



HANSARD
HOUSE OF COMMONS
APRIL 20, 2004
EMERGENCY DEBATE

[S. O. 52]

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[English]

↑ **Avian Flu**



The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely, the avian flu.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to address this very important issue this evening. As we all know, this virus, as we are told, is probably spread by wild birds and has struck chicken and turkey operations in British Columbia's Fraser Valley. I think the Fraser Valley alone represents 84% of B.C.'s \$1 billion poultry industry. That is a huge industry. The impact on our communities in the Fraser Valley at large will be significant.

We should emphasize that this virus is not the same strain as the influenza that jumped the species barrier in Southeast Asia and infected 34 people, killing 23. There is some comfort to be taken from that particular fact.

We are told that on Monday, April 5, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ordered a cull of the 19 million birds to determine the bird-to-bird vector of the disease. Visitors,

workers and vehicles from farm sites are being disinfected as a result. Warning notices are being posted throughout the region. Farms that have been depopulated and disinfected will then have sentry birds posted in them for 21 days. Those birds will then be tested. If they are found to be clean, the farmer may begin to rebuild his operation. Poultry industry officials are in agreement with these actions.

To date, we are told, 13 commercial barns have been infected. It is suggested that there are 10 backyard flocks infected as well. We are not too sure of the definition of “backyard flocks”. We are told, for example, that in Cloverdale a barn was shut down but there were some 10,000 birds in there. This farmer apparently did not have a commercial quota. He dealt with a specialty product so he was not considered a commercial operation.

The concern for the commercial operations in British Columbia cannot be overemphasized, as I mentioned just a moment ago. We are talking about a \$1 billion industry here. But there are other concerns as well, which I think are equally important, and they have to do with many of the small operators and collectors, for example, who have birds in backyard operations, some exotic species and so on.

Just as an example to show how significant this problem is, I would like to bring to members' attention the issue of Clayton Botkin. Clayton is a young man who lives in my riding on his dad's acreage. Back in 2002, he was a recipient of one of the millennium scholarships. He was a local excellence award winner. This is a young man who is a good scholar and, as members will see, he is a very enterprising young man as well.

Clayton is an avid aviculturist. He has a collection of over 200 birds, including many endangered and threatened species. Since 1999 he has been the junior director of the Fraser Valley Poultry Fanciers Association, and from 1999 to 2000 he was junior director of the Vancouver Poultry and Fancy Pigeon Association. Under his leadership, the number of active members in the Fraser Valley Poultry Fanciers Association has tripled.

I have visited this young man's facility and I have seen the birds he has. They are absolutely amazing to see. Obviously I am not an expert in these matters, but it is quite intriguing to take a look at the variety of birds that he has. He has birds from around the world there. Essentially, these birds are irreplaceable. They are expensive.

He has managed to gather this collection there, yet he is concerned because since this outbreak of avian flu nobody has contacted him. Nobody has given him any specific instructions on what he should do to protect these unusual birds he has. He attended an information night about a week ago at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Abbotsford, but that was of his own volition. He has searched the net for any information he can find that would protect him and his flock, yet that information is not being made readily available to him.

I think there is a real concern here. This is tragic. In many respects, these birds are pets. They certainly are exotic species. Whether or not this flu is transferable to them no one knows, but the sad story is that Clayton has received no instruction from the government, no directions on what he can do to ensure the survival of his birds. Certainly there is no indication from the government that if his birds are to be culled he is going to receive compensation. I have heard estimates that the 200 birds he has in his backyard may be worth in the neighbourhood of \$50,000, so this is not a trifling matter.

This is a young man in his early twenties. He is a very enterprising young man and, I might add, a good scientist as well, because he is very knowledgeable in these matters. His only asset is at risk and he has received no help and no instructions at all from the government.

There is another organization in my riding that again is not a commercial operation but is an operation that is at risk. For all intents and purposes it has received no instructions from the government on what to do. I am speaking of a woman by the name of Bev Day who runs the Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society in Delta, or OWL as it is commonly known.

OWL is a non-profit organization that operates in Delta. It is a rescue organization. At any one time OWL will have any number of eagles and owls and other birds that have been injured and brought to the centre for rehabilitation and a return to health. It is an amazing operation and a great concern because it has great support not only in my community of Delta but throughout the lower mainland. Many school groups visit to be educated about the birds and the importance of maintaining a habitat for the birds. It is a remarkable operation.

Bev has a couple of birds that I think are rather interesting. There is a barn owl, two bald eagles with some disabilities, two snowy owls, and other birds that are actually permanent fixtures at the OWL rehabilitation centre, because due to their injuries they are not able to survive in the wild any longer. They are maintained at OWL and are there for the public to view and to help us learn more about our feathered friends.

The problem is that Day has contacted one veterinary official who was unable to provide her with any answers as to what she can do to protect the birds. It is a tragedy, because there are wild species, some of which are at risk in some parts of the world, such as the bald eagles, and this is the refuge for these birds. Because of this outbreak there is uncertainty. It has also interfered tragically with the fundraising. For example, Bev had to cancel the open house fundraiser this year, which is OWL's largest fundraiser. Ordinarily they would collect about \$10,000. They had to cancel school tours and so on because of the fear of what may happen to the rest of the flock.

It is really upsetting to people that the government has not been a little more forthcoming in giving direction and in assisting these people. Not only are we concerned for the commercial producers who have a significant effect on our community, but we are also concerned about the smaller flocks, the specialty flocks like Clayton Botkin's or the

OWL rehabilitation birds at Bev Day's facility and other backyard and small time hobby farmers who have flocks they would like to protect. I think the onus is on the government to give these people some clear direction on what they can do to protect their flocks and protect the public.

   (2215)