

Transportation Accident Investigation Board

Both the district of Campbell River and the provincial Government have this money available and are prepared to proceed if the Conservative Government would simply show the same level of concern and commitment to the safety in that particular area. I am one who is very concerned about the area of Medivac as well as highway safety. If we could ensure that the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) would give this matter his undivided attention and respond directly to the provincial Minister of Transportation and Highways and the mayor of Campbell River, the matter might be resolved. Would the Hon. Member comment on that?

Mr. Wappel: I have a brief comment, Madam Speaker. Of course, I am not familiar with every area of Canada, much as I would like to be. I am not familiar with the comments the Member has made with respect to the area to which he has just referred.

I appreciate the short history lesson about what this Liberal Party believed in the past and where we are going in the future. My only comment would be that I think we are discussing safety and I am beginning to see that the Hon. Member, with due respect, is wandering from the subject of safety and going on to subjects of funding, which I do not think are appropriate and which I have not developed, and about which I have done no research. Therefore, I would rather not make any comment with respect to those.

Mr. John F. Brewin (Victoria): Madam Speaker, I want to address a few remarks to Bill C-2. The one aspect of the Bill that is of particular interest to those of us from Vancouver Island is that which would afford this new Board the role of conducting independent investigations of marine incidents. Clause 7 of the Bill provides that the object of the Board is to advance transportation safety by conducting independent investigations and, if necessary, public inquiries into transportation occurrences. Those occurrences, as defined by the Bill, include marine occurrences related to an activity of a vessel or a ship.

• (1530)

Under the Bill, the board is given the power to decide whether a public inquiry is to be held. It is not imposed upon the board that it must hold public inquiries, but it is given the responsibility of deciding in appropriate circumstances whether public inquiries are to be held.

With that preamble, I would like to address two points. First, the Bill does not spell out the implications of a public inquiry and what that really means, nor have we heard anything about it from the Government. We have seen examples in the past of inquiries which simply give a nod in the direction of public input. We on this side of the House will make proposals at committee stage that will provide that the elements of the public face of the inquiry be spelled out in greater detail. I am thinking particularly of a point made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lewis) yesterday.

Yesterday was Law Day and the Minister made a speech at the National Law Day dinner which was held at the Chateau Laurier Hotel. He made the clear and I think uncontroversial point that it is not enough to provide on paper for justice but it is critically important that all people in the community be given genuine and real access to justice. In one context, that may mean access to legal assistance, but in the case of inquiries under this Bill, it seems to me that the Government will have to provide a genuine opportunity for interested persons to participate in a real and effective way in the inquiries provided for in the Bill.

Let us use the example of the west coast oil spill. I will be getting into this in greater detail later. If there is to be a public inquiry into the west coast oil spill, we see it as being necessary that it will not simply be a pro forma opportunity for members of the public to show up at an inquiry in Ottawa. The inquiry should take place in locations to which interested people can conveniently travel. It means that funds should be set aside under the terms of the board for those interested parties to prepare for the hearings, to retain research assistance, if necessary to retain legal counsel and to have an opportunity to introduce witnesses and to cross-examine witnesses put up by either the big companies that will have an interest in these kinds of inquiries or even by Government agencies.

All of these things cost money. If there is to be a genuine form of public access, however, it is our submission that it will be necessary for the board to provide funds for that kind of assistance to interested groups. For example, if we do end up with an inquiry into the west coast oil spill, funds should be made available to environmental groups and others from Vancouver Island to retain the necessary expertise to make a meaningful commitment and contribution to that inquiry.