

Tories should heed farmers' warning

With only two days under his belt as Prime Minister in the new Parliament, Stephen Harper was confronted with his first protest Wednesday as angry farmers converged on Parliament Hill.

The new PM would do well to listen to their concerns.

The farmers want the federal government to help them compete with heavily subsidized farmers in the United States and Europe.

Those subsidies make it cheaper for food processors in Canada to buy raw materials like grains and oilseeds from abroad, shutting out Canadian farmers in many food sectors.

"Canadian farmers...get no help from their own government to survive in the industry," said Ontario Federation of Agriculture vice-president Geri Kamenz. "Many here today will not make it through this year if they don't get help."

Harper's government has pledged to help the farmers by vowing to replace the current Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program which offers compensation to farmers suffering drops in income in unusual years. Farmers have criticized the multi-billion dollar plan for its complexity and delays in getting much-needed cash.

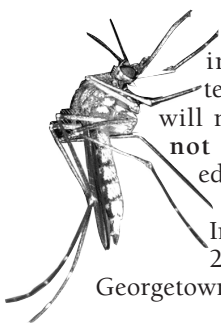
Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl, however, warned farmers that pressure must also be applied at the provincial level as the program is a joint federal-provincial project which all provincial agriculture ministers support.

With the Conservatives discovering more surplus money than expected after taking over from the Liberals, they would be well advised to take a close look at the demands of farmers.

As many signs in Wednesday's protest read, "Farmers Feed Cities". It is a message Harper's government should keep in mind when sifting through the pleas from various special interest groups for more cash.

Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



Letters to the editor must include an address and daytime telephone number. Unsigned letters will not be published. Letters should not exceed 200 words and may be edited for content and/or length.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Surveys preferred to vocal interest groups

Dear editor,

I was getting caught up on my reading of the local newspapers and came across an article in *The Independent & Free Press*, dated February 22 and entitled, 'Councillors question validity of survey'.

I was surprised at the reaction of councillors, not only to the survey results, but about the validity and usefulness of such surveys.

The article stated "some councillors were reluctant to trust a survey that represented the views of a minority of all citizens". Councillor Moya Johnson is quoted, "Why does 400 people out of a town of 50,000 people or so give us a reliable sample of what people really want".

In the article, Councillor Johnson points out that the survey says 34 per cent say transit is important, yet when councillors were considering implementing one last year, "the hue and cry was this is the last thing we want".

Councillor Bryan Lewis agreed, "I don't want to challenge (the survey) but I'm having a great deal of difficulty understanding that one per cent of our population should be telling us where we should be putting the bulk of our money".

Out of 50,000 people, how many people raised the "hue and cry"? On what basis is their opinion considered more representative than the survey? When is the last time 400 people, especially an unbiased random cross-section of residents, attended a council meeting?

This letter is not about transit, it is about the basis upon which our council gauges public opinion.

Perhaps surveys using a random representative sample and a proven statistical approach may better capture the opinion of the silent majority than the vocal residents or special interests who make their opinions known at council meetings?

As councillors, please be reminded that you are more exposed to the opinions of those vocal interest groups. The danger is that this may skew your view of where your constituents are on any particular issue. I do not blame you, it is an unfortunate weakness in

our system. However, these types of surveys may be a useful new tool for councillors to gauge the opinions of "the rest of us" who can't or won't attend council meetings. Council meetings serve an important public access role, however in this day and age should not be the only means to gauge public opinion, especially on major issues.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, your efforts on behalf of all citizens is appreciated, even if we all don't voice that opinion as frequently and loudly and publicly as we should!

Steve Teichtmeister,
Glen Williams

POSSE grateful for support

Dear editor,

I would like to thank all our donors who generously donated to the second Peer Outreach Support Services and Education (POSSE) Project Murder Mystery silent auction fundraising event.

We would particularly like to thank these local donors: olde Hide House, Blue Spring Spa and Salon, The Vacuum Store, Country Reflection, Catherine Dove, Fire & Ice Jewellery Emporium, Cellar Restaurant, Halton Region and all of those who attended.

With their help, we were able to raise more than \$3,500 to help 'at risk' youth in north Halton.

POSSE was designed by youth in

north Halton to meet the needs of their peers through training workshops and street level outreach. This project is geared toward youth, especially at-risk youth, and is founded on the belief that youth are a valuable resource, experts in their own lives and in their own experiences, and therefore, in possession of the best solutions to the challenges they face. POSSE is a non-judgmental, harm reduction project committed to meaningful youth involvement.

Once again, thanks for your generosity and support for POSSE, our youth and our future!

Kimm Kent,
Project Manager / Youth Worker