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investment in their future by building a modern, efficient rail passenger service.

What do we recommend in this report? We recommend that the government impose a moratorium on those cuts that are to be implemented on January 15. We say it ought not to go ahead. We say, as well, that the royal commission on transportation announced by the Prime Minister on the same day that the government announced the VIA Rail cuts ought to be given a mandate to examine the future of VIA Rail. The royal commission should tell this Parliament and through Parliament all Canadians what role, if any, VIA Rail or rail passenger service has in the future of this country.

What could be more reasonable than that? We did not establish the royal commission on transportation; the Prime Minister did. He did it on the same day that he announced the VIA Rail cuts. The Prime Minister has said he has great confidence in the chairman of that commission, confidence in all of its members, confidence in their ability to give us a blueprint for transportation in Canada.

He asks us to accept his statement at face value. Surely if you are to have a royal commission and listen to what it reports, it is foolish to cut train service first and ask a royal commission after the fact whether you have done the right thing. If the government has the confidence it says it has, if the Prime Minister personally has the confidence he says he has in this royal commission, then refer the whole question of the future of VIA Rail to the royal commission and in a year from now they can tell this Parliament what they think the role of rail passenger service is in Canada's future.

• (1040)

I am not used to taking that kind of non-partisan approach. I have to admit that I have a few partisan bones in my body. I have to tell you that there are other words I could use to describe this decision of the government. I will not do that today because you know I am appealing, not for the votes of the people who are watching, but appealing to members opposite. I am appealing to Conservative members of Parliament to take a stand in exactly the same way that Conservative members of the transport committee took a stand, exercised their best judgment, exercised their individual conscience, heard what their constituents, who had

reason enough to doubt this decision, were saying and were prepared to buck the party line.

I am not used to saying anything nice about Tories. It is a rare day. It could cost me the vote of a few right-to-the-backbone Liberals in Newfoundland talking this way, but the issue is bigger than partisanship. The issue is bigger than merely making sure that those who are upset about VIA Rail will not vote Tory. The real issue for us here is to see whether or not we can save a rail passenger service in this country.

Across the street today at the conference on the economy the premiers of Canada, representing every political stripe, are saying to the Prime Minister this morning that they agree with the report of a lowly, humble collection of members who make up the Standing Committee on Transport. They are saying: "We think they have done good work. We think their recommendation is worth considering and we, too, call upon the Prime Minister to pay attention to the report of the Standing Committee on Transport and to declare a moratorium on the cuts to VIA Rail and to refer this matter to the Prime Minister's royal commission for consideration." I ask members in this House and, in particular, I ask members on the government side to find a way to get a message to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Transport, to the cabinet, that this decision to slash, cripple, and cut VIA Rail is wrong. It is a decision not to cut fat, not to cut muscle, but to cut beyond the muscle and into the bone marrow and bleed it dry. This decision is wrong. Canada deserves better. As a nation we need a modern, efficient mass transportation system, a rail passenger service. We have an obligation to those least fortunate among us and those who most depend upon this rail service to ensure that it continues.

I cannot help but note, as many members would note because we are politicians, what has been happening in the public opinion polls these days. I dare to offer some advice to my friends opposite. The polls are not a reflection, as much as I would like to think they are, of the tremendous and overwhelming job that we in the opposition benches are doing. They are not a tribute to the tremendous ability at Question Period, either in this party or in that party. They are not a tribute to our oratorical skills. They are not a tribute to our powers of persuasion but we do our job as honestly and as effectively as we can. The polls are a reflection of government policy. The goods and services tax is a policy being