

*Routine Proceedings*

taxes, or are consultants who are being paid by their clients, or are civil servants. I am told that 80 per cent of airline travel is in that category. This leaves 20 per cent who pay their own way, who do not get a tax break. The exact opposite applies to rail. Some 80 per cent pay for their own tickets.

We can play the subsidy game, but I say that air is subsidized to as great an extent as rail has been subsidized. To say that one is more appropriate than the other is a false economy, to say the least.

There is also the environmental question. My colleague, the member for Skeena, our environmental critic, will address it in much more detail than I will, but I want to walk you through some of the aspects.

We had handed down in this House a week after the decision—a week after the Minister of Transport announced to the country that here were the cuts, here were the routes we are going to eliminate—a four-page preliminary environmental assessment. There are those of us who are suspicious of a document that is handed down a week after the decisions are announced. As I understand it, any proposal, any project done by the Government of Canada, is supposed to adhere to the EARP guidelines, the Environmental Assessment Review Process guidelines. It has to be tested; and the initiating department, in this case transport, was to take a look at it to see whether it felt there were any impacts on the environment.

They did do something. There is no question about that. We know that the final decisions on the routes to be saved and the routes to be cut were not made until the night before the order in council was passed, so there is no way under that kind of scenario that a proper testing could be done even on a preliminary basis. Then we found out that it was an economist and a transportation specialist who did the environmental assessment. It was not done by an environmental scientist. It was not even an environmental engineer. There was no contact with the Minister of the Environment who has officials who one would assume would understand the process.

They did not even do the proper environmental assessment, even though the Prime Minister in the election of 1988 said that every major economic decision made by his government would be tested for its impact

on the environment. As members know, we did not stand idle when the government made the decision to cut VIA. Nor did we stand idle when we saw the four-page phoney environmental assessment.

• (1520)

We took action elsewhere in this city, action which resulted in a full day of hearings before the Federal Court. The government lawyers came in and said: "Hang on folks, the EARP process does not apply to the cabinet. They are above it. They are above the law."

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, what decision made by the Government of Canada is not implemented through Order in Council? Then they said: "Transport was not the initiating department. It is the Minister of Finance who initiated it because it was a budget decision".

My colleague, the member for Regina—Lumsden, argued before committee time and time again: "What are we doing here? What are we doing having the Minister of Transport making fundamental decisions about the kind of transportation system that we have in this country," or, as we find out, that we do not have any more.

The government put forward that argument and said: "We are above the law". I would really like to hear from the government, to have it justify to this House and to the people of Canada why it believes that cabinet should be above the law, why cabinet should not have to adhere to an environmental test on decisions it makes. It would be very, very interesting to hear that response.

Canadians by the thousands have indicated their support. It was not a case of the media riding the train for the first time in 30 years. The people I talked to—and they were from age 5 to 85—have a keen sense of how important rail passenger travel is to this country. It is not a thing of the past. The equipment that we have been using is outdated.

Seven Ministers of Transport have recognized that, including some in this government, and have promised to replace the equipment and to do what other countries around the world have done, that is invest. But, no, they never followed through. One time it was an election promise. Another time it was an election commitment. Both parties failed to follow through on that.