

We have done this now for 20 years and farmers are getting tired of this type of infrastructure. When the Liberal government proposed the new infrastructure program that is going to cost the general taxpayer about \$6 billion, among the first comments I heard from my constituents was: "Jake, make sure that we get something done to our road system. We were promised this in the seventies and we are still waiting".

It is sad, Mr. Speaker, to inform you that we are still waiting. Just recently I checked the infrastructure programs that have been approved in Manitoba. I can tell the House that the rural communities have about one-half of what Winnipeg South Centre constituency received. I do not see any elevator systems or big highways. All I see in that area are projects for new community centres, new swimming pools and that type of a sports luxury infrastructure.

It amazes me when I hear the hon. member on the Liberal side saying that we have a rail system that binds the country together. I must say to him that those rail ties, those pieces of steel do not exist any more in our communities. Those rail ties now line miles and miles of fence line holding up four strands of barbed wire or supporting the boards on a corral fence to keep the cattle separate.

● (1345)

If that is what this government means by binding the country together, by abandoning more of these railways instead of making them efficient, I do not think I want that kind of unity.

The minister asked for input this morning on how to solve some of these problems. I think it was made very clear to the transport minister and also to the agriculture minister in May of this year when the subcommittee on rail car allocations suggested that the grain transportation agency should be done away with. It was causing more of a problem than a help in car allocation.

It was also suggested very strongly by every member on the subcommittee and the agriculture standing committee that we should finally do something about the backtracking. We are wasting millions of dollars by backtracking grain, disrupting the grain handling system. There is a very simple solution and I would like to read a couple of comments out of yesterday's *Quorum*:

The National Transportation Agency estimates 1.1 million tonnes of grain last year that landed in Thunder Bay was backtracked to Winnipeg, Canadian Pacific Ltd.'s gateway into the U.S. and to Fort Francis, Ont., Canadian National's link to the U.S.

These cars are being held up by backtracking and it is costing us money. It is a very simple problem to solve.

"It's ludicrous," says Tad Cawkwell, a barley grower in Nut Mountain, Sask. "You don't head north if you want to go south".

Supply

It amazes me that our railway system and our grain handling elevators decide when they get to Winnipeg instead of making a 90 degree turn into the U.S. to go south they have to go another 700 kilometres east then come back to Winnipeg and take a left turn south.

What is the result of this? The result is that roughly 13,000 hopper cars filled with Canadian wheat, barley and oats destined for the U.S. each year take a scenic route that is 1,400 kilometres longer than any direct route.

What does the agriculture minister say to a problem like this? It almost surprised me when I saw it in the paper. It really is a bit of a fluke in the system that goes back many years. It simply squanders some of the limited resources we have to overall pay the costs. Is that the type of Liberal government we have that condones that type of policy? I am surprised that we still have a transportation system at all if that is our philosophy of a good transportation system.

I was very pleased this morning when I heard the transportation minister quote a speech from Winnipeg on October 6. I would like to quote a few other stats that he brought forward in that speech. I thought he had a very good handle on what the problems really are and I thought he addressed them very well. I would like to bring them to this House this afternoon.

As he pointed out in one of the first statements, U.S. railways have higher labour productivity than Canadian railways, 64 per cent higher to be exact. The minister does know what one of the problems is. U.S. tonnes per mile are about 66 per cent higher than in Canada. Why is the government acknowledging that this is the case but is not doing anything about it?

Simply, my answer to these questions is that we have grain companies, we have railways that are lobbying very hard not to change the system because it benefits their pockets and they do not really care about what happens to the farmers' pockets. As long as the farmer grows the grain they know they have to ship it and they will continue to bleed us dry for as much as they possibly can.

● (1350)

The transport minister went on to explain that this is a bleak picture, everyone shares in the problem, not just in the failure to respond to changing technology or economic conditions. Other problems were created by governments through excessive regulation and taxation, by railway management, through top heavy structures and by labour, through low productivity and complicated work rules.

When I see the GTA coming out with figures that tell us that for every month during the summer a thousand railway cars or a thousand hopper cars were put into sidings and then taken out empty, I am beginning to wonder who is really looking after the system and how qualified they are to run that system.