

*Supply*

• (1650)

I understand there is a question at this end. The hon. member has the floor.

**Mr. Belsher:** Madam Speaker, I have listened intently to the hon. member and we have heard some of his musings on this subject before, but I find it passing strange when he talks about the standing committee and its recommendations. Yes, a majority of the standing committee voted for the recommendation, but it was my understanding that it was not unanimous.

I also remember a while back when there was a standing committee of this House which on two different occasions recommended to the government that it find a ways and means of replacing the federal sales tax, better known as the manufacturers' tax. I find in this day and age that both opposition parties have seemingly forgotten that part of it as they seek to build fear into the Canadian public about what is happening regarding the GST.

More important, the member has talked about the mayors of the corridor and how united they are with regard to not wanting to see any cutbacks in the amount of service that VIA Rail now gives in their areas.

I would like to remind the hon. member just what is really happening in the corridor to make sure that people in Canada realize what the facts are in the plan that VIA had tendered and which has been recognized and given the okay by this government.

The Montreal to Quebec run is currently at 48 round trips a week. It is dropping to 21 trips a week. But also at the 48 trips a week, this past year ridership was at 39 per cent. From Montreal to Ottawa, it goes from 29 round trips occupancy.

We get the very same type of rationale on each of those runs. Does the hon. member not realize that there will not be as much frequency of the trains after January 15 but, nonetheless, the capacity for servicing those customers will still be there?

**Mr. Tobin:** Madam Speaker, this is an absolutely amazing question coming from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport. The reason it is an amazing question coming from this gentleman whom I usually find well prepared is that it is the Minister of Transport himself, not the opposition, not the New Democratic Party, not those groups in Canada fighting

for the retention of VIA Rail, who said—and I remember sitting in the theatre, and my hon. friend was there the day of the press conference—that three million people who rode the trains in 1988 and 1989 will be displaced in 1990–1991 because capacity was being removed. I believe that my hon. friend forgot that. That is the only explanation, because he is not a member who would want to mislead. I am sure of that. He forgot.

What the hon. member is now suggesting is that if you take away half the trains and you just stuff more people into the same number of trains, you will have the same capacity. However, the government has already admitted that three million people will not ride the trains who had in the past taken advantage of trains. It has suggested that they will be in cars, in trucks, in buses, and in airplanes and that is why the government did a so-called environmental assessment and told us, having done that, there is no problem with having all that additional carbon being burned. There is no problem with the additional congestion at airports. There is no problem with additional congestion on highways that are already blocked, as we would say in Newfoundland, to the rafters.

The question is profoundly surprising but gives me yet another opportunity to point out that this government has not done its homework and, whether by design or by accident, has now given us a phoney rationale for trying to sell these brutal, heartless cuts, especially cuts as they affect our youth, the handicapped and Canada's greatest citizens, our senior citizens, those who have already paid their dues.

**Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend and colleague for allowing me part of his time in order to make my comments with respect to what this government is proposing to do with passenger rail service in this country.

My friend commented on the transport committee report, a committee of which he and I are both members and which in its wisdom brought in several recommendations that the government has chosen not to follow.

It is incidental, I guess, that this morning our party produced its report on our proposal and our alternative as to what Canadians can expect with a Liberal government and passenger rail service in our country. Part of the recommendation's dovetail was what my friend and colleague has already said, but let me just comment for a