

problem. So I think Hon. Members should say whether they intend to take 10 or 20 minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, if Opposition Members use this system, they will have two in a row, which makes 30 minutes. I thank Hon. Members for their comments. Resuming debate. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard).

[*English*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the New Democratic Party for giving me the opportunity to speak immediately. Normally, the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden would speak first, but he graciously agreed to let me speak first.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, for five years the Government of Canada, the present government, has been trying to build a strong economy in this country that will be able to compete with what is becoming a very strong international economy among all trading nations. To succeed, it is imperative, in our view, that the economy continues to prosper in the years to come. I say imperative, not just desirable. The measures we introduced to control the deficit and reduce the national debt were designed with that goal in mind.

The government's commitment to reduce spending and control its finances obviously applies to all sectors, and especially, as far as I am concerned, to the transportation sector.

• (1300)

Mr. Speaker, it is also a fact that transport has always been and always will be an essential component of Canada's economic development. It is also quite clear that we will have to ensure that this network is efficient and that Canadians are able to use it efficiently. If we are to understand the initiatives and decisions being made in the transportation sector today, they must be seen in this perspective. We must consider the financial aspects while at the same time ensuring that we have a transportation network that reflects the diversity of the country in which we live. The government's initiative are there-

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fore designed with this perspective in mind, while at the same time we must consider that this transportation network must develop in circumstances that provide for a network that is reliable, efficient and profitable, thus giving Canadians a better chance of competing in an increasingly competitive world.

What we must not forget, in the course of today's debate, is that railway transportation is not the only transport mode in this country and is not even the type of transportation Canadians use the most. It is a more traditional mode which has been used for a number of reasons, and those reasons have been around for some time. In 1961, the McPherson Commission recommended abandoning rail passenger services. For 30 years there were a number of studies and attempts to resolve this matter. Once again, when we look at transportation in this country, there is as much air transportation as railway transportation. But there is also marine transport and the automobile which is being used more and more today, and when we talk about freight, trucks have become an essential component, and finally, we also have buses for passenger transportation.

Mr. Speaker, one principle has always guided the government's actions, as it does now in the transportation sector, and that is; never invest more than we can afford, in other words, invest what we can in a transportation mode, especially one that is being used less and less and is costing us more and more. And we must remember that Canadian taxpayers are footing the bill!

Mr. Speaker, in 1988, and I have often quoted this figure but I would like to remind people: \$641 million was spent to prop up VIA Rail, which means a cost of \$100 per passenger, and between Jasper and Prince Rupert as much as \$483 per passenger. Mr. Speaker, this subsidy does not come out of the blue. It is paid for by all Canadians, although only 3 per cent of them travel by train.

Mr. Speaker, whether we admit it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we want to change it or not, we have to realize that Canadians have given more and more and will give more and more, unless the Royal Commission of inquiry proves the opposite. I am open to any recommendations, but today, Canadians have shown a preference for other modes of transportation.

The automobile is obviously the preferred type of transportation, with, to a lesser extent, air transport and