

Western Grain Transportation Act

Mr. Pepin: Resist temptation.

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): I felt, Mr. Speaker, I should rise in my place and express some very serious concerns on behalf not only of my constituents, many of whom are deeply concerned about the implications of these two motions, but also about the broader implications of Bill C-155.

First of all, since I do not believe this has been done yet in the course of debate, I would like to clarify what is in fact before the House. We are now dealing with Clause 19 relating to certain duties and functions of the Administrator under the Act. Motion No. 39 would add to this clause the following:

The provisions of this Part respecting the duties and functions of the Administrator do not restrict the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board under the Canadian Wheat Board Act to make available the quantities and types of grain necessary to achieve sales commitments on behalf of, and in the interests of producers.

That motion was moved by the Hon. Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Gustafson). The amendment proposed in Motion No. 40 would replace Clause 19(3) with the following:

The provisions of this Part respecting the duties and functions of the Administrator do not restrict the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board under Section 21(k) of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, or any Orders of the Governor in Council, to make available the quantities and types of grain needed to achieve sales commitments.

That motion was moved by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin), who has done such an outstanding job both in committee and in this House in attempting to preserve the historic Crow rate.

Looking at the history of these two motions in the committee hearings, I am not going to take the time of the House to go into detail but I think it is important to note that Motion No. 39 attempts to restore the wording moved by the Conservative Party at committee stage and subsequently weakened by a Liberal Party subamendment. I believe it was the Hon. Member for Parkdale-High Park (Mr. Flis) who moved an amendment in response to the Tory proposal and the Liberal subamendment was carried.

While we support the essence of both motions, clearly Motion No. 40 should be adopted by this House. It is a much stronger version of Motion No. 39 and effectively more in touch with the representations made by the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board, Esmond Jarvis, who said in his brief that he was very concerned about the shifting of powers to the Administrator and did not want to see any erosion whatsoever of these essential and, I might add, historic powers of the Canadian Wheat Board. His brief very graphically illustrated the need for Motion No. 40 to be adopted by this House. He said:

The Board still feels that the system operates most efficiently and effectively if grain transportation is fully co-ordinated by the major sales agency.

That, of course, is today and has been historically the Canadian Wheat Board. He went on:

If this is not permitted, it should be clear that we view any further reduction in the Board's ability to co-ordinate transportation, as a very serious step backward for the export sales program for Western Canadian grains.

Our strong concern is that with the establishment of a Grain Transportation Agency by this Act . . . and under Paragraph 97(b) of the Canada Grain Act, further powers could be shifted by Order-in-Council from the CWB to this agency at a later date.

It is for that reason that we propose Motion No. 40, Mr. Speaker. We are most concerned that under no circumstances should the existing powers of the Canadian Wheat Board be in any way weakened, particularly by regulatory action which is taken without any opportunity for the producers to have input.

The powers of the Canadian Wheat Board have been set out very clearly by my colleagues in the past. Certainly the central concept of the Board is at the core of our support for the existing Crow rate and the existing system of marketing, and that is the concept of orderly marketing. I know that the concept of orderly marketing is one which the Conservative and Liberal Parties have never felt particularly comfortable with, but certainly in my view that concept of orderly marketing as exemplified by the work of the Canadian Wheat Board is essential. Any actions which might be taken by the Government to erode the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board, particularly by regulation, will be vigorously resisted by us. It will not be just with smoke and mirrors, as is the case with the Conservative amendment in Motion No. 39. What we propose is real and effective powers for the Canadian Wheat Board.

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The Canadian Wheat Board is in fact one of the most accountable, open and democratic agencies in Canada. It is not a Government funded agency; it is an agency which is funded entirely by the producers. It has an annual report which is in fact delivered to farmers in every community it serves. Members of the Board fan out and speak to farmers in communities big and small in all parts of the prairie provinces.

Motions Nos. 39 and 40 should not in fact even be necessary. The suggestion that the historic powers of the Canadian Wheat Board be eroded is one which should not be made in this day and age. Yet CP Rail, and a number of other powerful resources, have effectively coalesced in an attempt to weaken the powers of the Board and transfer those important powers to the Administrator, taking them out of the hands of the Canadian Wheat Board. Mr. Gibbings, who is a neighbour of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Saskatoon East (Mr. Ogle) and does not live far from the mother of the Hon. Member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn), has had a very distinguished career as a Wheat Board Commissioner. Before that he was president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and played bridge with the Hon. Member for Saskatoon West. He stated, and I quote:

It is imperative that grain sales and grain transportation not be separated. The Canadian Wheat Board must be able to arrange the transportation of its own product or it cannot fulfil its obligations to western grain producers or their customers overseas. The board's marketing success, meaning sales success, depends on its ability to make day-by-day or even hour-by-hour decisions on grain movement. Its flexibility must not be compromised.

Those were the words, Mr. Speaker, of an individual who certainly is very experienced in both transportation and sales of grain in the prairie provinces. We in this Party certainly support the essence of Motions Nos. 39 and 40. However, I