

passenger rail transport in Canada. An atmosphere of uncertainty has been created in many regions of Canada that perhaps there really is no future for this type of transportation system. The long history of poorer and poorer passenger service and the service cutbacks announced by the Government in 1981 caused this uncertainty and put the future of passenger rail transportation in doubt.

Recent problems, especially during the Christmas period in December 1983 with equipment breakdowns resulting in long delays, have been viewed as indications that VIA Rail still is not committed to providing an adequate rail service. The Committee believes that underlying the whole issue of passenger rail transportation is the question of whether or not the Government is committed to the existence of VIA Rail, or even to passenger rail services. As stated in its first interim report, the Committee is still of the opinion that a modern and efficient railway passenger system can and should be provided and continue to play an important role in Canada's transportation future.

Are we "on the right track" to the achievement of this goal? The Committee believes that some advances have been made in a positive direction but that much more needs to be done. It feels that with proper Government initiatives, sound management practices and necessary powers, VIA Rail Canada Inc. can provide Canadians with a good rail passenger system.

Honourable senators, the report makes 26 recommendations which, if carried out, would provide Canadians with a good, modern passenger service.

● (1440)

I know that the committee would not expect all of its recommendations to be carried out at once, but a commitment to carry them out would be very helpful. Indeed, I hope that recommendations 1 and 2 will be accepted and put into effect as soon as possible in the next sitting of Parliament. These are two essential recommendations and I would like to take the time to quote them. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

1. The Committee recommends that legislation be enacted by the Parliament of Canada at the earliest possible time to establish VIA Rail on its own statutory basis with a mandate to provide a sound and efficient national rail passenger system.

Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

2. The Committee recommends that the Act include a clear statement of the Government's policy regarding VIA's provision of rail passenger service.

Honourable senators, if these two recommendations were put into effect it would be a very good thing. Since I am a member of the committee which made these recommendations and since I participated in some of the hearings, I suppose it would not do for me to praise the report too highly. However, I do think it is worthy of praise. It is a valuable report and I think it

[Senator Macdonald.]

owes much of its value to the guidance and work of its chairman, Senator Langlois.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Macdonald: He presided over the hearings of the committee with ability, knowledge, skill, and even with patience. We are fortunate in that he was our chairman. I know he will continue to act as chairman while the committee continues its study and he will give us the benefit of his knowledge and his wise guidance. Honourable senators, I am pleased to support the motion for the adoption of this report if such a motion should be made.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Daniel Riley: Honourable senators, I do not wish to take up the time of the Senate on this report. However, as I said earlier, the members of the committee, representing all regions of Canada, took the terms of reference seriously. We worked hard on studying and reviewing the VIA Rail situation and we came up with our recommendations. Along with Senator Macdonald, I hope that the government will implement them, particularly the most important ones. I can only recommend to my peers that this report be adopted.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

The Hon. the Acting Speaker: As no other honourable senator wishes to speak, the debate on the consideration of this report is considered as being concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I would now like to outline the state of play as best I can figure it out. The bills which are left to be dealt with are Bill C-31, which is legislation respecting fresh water fish; Bill C-47, which deals with amendments to the Indian Act; Bill C-50, which deals with agricultural stabilization; and Bill C-56, which deals with farm products.

As I see it, we are left with some four bills. However, the other place is bogged down with respect to Bill C-47. I think that very shortly we should tell them in the other place that they had better complete what they want completed and not expect any more help from us if they cannot get to the legislation I have outlined. Obviously, Bill C-47 does not now fit into the category of what I described previously as non-controversial; if it were then we should have it. I believe the other bills are in that category. Therefore, I would ask the Senate to allow me a few moments, until approximately 3.30 p.m., to make inquiries at which time I will return with a report as to the status of these bills.

Hon. John M. Macdonald: Honourable senators, before we adjourn perhaps we could take care of Order No. 6 on the Order Paper. It stands in my name and I would like to deal with it.