

National Transportation Act, 1986

● (1550)

[English]

Following a meeting in Fredericton last week, the Premiers of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. denounced the proposed National Transportation Act, saying it would further widen the economic gap between central and eastern Canada.

The Premiers want Transport Minister John Crosbie, who tabled the proposed legislation in early November, to add a clause ensuring that regional development will take precedence over a profitable transportation service, when the two conflict.

[Translation]

I would therefore ask the Hon. Member for his opinion on that proposed clause to be added to the Bill, which would give regional development priority over profit.

Mr. Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. friend has said, the Gaspé area that I represent is quite distant from here. As I said in my remarks, I sincerely believe that changing existing regulations will increase our opportunities for economic development.

But I should like to indicate to my friend the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud) that I am very much concerned about the regional economic development in both our ridings. Experience has shown that in spite of the fact that they followed these regulations for years, the Gaspé area, the Maritime Provinces, the Magdalene Islands, Newfoundland and the areas north of the 50th parallel, are faced now, in 1987, with the same situation. I would not want to play politics with this, Mr. Speaker, but I cannot help mentioning that the previous Government had had 25 years to change these regulations and look into this problem.

Over the past two years, unemployment rate in my area has come down nearly 10 percentage points. The economy has much improved, thanks to low interest rates and increased employment opportunities. The regional development through Bill C-18 will mean increased competition, which is good not only for carriers, but for users and consumers as well. It is our duty here in the House to improve the situation, and that is what we are going to do.

[English]

Mr. Belsher: I wish to commend the Hon. Member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Mr. Gray) on his speech on this important subject in Bill C-18, an Act respecting national transportation.

The Hon. Member will recall when he was part of the Standing Committee that was holding hearings for the *Freedom To Move* exercise that we went through a little over a year ago, that in the Atlantic area we were asked to pay special attention or acknowledge that transportation did play a part in economic development. The Hon. Member talked about this in his question. Does this Bill acknowledge that transportation does have a part to play in economic development?

Mr. Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Yes. I had the honour and the advantage of travelling with the Standing

Committee. We met many groups concerning regional economic development. In looking at the Bill as proposed in the House, the major premise is to create an efficient transportation system, not a monopoly, but a transportation system that will give opportunity to isolated areas, such as the one I represent, the Maritimes, and the North, and give those areas an efficient transportation system in order that they can compete on a regional, national, and international market. When this is included in this regional development, as I mentioned before, it has not worked. We are attempting to reduce the regulations that we presently have on hand. Any individual who is willing, fit, and able to serve his region, regionally, nationally, or internationally will be able to compete. Regardless of our politics, we all know in the House that a sound economy is the most important factor for the regions and isolated areas.

In this Bill, by reducing the paper work and regulations, and always guaranteeing safety, and as we allow more people to compete and our economy builds up, we can look forward to more regional economic development.

Mr. Angus: The Hon. Member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Mr. Gray) is a Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport, and was a very active participant in the consideration of *Freedom To Move*, as well as other transport matters. I wish to ask the Hon. Member this. One of the things we heard during our hearings when we travelled in those three centres in southern Canada, then the trip through the western Arctic, was the concern about safety, tied in with the concern about viability of the companies. The former Minister of Transport categorically said that safety would be the number one priority and consideration. I wish to ask the Hon. Member what will be faced by the passenger on the last flight of an airline that is going bankrupt? What type of corners has the owner of that company had to cut in order to keep the plane flying for that length of time? Will he be guaranteed a safe environment, or is there a risk because of the cut-throat nature of the competition, that whether he wishes to or not, the owner will be forced to cut corners?

Mr. Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): I appreciate the Hon. Member's question. We have talked at length concerning safety. I believe that in this Bill safety will not be compromised. There is no guarantee when buying a can of beans that if the company is on the verge of bankruptcy there perhaps may be more bacteria in that can of beans.

An agency will be set up to monitor the safety, and all operations of these airline companies. The employees of that agency will continue these check-ups and verifications for all companies. I would assume that, whoever will be hired to work with these safety regulations, if their job is not being done properly, they will be replaced by a more competent person. Personally, I do not feel or believe that safety for any airline, railway, boat, or truck that will travel in this country will be compromised because of this Bill.