

*National Transportation Act, 1986*

aims of regional development must prevail over commercial interests when both are in conflict. Such was the view of several witnesses which were heard when the Standing Committee on Transport visited the different regions in Canada. Indeed, that opinion was almost unanimously held in the Atlantic provinces. For example, let me tell you what the Leader of the Official Opposition in New Brunswick and very soon the Premier of New Brunswick, Mr. Frank McKenna said in Moncton on April 1 last and I quote:

• (1950)

*[English]*

It is essential that Bill C-18 be amended to ensure that economic development objectives will take precedence over commercial viability when the two objectives conflict.

There is bi-partisan agreement across the Maritimes on this fundamental point. In its present form, Bill C-18 does not offer this assurance. It is not acceptable to Maritimers. It is not acceptable to New Brunswickers.

The inclusion of this clause will reaffirm transportation as an important instrument of economic development.

It will clearly indicate that the federal Government will not allow commercial viability to be the sole determinate in any decision affecting the transportation service.

As it now stands, Bill C-18 stresses the right of the market place to regulate itself through competition. The point of the included clause will be to insist that the transportation services essential for our economic development will not be endangered by the more competitive atmosphere.

It will ensure that we will continue to enjoy full access to these services even if they cannot prove commercially viable. It will ensure that we are recognized as equal Canadians even though we do not live in central Canada.

*[Translation]*

One could say that this is a Liberal speaking and playing politics but, Mr. Speaker, it is not only the Leader of the Opposition in New Brunswick who said that but also the present Premier who appeared before the Standing Committee on Transport on April 1 last and said:

• (2000)

*[English]*

The federal government's reluctance to date to incorporate into Bill C-18 satisfactory protection against the possible downside effects of the proposed legislation has increased the province's concern regarding the potential negative impacts of the new act on transportation services in New Brunswick, and in the Maritime provinces in general.

This is why New Brunswick is adamant that paragraph 3(1)(d) of Bill C-18, recognizing transportation as a key to regional economic development, be expanded to include the statement that regional economic development objectives will take precedence over commercial viability objectives when the two are in conflict.

*[Translation]*

On of the best briefs presented to the Committee on Transport was that of the Harmon Corporation of Stephenville, Newfoundland. This is what they had to say:

*[English]*

Section 3 of Bill C-18 contains the statement of policy governing the whole of the proposed legislation. The Section accentuates commercial viability. In subsection (d) it states that transportation is a key to regional economic development. Sprinkled throughout the bill are provisions relating to the

maintenance of essential rail and air services, however, it is not a positive commitment to foster economic development. There is no evidence of a positive commitment whereby regional economic development is given greater status than commercial viability.

It was a condition precedent to British Columbia joining Confederation that a railway be built through the mountains.

It was a condition precedent in the Terms of Union with Canada that a ferry and rail link be continued between Newfoundland and Canada. One of the key reasons for these conditions was economic development.

The Canadian Premiers, in 1985, met in St. John's, Newfoundland and stated that they desire economic development objectives to have supremacy over the objective of commercial viability where the two conflict.

It is therefore the position of Harmon Corporation, in accordance with its mandate in the public statement of Canada's provincial Premiers that Section 3, subsection (d) of Bill C-18 be amended to read as follows:

"(d) Transportation is recognized as a key to regional economic development and where commercial viability objectives conflict with regional economic development objectives the latter objectives shall prevail."

• (2010)

*[Translation]*

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, all those evidences should have moved the minister of Transport and touched the Conservative members sitting on the Transport Committee, because I want to underline that the governments of Nova-Scotia, Prince Edward Island and that of New Brunswick which I just mentioned, as well as several other witnesses, all approved that amendment to the Bill. They wanted that section to be amended. They clearly wanted a firm undertaking that regional development would be preserved. Such a position had also been expressed by the Transport Commission of the Atlantic Provinces and by the Atlantic section of Transport 2000. I repeat, all those parties wanted and still want that regional development objectives to prevail over the commercial viability whenever the two are in conflict.

We think as Liberals that the priorities and understandings concerning regional development should never be jeopardized by transport policies that do not take into account the special needs of the most distant, the most remote regions of this country.

In the absence of such a declaration in the act, it is clear that the impact on regional development will be negative, because until now it is through regulations that we could alleviate a number of difficulties linked to regional economic development.

In a framework devoid of any transport regulation, Government intervention no longer will be possible. The Conservative Government would not recognize the importance of regional economic development. Such a position is totally unacceptable in our view, and points to a lack of awareness of the fact that Canada is a nation with a population that is relatively sparse and scattered over the second largest country in the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend my colleague the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud), who worked very hard to put the case submitted by all Maritime representatives, who himself moved a very important amendment that incorporated almost word for word