good or bad decision. That's very disappointing. That's just one of the other nails in the coffin of the Canadian Wheat Board concerning the way it goes about conducting its business.

Two years ago, this same organization lost \$265 million of farmers' money and derivatives. Where was the emergency debate on that? According to Mr. Easter it was not important, so we weren't allowed to bring that forward.

The Chair: Randy, please keep to the topic.

Mr. Randy Hoback: It is talking about motions that were actually in front of the committee. I'm looking at the motions we have in front of us. As I've said, the motion I have here is very important. I know Blake has a motion here that I think needs to be discussed a little bit more, too. If we're willing to go through them in order of precedence, I have no problem doing that. Let's go in the order of precedence that we've established and maintain the good working

relationship that we've had in the past. I think that's the proper way to go.

As such, Mr. Chair, I cannot support Mr. Easter's motion, nor will I support it. It's just not something that we should be doing as a committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I am very disappointed, as my colleagues have already expressed, in the fact that...and Mr. Easter has consistently done this. Consistently, every issue du jour, every flip-flop he has, is now the "issue of the day".

I'm sure we'll get into this on the Roundup Ready alfalfa, but who was the parliamentary secretary when they allowed the plots for Agriculture and Agri-food? It was Mr. Easter. Now of all sudden he's decided he's going to change, he's going to flip-flop, just before he wants an election, which isn't necessary, with his coalition partners. He's decided he wants to make sure the public knows, for voting purposes, that this is his position.

But that's not what we're talking about here. We'll talk about that in a minute. What we're talking about here is motions. What we're talking about here is the fact that our committee has a policy that we will respect the order in which motions are brought up.

I know this policy may not be documented, Mr. Chairman, but if you seek the blues, I believe you will find that we have an agreement amongst all parties that we respect the order in which our motions are brought forward. I believe that is very clear in the blues surrounding the initial meetings we had, as well as in consequential meetings where we discussed this kind of thing.

The fact of the matter is that Mr. Easter has a motion on fertilizer and the fertilizer industry. This can be a very important motion, I think, with what's going on in the world today, and as prices start to escalate once again.

But Mr. Easter, instead of talking about things that we can actually get ahead of, decides to do his issue of the day. Mr. Albrecht is absolutely right: what he's doing is bullying the committee around to get his way with his coalition partners. It is absolutely unacceptable.

Mr. Chairman, we have a precedent that we have set. I refer you to page 1051 of O'Brien and Bosc, where it talks about the decision-making process in regard to motions:

A motion is needed to submit a proposal to a committee and obtain a decision on it. A motion is moved by a Member to have the committee do something, order its Chair and staff to ensure that something is done (an order) or express an opinion on a matter (resolution). Where the motion is debatable, moving of the motion triggers a period of debate. If no Member wishes to speak to the motion, the debate ends. The Chair then calls for a vote on the motion.

I'll skip forward to page 1052, under "Moving Motions", which clearly states the following:

A member of a committee may move a motion at any time in the normal course of a meeting, provided that...moving the motion does not violate any rule the committee may have adopted in respect of the period in which motions can be moved.

I do recognize that we do not have it in writing, I believe, but if you refer to the blues, it is a verbal agreement amongst all parties of this committee that we would respect the order in which motions come.

Now, part of this is so that we don't stack up motions so that the opposition or Mr. Easter or individual members can continue to throw out their "I'm doing something on the fertilizer industry". All he's doing is leaving the motion sit on the table so that he can do press releases on it whenever he feels like it.

I think, in the best interests of this committee, if we are to move forward, if Mr. Easter wants to drop or put his motions to the bottom of the list so that we can more expeditiously get to his motion, which is now his issue of the day, I'm more than happy to deal with that. But I believe it's almost a breach of privilege that other members of the committee are automatically pushed aside every time Mr. Easter decides he has a new issue of the day.

Who does this affect? It affects our government side, because we're outnumbered here. We're not going to pull the chair, because we believe in parliamentary democracy. They always talk about...

Whenever we pull the chair, the first thing Mr. Easter says is, oh, the tyranny of the majority; how can you guys do this to us? But we sit here, we play by the rules, and all he wants to do now is use the tyranny of the majority to overrule our parliamentary rights as members of Parliament to bring motions forward.

That is exactly what he is doing in this situation. He is riding roughshod over Mr. Richards' and Mr. Hoback's parliamentary privilege to bring motions forward. I think it's very disrespectful.

I think this is a very important motion that you'll be ruling on here, and I hope that you'll rule in the right way.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

•(1210)

The Chair: Mr. Shipley.

He's not...?

An hon. member: He's not here. Go to the next person.

The Chair: Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just very briefly—

The Chair: Please.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: —if you look at O'Brien and Bosc, at page 1052—

An hon. member: A point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, go ahead.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Oh. I thought he missed his opportunity.

The Chair: Well....

An hon. member: No soup for you, Bev; no soup for you.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): You're right.

I don't have any motions before you on the list of 16 here. But I've been on this committee for a couple of years, and time after time motions have come forward. I think it's been mentioned that on this side, motions have come forward that we thought would be of interest and needed to be dealt with. It may have taken some discussion, but we've always agreed that those motions would slide back and fit within the order there.

In fact, I think some of those motions have been withdrawn. I think if you go back about a year ago, to move ahead—I forget now what the topic was—we withdrew a motion so the debate.... It had either lost its significance, in time, or we wanted to move ahead with what was next on the order sheet.

I find it pretty interesting, though, that in this motion it says "the Standing Committee on Agriculture & Agri-food recommend that the government place"; then it goes on for a little while. That is a motion by Mr. Easter.

If you go to motion six on advanced payment that came forward on September 2, 2010, it reads, "that the Committee undertake a review on an urgent basis of the Advanced Payment Program".

Well, as he does, he has most of the motions that are on here. He keeps putting motions out. He talks about dealing with this "on an urgent basis", because this is the item of the day; we need to deal with this issue now.

That was in September. He has never followed up in terms of getting this motion in front of the committee.

If you go to Mr. Atamanenko's motion, number 13, you will see that it came forward on January 28, "that this Committee recommend that the government immediately advise US President". Well, this is March 10.

That hasn't been pushed in terms of moving other motions aside to get to this urgent, immediate motion.

•(1215)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): The President's not taking our calls.

Mr. Bev Shipley: He has actually taken a lot of calls from the Prime Minister, and that's been really good—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bev Shipley: —in terms of how we're moving ahead with our trade and why some of these motions in terms of trade and moving and getting some of the issues around COOL, for example, resolved. It is important that our Prime Minister is actually getting the answers and getting the calls from the President.

At any rate, aside from that, I should go back to the motion debate. I don't know how and I don't know why the opposition parties are saying, "Well, you know, just because now we've got another event of the day right now...."

I don't think anybody is saying that the concerns around Roundup Ready alfalfa won't be a concern at the time. But I go back; as my colleague said, they authorized Roundup Ready alfalfa in 2005. This is now March of 2011, and I don't know just what the big emergency is to put a moratorium on it.

Well, I do know, because they're in the opportune position, Mr. Chair, to call an election. He wants to get out all the information he can that would help support him and say how bad Roundup Ready alfalfa is, and yet he was in the Liberal government and was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture who actually authorized it.

The Chair: We're not actually debating this motion as yet.

Mr. Bev Shipley: My point, though, is that he has asked to bring this forward and jump the queue on 15 other ones. I would ask that he withdraw his motions as we work down through the process—and the ones who have their motions—so that we can get to number 16.

My colleagues have one on the Wheat Board and we have one in terms of the rail, which are significant to a motion that is immediate. As wheat is moving out, it has urgency because it's actually happening.

Mr. Chair, I don't disagree about having a discussion and reflecting the concerns about Roundup Ready alfalfa, but there's a process, and we're going to follow the process. That's been a precedent that has been set by this committee on all other motions.

I'll just reiterate that if they want to step back and defer or withdraw those motions out of precedent, out of respect for the rest of what the committee has done, then we could move ahead with that particular motion. It's not a good motion, but we could have that debate on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I'd like to say that presenting a strong argument about a compelling issue at this committee should not be regarded as bullying. I don't think anybody on this committee bullies. I don't think anybody bullies anyone on this committee. You simply make strong arguments about very compelling issues.

People do take advantage of the rules from time to time, by filibustering and things of that nature, but bullying is not—

Mr. Brian Storseth: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'm just addressing the issue of bullying.

• (1220)

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

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'd like to point out that Mr. Valeriote is not on the topic of the motion. For the record, he's actually the one who is filibustering at this point.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: No, that's not true at all. I'm dealing with the motion at hand, Mr. Storseth. Don't make inaccurate comments for the sake of the record.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: I'm dealing with the motion at hand.

Secondly, Mr. Chair, page 1052 of O'Brien and Bosc—

The Chair: I'm quite aware of what the—

Mr. Francis Valeriote: —gives you the authority to rule on this motion.

Mr. Shipley made reference to precedent. It has been a precedent that certain motions have taken precedence over other motions.

If you look at Mr. Hoback and I, and my motion of October 30, there were several motions that preceded that, and we have undertaken—

The Chair: I would just point out that the previous motions were pulled off. We went around the table, and they were pulled off. I distinctly remember that.

Anyway, continue.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: There's no precedent that requires one motion to be heard after the other. It simply is not the case. There have been many times when somebody has put their hand up, brought a motion, and it's been dealt with. Admittedly, maybe it was by the inadvertence of committee with those who brought motions previously, but nevertheless there is no established precedent that one be heard after the other.

You do have the authority and the jurisdiction, on page 1052 of O'Brien and Bosc, to hear this motion first.

The Chair: Yes.

I have already turned down some potential speakers. As I said, I'm not taking any more on the list, but I still have Mr. Eyking and Mr. Lemieux.

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

I'm quite disappointed with the rhetoric from the government side. This is not about Mr. Easter. They shouldn't be doing a character assassination on him. This is about procedure.

I don't know where Mr. Storseth got that book there, but he should call his whip. It is very common in House of Commons committees for the majority of the committee to prioritize how motions go. We've done this here. I've seen it on the foreign affairs committee. It's a regular thing.

Without further ado, Mr. Chair, you should have your clerk rule on this, and let's get it done.

The Chair: The clerk doesn't rule, I do.

Hon. Mark Eyking: No, I meant advise you on the ruling. Let's get 'er done.

The Chair: I've already done that.

Mr. Lemieux, you're the last speaker.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair.

The first thing is that I'm not sure why you're limiting the speakers list on this, because normally, out of respect for members, if members have a point of view they want to expound upon, they need to be given that opportunity. Limiting debate and limiting a list serves no purpose, if we're to have full and open debate.

I would ask you to revisit that, because there are other MPs.... For example, Mr. Richards has a motion that sits in front of Mr. Easter's motion, and we haven't heard from Mr. Richards yet about whether he would be willing to let his motion slide and why he feels that it should slide or not slide. How does he feel about it? He will be directly impacted by your ruling.

What's going to happen here, Chair, is that you're going to make a ruling. If you rule in favour of the fact that we're going to actually respect the precedent of this committee, which is that we follow motions in the order in which they are presented, then we'll challenge your ruling and overturn it. That's what's going to happen. Then Mr. Richards, who actually has a motion that's sitting in front of Mr. Easter's, will not have an opportunity to explain what his position is on this. And I just don't think that's right.

I actually think that other members who want to participate in the debate today should be able to participate in this debate. I see no useful purpose in cutting members off because Mr. Easter feels that he has an urgent priority. That's his opinion. I think what we've heard from my colleagues, Chair, is that it is only his opinion.

There have been many times on this committee when a member's had an opinion, and we've had fulsome debate on that opinion and have not cut people off just because a member feels that it's urgent or is in his best interest.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, I just want to point out that my decision to limit the speakers list was not based on Mr. Easter's wants or needs. It was based on the fact that we're not in debate. We started out with points of order on his motion to bring forth, and I think I have been more than fair in giving a chance for pretty well everybody around the table to have their opinions put out there on whether they agree with—

• (1225)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, that's not the case. Mr. Richards asked to be added to the list, and you said no. He actually has a motion that sits—

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, I'm not going to debate it with you, but I gave fair warning well in advance that I was not taking any more. So it wasn't a surprise. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Let me continue. Mr. Easter has a big Cheshire cat smile on there.

The first thing, Chair, is that there was no consultation on this. Out of respect, you would think that the opposition would have consulted with at least one of the MPs on this side of the table.

We meet two times per week, two hours each time. We're all in the House, generally, for question period.

I have Mr. Easter's contact information here, and he has mine. Why do we have that? So that we can consult.

I have yours as well, André, in case you didn't know that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Why do we have that information, Chair? For consultation. It's not to cook up deals; it's out of respect, to discuss things that are important.

If this is a burning issue, why was there no consultation? This doesn't make any sense to me. Normally, when there has been a burning issue, there has been at least a modicum of respect, to approach the other side to say this is what we're thinking of doing at the next meeting. We do this on all sorts of matters—but not today, not on this matter. I do not understand that.

The second thing concerns the procedure here. There is a way out of this. I don't want you to think that there's no way out of this. The way out of this is for Mr. Easter to ask for unanimous consent to move his motion forward. That's the way we've done it before; it's the way we've always done it. I don't understand why we're changing it today. What is so urgent about today?

I think it is showing lack of respect, as I mentioned before, for the committee, because we have a well-established procedure, and for some reason Mr. Easter and his colleagues want to trample over that procedure without...without due course.

The third thing I want to mention, Chair, is Roundup Ready alfalfa. We're in the middle of a biotech study, right in the middle of it. We're going to be calling more witnesses; we're going to be preparing a report on this. This is the kind of thing you would find in the report. It's why we're doing a biotech study—so that we can look at all aspects of the situation.

We've had all sorts of witnesses, Chair. We've had witnesses from the organic sector. We've had witnesses from the biotechnology sector. We've had farmers themselves. We've had representation from farm groups, farm associations, research groups, research associations. We've heard a good diversity of opinion, as we're supposed to. We're then supposed to work on a report. We would have a draft report prepared; we would review that report; we would look at including things in recommendations.

What is in this motion is actually short-circuiting the work we're doing on biotech. If we were to follow this example, why would we not just do away with the report and start injecting motions into meetings about what would normally be recommendations in reports? It doesn't make any sense.

We just finished a report today on programming. There are recommendations, but those recommendations weren't put in front of committee as motions; they were done in the context of a report after a study. It was the same when we studied competitiveness in agriculture. It was the same when we studied young farmers. The main recommendations came about in the report. They weren't rocketed to the top of a motions list. They weren't strong-armed by the opposition, nor by us. Instead, we did our due diligence by having witnesses come; we gave thoughtful consideration to their testimony; we had a draft report prepared; we reviewed the draft report as a committee; we had debate on certain points; we had debate on certain recommendations; and then we tabled the report in the House.

What baffles me here, Chair, is that we're in the middle of a biotech study. This committee has traveled together as a committee on the biotech study, we've touched on Roundup Ready alfalfa, we've heard from different witnesses about certain concerns. But this should be included in the report. This is why we do a report. This is why we do a fulsome study. This is why we have different witnesses come in.

This is actually short-circuiting the work of the committee. It's highly irregular for this committee. It's actually undermining the goodwill in this committee.

My colleagues have brought up that for two and a half years, for the most part—I would say 90% of the time—we have been able to work in a very constructive and cooperative manner. The times we have not, if you go back and check the record, are the times when the opposition have pulled this kind of game, when they have tried to bully and strong-arm a motion. That's when the committee has broken down.

When we're working on a study, as I mentioned—on competitiveness and agriculture, on young farmers, on biotech—we tend to work in a spirit of cooperation and in a spirit of wanting to do what's best for the farm community. We have tended not to leverage our position for partisan advantage.

• (1230)

And that's what's happening here, Chair. You should see this motion for what it is. There was no consultation done, no respect shown for the past precedent of this committee. There was no respect for the way in which this committee normally conducts itself, no respect for the study that we're doing, for the report that's going to follow. This is to gain some type of partisan advantage, and I think what the partisan advantage is linked to is the confusing signals that they sent out on on Bill C-494.

That's the second point, Chair. I'm mentioning that we're in the middle of a biotech study, so we have ample opportunity to—

The Chair: I presume you meant Bill C-474.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, Bill C-474; I'm sorry.

We have ample opportunity now to look at the content of this motion as part of our study and as part of our report.

But the other opportunity that we had, Chair, was when we were studying Mr. Atamanenko's bill, Bill C-474. That was a look at GM products, GM agricultural crops. We had debate on it, and Mr. Easter sent out extremely confusing signals. He supported Mr. Atamanenko's bill every step of the way. He did it in the House, he did it in committee, he did it on motions, on debate. When it came time to vote, he voted in favour of Mr. Atamanenko's bill at every single step except the last step. At the last step, he sent a confusing signal to the agricultural community, because he had been going along with Bill C-474, sowing confusion and dissent, and—

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

The Chair: Yes, I was just.... It may be the same.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, this is important—

Hon. Wayne Easter: I mean, this is absolutely ridiculous. As I said on Bill C-474 in the beginning, we wanted to see it go to debate. I made it very clear in the beginning that we didn't support the bill, but said let's have the debate and discussion. And in fact it's out of that debate and discussion that this motion comes forward. We have seen the seriousness of the issue.

I'm getting a little tired of the attack here, but let's get down to business.

The Chair: I was just about to suggest that you stick to the topic, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, this touches on the point. Mr. Easter wants his way: like, Mr. Lemieux, it's great that you're talking, but

stop talking, because I want my way; I want my motion moved ahead; we'll talk about all this when the motion is actually tabled.

Chair, what I am saying is that the motion should not be reviewed by committee right now. We have other motions in advance.

What he just said is exactly my point. That's the kind of attitude that is causing a breakdown in committee. We just worked together very well for the period of an hour on a report, and now everything is blown to bits because we have a motion that has come in front—

Hon. Wayne Easter: If you were being honest about it, you would admit that you guys prevented witnesses from coming before this committee whom Alex and all of us had invited in. With your games over there, you prevented witnesses from coming forward.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: How did he get the—?

The Chair: Order, order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: It happened, and you know it.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Lemieux, please finish up.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, you're limiting debate again.

The Chair: I respectfully ask you to....

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I understand what you're asking, Chair, but the point is that what Mr. Easter is asking of the committee is unfair and breaks with the tradition of this committee and does nothing but sow hard feelings amongst members. That's not conducive to the work we need to do for farmers. I actually think that farmers want to see that this committee can work in a cohesive manner, that members can work together from opposite parties, and that partisanship is not part of this committee. And that's not what we're getting today.

I'll come back to this lack of consultation, Chair. On many other issues, particularly when we're doing a study, we've had consultation. There have been times when I have spoken to members in the House of Commons, simply crossed the floor to talk to them after question period or before question period to verify a point—this is what we're thinking of doing next, and what do you think of it?—so that we work in a cooperative fashion. We're not pulling fast ones, which is what's happening today.

On top of pulling fast ones, he's trying to ram it down your throat, Chair, by getting you to limit me and to limit other members who want to speak on this motion. That's what's happening.

The Chair: We're not speaking on the motion yet. This is on the....

•(1235)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I understand that. This is on the eligibility of the motion.

The Chair: I'm asking you to finish up, because I think your position is quite clear.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It is clear. It absolutely is clear. What I'm saying is that this committee should not allow Mr. Easter to move his motion to the front of the pack, because it is unfair to other members who have tabled motions, who have respected the modus operandi of this committee. It is unfair to them, and it's strong-arming.

They know that they sit there with more votes than we have, and they're going to ram this down not just our throats but down your throat, Chair, because they're going to challenge your ruling—watch what will happen—unless you rule in favour of them.

Either way, they're going to run with this, and for that reason—

The Chair: I'll deal with that issue.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —okay—I actually I think that Mr. Richards, to go back to this issue, should have a say in this matter, because he has a motion. You should hear from him on his motion that sits before Mr. Easter's motion. Your ruling has an impact on Mr. Richards, yet you have not heard from him.

I think it would be premature for you to rule on the eligibility of Mr. Easter's motion if you have not heard from MPs who have motions that sit in front of Mr. Easter's motion and would be materially affected by the ruling you give.

Even if your ruling is in favour of everything that we've been saying, or that I've been saying, it will be challenged.

The Chair: I'm not taking anybody else.

Mr. Bellavance, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I only want to say that Mr. Lemieux is once again challenging your decision. I believe it is time to move forward.

Furthermore, my translation system was not working. Could he repeat what he said, please?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, I can.

[*English*]

Chair, what I'm saying is that I think you should at least let Mr. Richards speak on this, because he has a motion that sits in front of Mr. Easter's motion.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

I agree with a lot of the facts. I do agree that our precedent here has been in dealing with motions as they come up; call it respect or what have you.

With regard to allowing Mr. Richards to speak—no offence, and knowing him, I don't think he's going to take any—I've made a decision on that. This is not debate on the motion; as I said earlier, I

think we've had a very good dialogue, and I think we have a pretty good feeling.

Where my hands are tied...although I personally disagree with how this is coming forth, we have nothing in writing, and I have no choice but to rule that Mr. Easter's motion is allowable.

With that, Mr. Easter, you can move it, and we'll move into debate.

Yes, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Are we actually now proceeding on to Mr. Easter's motion?

The Chair: Once he officially reads it into the record, the debate on it will start.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

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

The Chair: Mr. Easter, read your....

On a point of order, Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Stanton and I are both just visiting this committee, and maybe we could just get a little bit of a “pre-empt”, just to know what's going on. We're a little bit vague; we just came in at the end of this thing.

Maybe the clerk or somebody could fill us in.

The Chair: We have 16 motions in front of us that have been tabled by various members. Mr. Easter has moved number 16, and the debate was on whether that should be.... It hasn't been the practice that we do that—we usually go through them—but under the rules, I have no choice but to rule the motion in favour.

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

Before I read the motion, I would say to Randy that we will be supporting his Wheat Board motion because we believe they should come before the committee.

The reason that we had to move this up is that with some of the other motions we considered urgent, and still regard as urgent, we find that the government members will—as we've seen here previously—talk it out so that we don't get them forward.

At any rate, the motion that I move is as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food recommend that the government place a moratorium on any approval of Roundup Ready Alfalfa until the government completes public research:

- (a) into Canada's ability to ensure the genetic integrity, production and preservation of a diversity of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), non-GMO and organic alfalfa production;
- (b) the ability of Canada's handling and transportation system to ensure segregation of forage seeds and detection of genetic commingling in alfalfa seeds and hay;
- (c) the development of industry-led, third party audit and verification systems;
- (d) that these findings be reported back to the Committee; and
- (e) that this motion be reported to the House.

The urgency of this motion in part comes about as a result of the Bill C-474 discussions, including Mr. Atamanenko's motion, and in part as a result of the discussions that we're currently undertaking on biotechnology, for which a number of us have travelled across the country.

Given the U.S. decision on genetically modified alfalfa and allowing it to be commercialized, following that decision, Secretary Vilsack has come out and laid down some pretty tough conditions after the fact. I believe they got the cart before the horse.

So there is a need for this, no question. There's a need for the federal government to ensure that genetically modified organisms such as GE alfalfa do what it is claimed and not what should not be permitted, namely, to cross-contaminate. There is a lot at risk there. We've heard this from many witnesses. The foundation of the organic industry in livestock production is alfalfa. That could be undermined by cross-contamination. So we're worried about that. That's why we need some of the safeguards.

At this time in Canada, the provisions to prevent cross-contamination from occurring have not been demonstrated to be in place. I'll not go through the things that have been happening in the U.S. to prove that. To save time, I'll just make the point that the federal government should ensure that the relevant questions and concerns are addressed prior to approval—not afterwards, as was done in the United States.

This is a moratorium, not a ban. I want to underline that. It is not a ban. The reason for it is to give the Government of Canada the opportunity to ensure that there are no negative consequences from the commercialization of GE alfalfa. Clearly the United States administration is of the opinion that there are reasons to be concerned—thus the call for studies and the development of mitigating provisions.

The course of this action in Canada would be the reverse of what it is in the United States. We believe the studies and the development of mitigating provisions must be in place prior to the approval being granted.

This motion implements a moratorium on the basis of the necessity to address the science involved. It's motivated by a need for scientific information that has yet to be presented. There are a lot of economic concerns and we realize those. Should GE alfalfa contaminate alfalfa, we could lose European markets, undermining the organic industry. And the list goes on.

• (1240)

So there are lots of economic considerations. But what I'm basically saying in the thrust of the motion is let's do the sound science. These studies would be at, and should be at, the government's expense, not the industry's.

The last point I'd like to make that shows the seriousness, I think, of the issue is that according to testimony presented to a committee in the United States, data from GE alfalfa trials in the United States show that 11 of 15 plots were contaminated, despite a 900-metre buffer being obeyed. And some of those plots were 2.5 kilometres away. So some of the buffers we're talking about that would supposedly allow safety have been proven not to in the United States.

In a submission to the USDA last year, the National Organic Coalition cited studies from the USDA itself, which found that "... honey bees can cross-pollinate at distances over 6 miles. Alkali bees cross-pollinate at 4-5 miles. All of those distances are much further

than those included in Monsanto's 'best practices.'" That's what was determined in U.S. hearings.

I think that for us as a committee, and for the Government of Canada, it's important that we err on the side of caution and ensure that the federal government addresses these matters prior to, not subsequent to, any approval.

I would go back to 1994. In April of that year, this committee recommended unanimously that the federal government of the day, which was a Liberal government, impose a moratorium on the approval of Monsanto's recombinant bovine growth hormone, bovine somatotropin—or rBST, as it was more commonly known. Health Canada had been posed to grant approval of this product, and it was only after the intervention of this committee that the federal government granted a moratorium on the approval, with the expectation that the concerns raised with respect to that biotech product would be responded to by Monsanto. To date, rBGH has not been approved for use in this country.

I believe this committee did its job in 1994 with one particular genetically modified product. I believe it was the right decision then. And I believe if we were to support this motion today and ensure that these criteria were met, it would be the right decision for this committee to make. It would be the right decision for the Government of Canada to err on the side of caution.

We've heard lots of concerns from the organic industry, and I think we should respect those concerns. Therefore, I ask you to support this motion.

Thank you.

• (1245)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Hoback.

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

I'm still a little disappointed in how we came to this, but that's fine. We're here now. We need to deal with the motion as is.

The concern I have isn't necessarily with the motion itself.

Wayne, I think your heart's in the right place here. When I go to my farmers in my area—we have a lot of alfalfa production—they're concerned about Roundup Ready alfalfa. There's no question about it. They don't know what the drift tolerance is or the pollination areas are. They've heard stories out of the U.S., and they've heard stories out of Canada. There is a lot of information that needs to be looked at and talked about here, for sure. There's no question about that.

I get a little concerned, though, when we start using U.S. data, because you can't use data out of Arizona and then take it into northern Saskatchewan. The logistics are summer versus winter. We have this thing called "winter". We have our leafcutter bees that go into hibernation, where in alfalfa they could be going year round. The pollination areas can be totally different. I just use that as one example.

But I don't want to defend it; as I said, my farmers are saying very clearly that they have some serious concerns. That's where I was hoping in our biotech report that we could actually start to flesh out what those concerns were and then flesh out what the industry was saying with regard to how they're handling it. I wanted it with Canadian data, not American or European data, because the environmental situation around that data is totally different.

You can't take a data pack out of Arizona and take it into northern Saskatchewan. It just does not work. We need to see that in northern Saskatchewan, if that's the way we want to go.

Now, my understanding is that in 2005 the Liberal government went through the regulatory process on this product and actually approved it. It actually has regulatory approval here in Canada. But I also understand that there is no variety in the registration process at this point in time that is coming forward for this year. This is something that is happening in the U.S.

Now that it's happening in the U.S., I have some concerns about the pollution coming up here if they're not able to keep the integrity of their system. Do we do as they did with the honeybees, where they banned all the queen bees coming out of the U.S.? Do we ban all the alfalfa coming out of the U.S. to keep our integrity? Is that where we're going? I really don't know. I don't know what the answer is. But that was point of the study. That's my concern. We're coming out, before we finish the study, with recommendations that may or may not be right. I really don't know.

I'd like to hear all sides of the story before I say yes or no. I just feel I don't have the information in front of me to say yes or no. How do we move forward on this? This is the problem I have, because there are concerns. There is no doubt about that. I think everyone around this committee would say that our farmers are very concerned about the usefulness of alfalfa, especially Roundup alfalfa.

We also understand how important alfalfa is in the fertilization process for the organic sector. They can substitute to peas or lentils in certain parts of the country of Canada to get their nitrogen requirements, if that's an option. But again, I'd like to see the data set here in Canada.

We did have a data set done under the regulatory side of things, to say that it's safe for human consumption. As a government, when you take a step back, when we're talking about human consumption, they're saying there's no issue here, but there is a marketing issue. There is a marketing issue in terms of whether the Europeans will accept it and some of those things.

Those concerns are definitely valid concerns, but what is the role of the Canadian government here? Is it the role to start restricting where and who and what we can sell and where we can sell and what we can't sell? Or is it just to ensure that what we do sell, what you put on your table what you eat, is actually safe to consume, is actually safe for the cow to eat? That's where it starts to get really dicey, because we start going into a grey zone now. Where does it start and where does it stop? You could say, in this situation, on alfalfa, this might be a good example of where you may want to go into that grey zone and say, no, we don't want it.

But then what about canola? If we would have used that example in this scenario, we would not have some of the GMO varieties of

canola. We would not have yields pushing 50 or 60 bushels an acre right now in western Canada. We would not have the infrastructure of crushing plants, the employment and the value-added sector in Saskatchewan and Alberta. All that was because we used safe science as the approval mechanism to ensure that the food that we got, the oil that came from the canola seed, was actually safe to eat.

That's why you need to have the science approach, and that's why I'm not willing to bend on the science approach at this point in time unless there's a reason to do it. Is there a way whereby we can accommodate the farmers who don't want to do it? Is there a way to ensure that the guys in organics won't have cross-pollination? I'm not sure. We need to figure that one out.

That is definitely an issue that needs to be discussed, but I don't want to put something like this motion in front of somebody right now without hearing all the sides. That's the concern I have. It's really awkward to have this motion now just because of that: we don't have all the facts in front of us.

• (1250)

I know you'd agree with me, Mr. Atamanenko. You want to hear all the sides before you make a decision.

In some ways, this motion would be better as a recommendation in the biotech study itself. Then we would at least be able to back it up with witness testimony from both sides, and then we could probably address it better.

As I said, though, it's sitting here in front of us, and we need to deal with it. We need to figure out what Mr. Easter is talking about.

He mentions in the motion "Canada's ability to ensure the genetic integrity, production and preservation of a diversity of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), non-GMO and organic alfalfa production". Well, those issues aren't just in alfalfa. If we were to look at a GMO wheat or a GMO barley somewhere down the road, those issues would also have to be re-addressed in this situation.

Again, you take the balancing of what we need for food requirements throughout the world. We know that organics aren't going to feed the world. I don't care what anybody says. That's pretty well agreed upon among the experts around the world. So if we're going to have people starving just because we want to go to organics, is that the right way to go? Is that a responsible measurement for farmers?

We also know that the organics have a right to make a living. We understand that. They have the right to market their products to be able to put a label on something they believe is right, even if that label has some conditions around it, has some.... I'm looking for the proper word. I don't want to offend anybody. "Regulatory" isn't the right word; what I'm trying to say is "standards".

When we look at the organic sector and when we're pulling organic vegetables out of the U.S. and Mexico, the standards they're using for their organics sector are very questionable compared to the standards we use here in Canada. Canada has a much different standard system. But the reality is that when we put the label "organic" on there, the consumer doesn't necessarily know which standards are being followed for that product. They know that for wheat it's one set of standards, and they know for lettuce it's another. But if it's coming out of a third country and we have no clue what their standards are, we cannot ensure what they're claiming is true.

So again, it creates an issue in the organic sector of getting them into a situation where they have a set of standards that can accommodate the need for other farmers to use GMO products. What we're talking about is low-level presence so it still meets the organic standard the consumer wants, with the understanding that the farmer next door is producing safe food also and isn't restricting his options.

There are so many issues in this debate. To try to round it up into one motion is very awkward. And I think it's unfortunate, because we have a good study going and we're actually bringing forward a lot of good witnesses.

Even Mr. Atamanenko would agree with me; it's given him an opportunity to bring forward the concerns he had when he brought through Bill C-474. Even though I could not support his motion or his bill—I think he understands why I couldn't support it—I think he appreciates the fact that he can still vet the problems and concerns that he is hearing.

We need to see that report finished before we can start making motions and recommendations. I feel we're only halfway through it.

Mr. Chair, I'm looking at this and I'm just thinking it's premature, at this point, to take any "yes" or "no" on this thing. I really don't know.

I will reiterate, though, that the farmers in my riding are concerned about Roundup alfalfa. It is an issue, and we need to deal with it. We need to have some imagination to do it in such a way that we do not chase away that investment in the GMO and the biotech sectors. As we have heard, GMO is just one small tool in the biotech sector. A lot of the companies are saying it's too expensive a tool to use, so they're using other methods that are non-GMO to bring forward new products.

The pulse sector is a good example of that. If we look at the new varieties coming out of the pulse sector and what they're addressing—the need for fertilizer, the need for water—there is a good example that I think we can look at to see advancements in varieties that are non-GMO that work for everybody.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll wrap up my concerns. I'll turn it back to you.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux, you have three minutes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair.

Having read through the motion, I would say it is a motion that is definitely worthy of consideration and debate. We are in the middle

of the biotech study as Mr. Hoback mentioned. We've heard the concerns that farmers and farm groups have about Roundup Ready alfalfa, and I think we need to seriously consider the testimony we've heard. We need to finalize this into a report. We're just not there yet. We haven't heard everybody. We haven't had all the witnesses. We're not at the end of the report. We're in the middle of the report.

So there is nothing wrong with this motion. The issue is just the way in which it was tabled, Chair. If it was so important, I don't understand why there was no consultation. We've worked so hard as a committee to have a good, positive relationship amongst members. There has been no consultation on this at all, and it has basically been strong-armed to the top of the list.

I don't understand that. I think about motivation, and the only thing I can think of, Chair, is that.... Mr. Easter sent very confusing signals during Bill C-474. He supported Alex Atamanenko's bill every step of the way. He voted for it every step of the way except the last step. When it came time to actually pass the bill and move it to the Senate, he voted against it.

He used to be president of the NFU, Chair, and I think some of these groups are very unhappy with him. He's trying to make up the ground now by giving his 10-minute speech on how outraged he is about alfalfa.

As I said, this motion is worthy of more study and more debate. There's nothing wrong with this motion, but the way in which it was presented was completely wrong, and I think it was coming from that advantage, Chair.

I'll just give you an example of some things that need to be considered. There is a move, particularly in Europe, from zero tolerance to low-level presence. What caused undue hardship for our farmers was this zero-tolerance policy of Europe whereby if there was a single grain in there that was GM, the whole shipment was rejected. Of course that is unreasonable. We've agreed on committee that this is an unreasonable approach. It's not manageable, and it's not affordable either for us as the providers of grains and alfalfa or for the purchasers either, because of course they're rejecting crops all over, and the price is going up because the supply is going down. In a sense they are limiting their own markets.

So what are some things that need to be considered before outright bans are considered? There are things like low-level presence. What sort of emphasis should the government be placing on promoting low-level presence, which of course allows for some level of presence to be considered acceptable provided there's no risk or threat to health and safety?

That's the kind of thing we're looking at in committee. What are some of the other factors? It's easy to say...an outright ban, but what are some of the other factors that could actually help the industry and help our farmers? This is one of them. We're starting to see movement.

As you are probably aware—and as, I think, the committee is aware—only one to two weeks ago Europe decided that when it comes to feed they will accept low-level presence. This is a dramatic game-changer. This is a huge shift, and yet it's not considered in this motion.

So I am divided on this, because on the one hand this motion is worthy of consideration, and it's worthy of discussion, and it's worthy of debate. On the other hand, the manner in which this motion was brought in front of committee, the manner in which it was bullied onto the list and bullied to the top, I completely disagree with.

I also disagree with the fact that we are in the middle of a study, and full consideration needs to be given to biotechnology, which as we know and have said many times is not just GM. The GM is just a small subset, a small microcosm, of biotechnology at large, and we are studying biotechnology.

So I think it's important that we continue with our study and that we consider something like what's in this motion as part of the study.

It should be a recommendation in the study that can actually be part of what our witnesses said. Right now this kind of stands on its own. There are no reference points on this motion, and we don't know what testimony contributed to it or took away from it.

Hon. Wayne Easter: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (1300)

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to have to...

We're out of time, Mr. Lemieux.

An hon. member: There you go.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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