

Private Members' Business

dismantle those lines. Everyone agrees that they are important for the economic development of that part of the country.

But we ask that the same sensitivity been shown towards the East. Why should that not be the case in the East also? What makes Chibougamau—Chapais less remote than any other area in the West, say northern Manitoba or Saskatchewan? Where is the difference? Lines are maintained when they are important to development in western Canada, and we agree with that. But we cannot agree to the dismantling of rail lines that belong to us in our area.

Moreover, we want to buy that line and keep it open. We simply want Canadian National to give us back the taxes we paid to finance the construction of those trunk lines. As I see it, the Canadian National is a one-way organization. They pull the plug to drain away the savings of Canadians but when the time comes to open the tap at the other end, there is nothing left. I think this is the way things are done.

We would ask the government to take action on that issue in a non-partisan way and without using the schemes that some would want to see implemented in that case. There is no concept as reasonable and as cheap as the one that has been submitted to this House to guarantee the development of a region.

Some businesses will inevitably close down if that trunk line is abandoned. With a 50 per cent increase in transportation costs, it will not be possible to ensure the economic development of Chibougamau—Chapais. Annual wages of \$50,000, \$60,000 and \$70,000 are paid in the mining sector. Our people are proud of those wages, but they work very hard to earn them. However, we need help. Is there anyone in this House who would refuse to support a motion that gives one dollar to the government, that ensures the development and the pride of a region, that ensures people that their livelihood will not be taken away from them?

I see that my time is up, Madam Speaker, but I would ask the members of this House to show solidarity. We have to save the Franquet—Chapais trunk line. We have to hold public hearings on the dismantling of the rail network in Quebec and in the rest of Canada.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on Motion M-194, presented by the member for Roberval. The motion asks the government to call on Canadian National Railways to sell the Chapais line for a nominal sum and to ensure that CN maintains the neighbouring CRAN subdivision.

Concerning the first part of the motion, let me first give a brief summary of the present situation of the Chapais subdivision and to explain how it got that way.

Parliament delegated to the National Transportation Agency the powers necessary to enforce the provisions of the National Transportation Act, 1987, on the abandonment of rail lines.

In 1987 CN asked the Agency for the authorization to abandon a 90-mile section of the Chapais subdivision, between Franquet and Chapais, because it was losing money on it.

After reviewing the case presented by CN and the testimony gathered at public hearings held in 1989 across northern Quebec, the Agency agreed that the line was not cost-efficient but that there was a reasonable probability of it becoming so in the foreseeable future and that its operation should be maintained in the public interest.

Consequently, on January 31, 1990, the Agency rendered a decision ordering CN to keep operating the line.

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As provided for in the law, three years later, the agency reviewed CN's application for abandonment and ruled that, with the exception of a six-mile section, the line was not profitable and there was no reason to believe it could eventually turn a profit.

On July 12, 1993, the agency ordered CN to continue operating the six-mile section between Franquet and a site near Grevet and allowed CN to stop operating the 91-mile Grevet—Chapais section as of August 12, 1993.

I must stress that, in the last five years, the line was only used in November 1992 to transport Hydro-Quebec transformers.

We must realize that the operation of this line costs CN over \$600,000 in annual losses. Since the NTA order requires CN to keep the line in service, CN receives compensation for its losses from the federal government, or rather from taxpayers. So the Chapais subdivision is operational but does not handle any traffic.

It is quite understandable that local communities, fearing the impact losing the line would have on their economic development, lobbied the former government, which issued an order delaying abandonment until May 31, 1994. The purpose of this nine-month delay was to allow interested parties to review various options to maintain the line.

CN is ready to sell the line. However, nothing is happening and CN should be allowed to go ahead. But the matter is not necessarily closed. Once the abandonment order is in effect, CN can sell its right of way and facilities without any kind of federal regulatory approval, which it cannot do at the present time. Currently any interested buyer can negotiate a selling price for the line with CN.

Which brings us to a very interesting aspect of this motion, the expression "nominal sum". As a commercial Crown corporation, CN received from Parliament the mandate to operate like a business in order to remain viable. I fear that a business cannot