

made to me and to the standing committee arguing that transportation legislation rather than human rights legislation should be used to enforce these accessibility standards, and I have agreed.

I am pleased to inform the House that accessibility standards when finalized will be adopted as regulations pursuant to transportation legislation, either new or existing. We make a commitment to consult with the disabled in all aspects of that work. In the meantime, the disabled will not lose any rights they now have for access to the transportation system. The Bill has been amended to remove any uncertainty on this point.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: The standing committee heard a great deal of evidence concerning competitive access provisions for rail. Manufacturers explained why they need extended inter-switching limits and bulk-resource shippers explained why they need competitive line rates. These competitive access provisions are Canadian solutions to Canadian problems.

The committee was not persuaded nor am I that lower rail rates arising from greater competition between Canadian railways or with American railways on transborder traffic will threaten the viability of our railways. I believe Canadian railroads can and should compete.

• (1800)

I agree with the committee that we should proceed with the inter-switching and competitive line rate reforms. I appreciate as well the committee's wisdom in adding a safety net just in case rail revenues are too hard hit or the U.S. Government takes steps that disadvantage our rail carriers.

To accomplish these ends the Bill now authorizes the Governor in Council to suspend the competitive line rate provisions if the annual or four-year reviews of the Act show that the financial viability of Canadian railways is in jeopardy as a result of these provisions. It provides the Governor in Council with the authority to take appropriate retaliatory action if the U.S. Government engages in unfair, discriminatory or restrictive practices against Canadian railways and consultations fail to result in the elimination of those practices.

The Bill has also been amended to delete the third competitive access provision, that being terminal running rights. It would have benefited a few shippers, but the committee was persuaded it should be deleted because of the serious problems it might cause for small railways and the type of short line railway we hope to encourage as an alternative in some cases to branch line abandonment.

Concern has been expressed, especially in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, that new branch line abandonment procedures might result in the loss of many branch lines soon after this legislation is proclaimed. Obviously it is in the interests of a more efficient transportation system to deal first with those lines which incur the greatest losses. This is also the most understandable approach for shippers and affected

communities. From a practical point of view the new National Transportation Agency can only deal with a certain number of applications at any time. In view of those factors the committee added a provision to limit abandonments by any railway to 4 per cent of its total mileage in any of the first five years after proclamation. I think that should provide the necessary safeguards for those in Quebec and eastern Canada who are concerned about it.

As well the Bill, when introduced, did not recognize that it may be necessary to continue operating passenger service and branch lines no longer needed for freight operations. Therefore the Bill has been amended first to give VIA an opportunity to acquire a line which is to be abandoned but is currently used for rail passenger service. Second, it was amended to remove any obligation on VIA to provide freight operations should it acquire a rail line. Third, it has been amended to protect VIA's interest in the event that another railway acquires the line. These and other amendments are contained in the revised version of Bill C-18 reported to the House by the standing committee, and certain other fine tuning has been done by the House during report stage.

As we all know, our job is to seek the best balance among competing interests if we are going to achieve reforms that will best serve the interests of Canadians in all regions. There is always strong pressure on every side, particularly in the field of transportation, from conflicting and competing interests. I believe this Bill has successfully achieved the best balance among all those competing interests. If it has not, and if in the future it turns out we have gone too far in one direction or another, then the annual and four-year reviews will point that out and the Government can ask the House to pass any amendments that may be found to be necessary.

We sought a balanced package. We sought to advance the interests of all Canadians by removing obstacles to growth in international trade. We believe Bill C-18 and Bill C-19 achieve that. The work of the standing committee gives me even greater confidence that that belief is correct. The need for these reforms is clear. The benefits are clear. Now is the time to complete the job of making these reforms a reality.

I might say that the Government is responsible for the Bill now before the House. We have listened to all of the competing interests. We have listened to Members on both sides of this House. We have listened to the standing committee and acted on many of the changes it suggested. That is the proper process, but we remain responsible for the Bill. We stand behind it. We believe it is going to mean a great breakthrough for success in transportation, giving us a better, more efficient and viable transportation system. It will help our shippers and help economic growth, and regional development. We persisted in this direction despite a great deal of opposition, some of it from my good friend from Regina West who has been very active and vociferous in committee and in the House in opposition to the Bill. We know there are strong groups, including organized labour, who have not been supportive of the Bill. However, I believe history will show that this has been