

Oral Questions

The two train tragedies in Brighton and Rimouski have revealed major shortcomings in VIA Rail's ability to assure the safety of passengers in case of accident. Passengers have pointed out that no one was able to open the doors of the railroad car that caught fire in the accident and that first-aid kits were totally inadequate.

Can the minister tell us if he has instructed VIA Rail officials to immediately correct the shortcomings with respect to emergency measures and first aid for passengers in case of a train accident?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the well-known events described by the hon. member are disturbing. We asked VIA Rail, which is conducting an internal investigation, to take all necessary measures on a provisional basis to try to correct the shortcomings that have come to light especially after the accident that occurred between Montreal and Toronto.

We will make every effort to assure to the extent possible the safety of passengers and employees travelling on VIA trains.

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Since VIA Rail's Vice-President, Customer Services has indicated that emergency measures and first-aid kits met standards, does the Minister of Transport intend to upgrade safety standards?

[English]

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on an interim basis obviously we are going to review internally at VIA what has to be done, what should be done and what can be done.

I want to explain to my hon. colleague this was an unprecedented situation, something that no one could have foreseen. It is a tragic incident particularly the incident between Toronto and Montreal.

The safety transportation board is reviewing all of it and will report. We are going to do everything we can at VIA, at Transport Canada, at the police forces. Every possible avenue will be explored to make sure that people who travel in Canada on VIA trains can do so in safety and security.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General reports that the department of Indian affairs is currently spending approximately \$1 billion on the delivery of social services to on reserve Indians. The Auditor General also says they are spending this \$1 billion with no substantive legislative authority, no plan, no goals, no monitoring and no accountability for results.

How can the minister account for the utter failure of these programs despite the billions of dollars that have been spent on them?

• (1450)

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as other ministers have indicated I welcome the Auditor General's report. It is a very important instrument to my ministry to ensure that we improve.

As well as looking at what is in there and acting on it we will be working on housing conditions, greater employment skills development and things that the Minister of Human Resources Development has indicated today. We will improve.

The aboriginal people have a saying: Walk in my moccasins. I am sure if Reformers were in government there would be no moccasins for the aboriginal people. They talk about failures but they refuse to accept that there are successes. In 1968 there were only 600 aboriginal people in post-secondary schools. Because of Liberal policies over the years there are now 150,000 aboriginal people in colleges. That is success.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I remind the minister that it is precisely the fact that Reformers do care about the plight of the Indians that we dare to question this. It is something no other party has done in this House. The government knows it. That is why its programs serving the natives have been an absolute failure.

Since 1981 the number of individuals receiving social assistance funding in the native communities has risen from 85,000 to the current 130,000. Spending has gone from \$200 million to \$1 billion. These are unacceptable results. Considering this, will the minister take immediate steps to bring this social spending on native affairs under the scrutiny of the Parliament of Canada?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Reformers fail to point out is that the population of aboriginal people is double that in the so-called white community.

We welcome the report. We will work within the report. I am sure at the end of four years we will have a much better system in place than that which we inherited.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

Recent court decisions have confirmed that extreme drunkenness may be used as a defence for certain crimes. This has caused many Canadians to be concerned that those responsible for their drunkenness and crimes will not be sanctioned and