

Cattle Drive to Parliament Hill



MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

The Cattle Drive to Parliament Hill was a fantastic project organizing 32 events in 5 provinces to raise awareness for Canadian farmers.

The following is an article written by Peter Goldring and published in the *Davidson Leader*, Davidson, Saskatchewan, October 6, 2003.

In late August I was asked to be the prime organizer and outrider advance person to take a cattleliner and my own outrider vehicle across Canada, from Langley, B.C to Ottawa. With my office I re-messaged the event to be a “**Cattle Drive to Parliament Hill**” and worked out graphics, designs and a mission statement. The “Cattle Drive” would thank Canadians for supporting beef farmers and also serve as a great show of support for the cattle industry, Canadian farmers in general and the many other businesses affected by the farmers’ plight of Canada’s borders being closed to export. On the trail, many Canadians signed the cattleliner panels and ten thousand Canadians signed my petition, demanding that the government institute

approved and recognized international protocols to ensure and give renewed confidence to Canada’s beef export products internationally. Although some small moves have been made to restore Canadian beef and sheep exports, the Government must do much more.

I am convinced that the magnitude of the effects of the border closure is not appreciated by many Canadians who are not directly affected by it. As a Member of Parliament representing an urban riding which was at one time home to a major meat processing plant operated by Maple Leaf Foods—

a plant that I and other elected officials worked hard to try to save—I know a fair bit about the industry. I also grew up on a farm outside Grafton, Ontario and have a brother who raises beef cattle on his farm outside Havelock, Ontario. I still learned much more during the course of the Drive. I am convinced that farmers, ranchers and public officials across all party lines must all help to resolve this crisis.

Everyone is affected. When farmers can’t sell their products, they can’t buy other products. As Ford truck sales drop off, Oakville assembly lines slow down. Mortgage payments are late and food



Member of Parliament Peter Goldring with 8 MP’s on the running board of his “outsider” advance vehicle leads the cattleliner onto Parliament Hill



banks have more clients. Cattle get seized for non-payment. Farms are foreclosed. Low-priced beef and lamb products depress pork prices. No meat producer escapes the disaster.

Farmers and ranchers always have many obstacles that they normally deal with and plan ahead for. Nature is not always kind to farmers, ranchers and producers. Nature brings drought, floods, fire, hail, sickness and predators. Then economic downturns bring more predators: bankers, creditors, the taxman and the sheriff, to foreclose. But politics? Farmer, ranchers and producers would rarely add politics to their significant, day-to-day problem planning, but this year politics is killing an industry. The one sick cow was contained, the science was done and the results cleared the industry within three weeks, yet the borders still remain politically closed after four months. One cow is still costing the industry \$10 million per day over one billion dollars so far, and still counting? The problem is not one sick cow; it is sick politics.

After various foreign outbreaks the government very quickly banned the beef of sixteen countries from entering Canada, but incredibly, the government had no protocol to reassess and re-evaluate the bans. The Canadian government was oblivious to the possibility that its beef products might be subject to a similar ban by other countries that could be imposed if even one of Canada's 8 million cattle would become sick.

Since Canada has never reopened a "banned border", our federal government, through ignorance

or insensitivity, set a precedent that invited political retaliation. Meanwhile federal government Members of Parliament referring to Americans in pejorative terms does little to invite sympathy for the plight of Canadian beef producers and the Canadian cattle industry. That attitude, coupled with no plan and no vision, has left the federal government with a "billion dollar beef boondoggle".



Member of Parliament Betty Hinton of Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys at the controls of the cattleliner at the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce Tourism Centre

Japan then used the situation to politically extort concessions for themselves, understandably, because Canada banned Japanese beef products, and has no plan to review that ban with the optimism of reopening Canada's borders to Japanese beef. Small wonder then that Japan would threaten the United States that if the United States were to reopen its borders to Canadian beef, then Japan would close its borders to American beef. What a mess! This beef industry disaster happened because our government was caught, completely unprepared, without a contingency plan and now they are compelled to

seek favours from the very American politicians they had so recently insulted.

The basic point here is that, in the midst of an international crisis over one sick cow, the Canadian government had no internationally-recognized procedures in place to convince international markets that the balance of Canadian beef was safe and untainted. The government simply didn't know what to do and what efforts it did make were far from convincing. Canada apparently had previously



agreed to a seven year international ban on beef exports and imports in the event of a BSE breakout, but incredibly never thought that one sick cow could shut down a 8,000,000 head Canadian cattle based farming industry. When dealing with the supply of food products, we must deal with periodic problems of a comparable nature in a sensible, reasonable and internationally convincing fashion, and never again allow circumstances that permit political extortion to wreck our farmers' lives.

The farming industry is a disaster zone not because of drought, fire or other calamities of nature, but due to politics—from bad politics to political neglect.

Farmers are questioning why our export borders are closed while our country still imports cattle products from other countries. This is aggravating farmers and further damaging the farming economy. The federal Minister of Agriculture must get the lead out and get moving to help farmers or get out of the way and let someone else take over. Farmers are calling for action now, not later. Farmers want our government to set up an emergency international committee with membership of a full cabinet minister to get the border open and then to institute international rules and protocols for future trade. Farmers then want a joint Senate and House of Commons Committee to study cross-border farming trade with a view to the removal of political interference. Farmers want debilitating politics replaced with sensible rules, similar to how the recent power failure has been addressed in Ontario. Within two weeks of the recent power failure affecting virtually all

of southern Ontario and much of the northeast United States, a substantial international committee was struck, with a cabinet minister to oversee assessment of the causes and to develop protocols for the future. Canada's farmers want the same degree of federal attention directed to their own crisis. Canada's

farming industry has a great future if our government will give it the full support it needs.

On Wednesday, September 17, the Drive pulled up on Parliament Hill, on time and on schedule, to the minute to a crowd of over 2000 people. The trail was 8,000 kilometres long and consisted of 32 events leading up to the arrival of the Drive on Parliament Hill. Particularly mention must be made of the contribution of my staff, as well as the particular

dedication of my wife Lorraine, who rode with me as we travelled in my "outrider" vehicle, leading the Drive from British Columbia to Parliament Hill. We put one solid month aside to marshal resources.

There was great support for the Drive from the offices of over twenty Members of Parliament and many provincial Members of the Legislative Assembly, across political lines. All provided support, as did constituency associations, farm organizations, cattle and beef associations, as well as many individuals. Regrettably, the closer the Drive got to Parliament Hill, the more politics got in the way. My colleague, MP Cheryl Gallant, volunteered early in the Drive to organize our arrival on Parliament Hill. On the morning of our Parliament Hill arrival, MP John Reynolds, Canadian Alliance House Leader, added his authority



Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper greets & welcomes Member of Parliament Peter Goldring and the Cattle Drive on Parliament Hill

to help move a politically stalled truck onto Parliament Hill and to a great reception.

The trail has been long and dusty, and has had appearances by political rustlers, opportunists and snake oil salesmen. At the same time, the reception by farmers was consistently great, all across the country. Most with political agendas soon dropped the politics early in order to have good events. Special mention should be made of Liberal Member of Parliament Benoit Serré, who organized two great events in Cochrane and New Liskeard, Ontario. The support of Scarborough Liberal Member of Parliament John Cannis, when the Drive swung through Toronto, was also appreciated. The

concerns expressed, across party lines, are very significant.

The sun drops low and the shadow of the cattleriner lengthens as it is moved from Parliament Hill. Some of the crew have already moved on to other trails, but there is satisfaction in knowing that a message was delivered, in one voice and on time. The voice of the farmers of Canada was heard on Parliament Hill. Congratulations to all. We hope this will "moove" the government to finally act.

In December 2003, United States found one cow to be BSE positive. Mad cow is now officially on American soil yet Canada and United States have yet to enact sensible cross border protocols for dealing with the situation.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment and fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Do you agree that the federal government should be doing more to protect Canada's farming industry?

Yes No

Do you agree that the federal government should be doing more to negotiate sensible rules to open international borders to Canadian cattle?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
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