

Routine Proceedings

Yet if they had given VIA Rail the kind of rolling stock that does not break down in 40 below weather in northern Ontario or northern Manitoba or in the rain in B.C., rolling stock that is attractive, that has increased capacity, we could have turned things around.

Compare VIA to Amtrak in the United States. They get a return of about 74 cents on the dollar, and they use new double-decker transcontinental rolling stock. They are even getting support from this government across the way in the form of export development loans to Bombardier—\$100 million last year, \$200 million this year—to supply rail passenger equipment to the United States.

Let me look at the comparison. Amtrak is at 74 cents on the dollar. What do we do in the corridor where we have a density and a potential utilization that is beyond a lot of the other parts of the country? We are already making 71 to 72 cents on the dollar there, and we are making it with junk. If we could increase the car capacity by 80 per cent with new head-end equipment, new marketing techniques, expanded schedules, I can guarantee that we would not even have to go to high-speed electric on the corridor to break even. We could do it with a good investment in some new equipment.

This is an important issue. It is one that people will not forget. The government thinks it will go away as the people stop seeing the trains. One of the Liberal members from Manitoba was on Newsworld with me back in November. He was a member in this House prior to 1984 and was defeated in 1984. He said the reason he was defeated was that people had long memories and they remembered what the Liberals did to rail passenger services in 1981–82.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that whether it is in Atlantic Canada, in western Canada, in southern Ontario, in northern Ontario, or on Vancouver Island—even though there they have a court decision that protects their railroad, and I give credit to those people who took it to court—people will remember. They will make sure that the next time around they will not be voting for anybody who cut their trains.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, this issue is certainly an issue that is important to the Canadian public. It is important to this House and to this govern-

ment. In fact, this House has been seized with the issue a good deal of time in the last few months.

As you will recall, Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of questions in Question Period. There has been debate on the issue. Of course, the committee itself has put a great deal of work into looking at the question of rail passenger service within our country. Members of the committee looked at a number of issues, all of which are very important. They looked at the question of the environment, the question of services in remote areas of Canada, the question of a legislative mandate of VIA Rail, equipment and productivity. They looked at all of those questions that we believe are very significant and very important as they relate to passenger rail service in this country.

We as a government take that issue very seriously. That is why we have taken in this report that has been filed by members of the transport committee, a report that we know they put a lot of work into and a report that we as a government are treating seriously.

Under our particular rules this report will be responded to by the minister in question. In fact the Minister of Transport, under the rules, has an opportunity to respond up until April 29 of this year.

What we are faced with is an opportunity for the minister to look at the report, a report which was detailed, a report which brings up a number of issues and questions. He is looking at that and will respond to it.

I do not think it is necessary for us to take up the time of the House today since we have taken a great deal of time on the issue in the past. The report will be responded to. I can assure the House of that. Therefore, I move:

That this House do now proceed to Orders of the Day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some Hon. Members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some Hon. Members: Nay.