

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 16, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

WESTERN GRAIN TRANSPORTATION ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

The House resumed from Friday, May 13, 1983, consideration of the motion of Mr. Pepin that Bill C-155, to facilitate the transportation, shipping and handling of western grain and to amend certain Acts in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport; and the amendment thereto of Mr. Benjamin (p. 25389).

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Minister of State for Economic Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, it is my purpose at this point in the debate to draw the attention of the Members of this House to the importance of this initiative to Canada's economic development as a whole and to regional development.

Canada, as we know, has always been a country of regional particularities and it is the stronger for that. Economically strong regions in association and in co-operation mutually benefit each other, and also, of course, benefit the whole country.

[Translation]

Together with the budget measures announced recently by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde), the transportation plan will be one of the main driving forces of our economic recovery today. In addition, and this will be more important in the long run, it will help provide a stimulus for economic development in the years to come. Among all the measures taken by the Government to promote economic recovery and development, the western transportation measure certainly is one of its most important initiatives. Although basically aimed at strengthening the agricultural and transportation sectors of our economy, it also constitutes a multifaceted and long-term measure that will have a positive and durable impact on many other sectors of our economy. It is therefore a vital part of the Government's general strategy for getting Canada out of the worldwide economic recession.

[English]

Agriculture and transportation are two of the principal pillars of the Canadian economy. Agricultural production,

traditionally an economic mainstay, now generates 16 per cent of the Gross National Product. It accounts for 10 per cent of Canada's total exports. The efficiency and hard work of Canada's farmers has contributed greatly to our export earnings and contributed also to a situation in which Canadians spend a smaller proportion of their incomes on food than is the case in most other countries. Canadians spend on average less than 17 per cent of their incomes on food, second only to the United States in the entire world.

The transportation sector is equally important. Without a sound, efficient and reliable method of moving Canada's products to markets within the nation and from there to world markets, our country's position as one of the world's great trading nations would be severely undermined.

● (1110)

It is a historical fact and a fact of some interest that many of the early European explorers came here not so much to find Canada as to find a way around Canada, that is, in search of the Northwest Passage to China and the Orient, in pursuit of trade and of commerce. They failed in that endeavour, or so they thought. But when the first transcontinental passenger train reached Vancouver in 1887, it seemed to many at the time to be at long last the realization of the dreams of those early explorers. The fabled passage had been found, with the added benefit of the riches of a new land to be worked and husbanded. That it was achieved through a combination of water and rail transport rather than through water alone was a matter of minor moment. The important fact was that the great nation-building link had been established at last.

What we are seeking today, some 95 years later, with the western transportation initiative is to achieve a modernization of those passageways of commerce. The goals are the same as they were for the railway builders of the nineteenth century—the furtherance of nation building and the expansion of commerce, both goals in the interest of all Canadians wherever they live and whatever the livelihood they pursue.

The construction of the western railway system was, as I said, both in the interests of commerce and of nation building. Indeed, it was part of the Confederation bargain, necessary for the settlement of the West and for moving its products to markets. Likewise the establishment of the Crow rate in 1897 in return for the building of a new line allowed settlers' goods into the West and grain out at low freight rates. It served its purpose well in its time. But as other speakers have indicated,