

Supply

let us congest even more Toronto International and other airports around the country. Let us pollute this environment. The government has obviously come to the conclusion that with the destruction of the tropical jungles of this planet, there will not be a planet in 15 or 20 years anyway. Let us save our pennies in the piggy bank now.

When I go to buy a house, I expect to have to pay a great deal of money up front, more than I would like to pay of my disposable income because I am making an investment in my future and the future of my family. I believe that that kind of investment is necessary in Canada.

The reason VIA is losing money today is that the equipment is 35 years old. VIA has been raped—a strong word but I have to use it—by CN. VIA pays four to five times as much to ride CN rails as Amtrak in the United States is charged to ride American company rails. Why is that? VIA Rail has a president who is also president of CN. It is like the Liberal party having a president who is also president of the Tory party. We would be laughed out of town. This government has no problem appointing a president of VIA Rail who is also president of CN, and CN charges VIA Rail several hundred million dollars a year to ride its rails. What kind of a conflict of interest is that?

I said I did not want to be partisan but the member is sorely tempting me. I had better bite my tongue and sit down.

Mr. Pagtakhan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for his eloquent pleading that this House approve the recommendations contained in the second report of the Standing Committee on Transport calling for a moratorium on the government's proposed cuts to VIA Rail. He argued we should have a moratorium while the Royal Commission on a National Passenger Transportation System proceeds with its study. In contrast the government has indicated that the commission will proceed even after the VIA cuts had happened.

I am reminded of the story about asking an orthopaedic surgeon to first amputate the legs of a patient and then do a study as to whether the operation was required to begin with. That is the wrong approach. I can see from

the member's presentation that indeed this government has a policy of annihilation of VIA for this country.

Could the member indicate to the House the composition of the Standing Committee on Transport as to who constitutes the majority on this committee in terms of the representation from the three political parties? Second, is this very issue on the top agenda of the First Ministers' Conference now ongoing?

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, the member asked about the composition of the standing committee. The standing committee is made up of eight Conservative members, four Liberal members and two New Democratic Party members. So the Conservatives have a clear majority. All of the votes that could have been exercised that day were exercised. A full complement was in place when the committee took this vote, and it had a clear majority. I do not want to say which Conservatives voted for or against. I do not think it is appropriate in the spirit of reform. The meeting was *in camera*. It was private. I do not seek to embarrass any individuals, but it should be clear to everybody that this report, which was laid before the House yesterday, and this debate which is occurring today, could only have occurred if Conservative members of Parliament joined with opposition members in saying that the decision of the Government of Canada was wrong.

I want to re-emphasize that this is not a partisan statement. This is a statement from the members who have been charged by Parliament to examine transportation policy. These are people who make it their business every single day to be involved in transportation issues, people who have on many other occasions approved of government initiatives, people whose first role in Parliament in terms of their obligations beyond their constituency is the transportation policy of Canada. That is the group, with the majority Conservative members, that has said this decision to proceed with cuts on January 15 is wrong for Canada.

All I can say is now is the time for Canadians right across this country to get out their pen, get out their paper, to write their members of Parliament to once again tell us how you feel because I think there may be a thaw occurring across the way and perhaps as a consequence there is some chance for VIA Rail.