

Supply

before it proceeds with its plan to cut VIA Rail's system, come the middle of next year.

Does not this government have a heart? Will it not listen to a committee of this House of Commons, the majority of its members belonging to the government party? Do we not see in here the non-partisan issue that VIA Rail passenger service has generated in the country. I ask the government to do a little soul searching, and for once listen to Parliament. As I said in the past, our Parliament is not a Parliament for government, but a Parliament for Canadians across our country.

I would like to highlight some of the report. The Standing Committee on Transport indicated, and I quote:

Throughout the hearings the Committee was confronted with a plethora of divergent statistics put forward by various witnesses with great persuasion and conviction.

Then it continues:

The observation the Committee would like to make is that the statistics can be used to make anyone's case or position sound persuasive. We do not intend, in this report, to become tangled in the "numbers game". In our view, this would be unproductive and somewhat redundant because obviously, the royal commission will be examining this problem in detail.

What the committee felt is that we should find the real truth, and there is nothing wrong with that. Canadians would like to hear and know the real truth.

Obviously there are conflicting statistics being presented, but let the royal commission which has been given a mandate by this government to first make an interim report so that the government may be well advised to then consider what action to take next. Let us first diagnose the problem, not settle on the treatment before the diagnosis, otherwise it could be the wrong treatment and therefore harmful to the people of our country.

On the issue of cost-effectiveness, I quote:

— the committee is not persuaded that the Government plan is the most cost-effective option. This leads us to conclude that is likely that VIA will have great difficulty operating the new network successfully within the reference levels set by the government.

Here, again, the committee is not convinced of the government plan. The committee has challenged the

government plan. This is the committee of Parliament, the supreme court in our country, the supreme body that should be formulating policy. I would like the government, which is only a part of Parliament, to accede to the request of a standing committee of this House.

On the issue of the environment I quote:

There was considerable comment during the hearings regarding the adverse impact of the new VIA Rail Plan on the environment. What is clear to the Committee is that the "environmental factor" has become a critical issue in the development and implementation of a national transportation policy.

In that light, we are not satisfied that the minister's potential environmental impact assessment is adequate or persuasive.

Again, the committee feels that the government has not done a careful study about the adverse impact on the environment of cutting the VIA Rail passenger service.

On the remote services:

The question the Committee grappled with regarding the mandatory or remote services was whether they were truly remote and whether there were more cost effective transportation alternatives.

The committee believes that, as was pointed out in the evidence, serving these communities should be a social obligation and therefore separated from VIA's funding and treated as an imposed public duty.

I would like to repeat and underscore that when we serve the remote communities of our country, we have to consider it as a public social obligation. We truly have to subsidize those routes because when we do that, we demonstrate that we care for Canadians whether or not they are in the remote parts of our country.

On equipment:

In the Committee's view old and unreliable equipment has adversely affected ridership and subsidy levels over the past decade.

They would like the equipment to be modernized. On the labour assistance programs, the committee states:

— the Committee calls upon the Government and VIA to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and with compassion.

On deficit reduction:

There was some persuasive evidence to the effect that the Government's plan will not produce the predicted reduction in the deficit.