

*Supply*

be using the full 20 minutes which is available to me. I will be sharing it with my colleague who is sitting next to me.

We have moved this motion today, taking advantage of an opposition day to put down this motion which condemns the government's failure to respond to the Canadian public and its view on VIA Rail for two reasons. One is that we as an opposition party do not intend to allow this issue to die within the walls of Parliament. More important, we want to take advantage of the opportunity of mayors from all across Canada being on Parliament Hill today again.

This is the third or fourth time in as many months that mayors from right across Canada, representing Canada's municipalities, have come to Ottawa to make their case, to continue to fight for VIA Rail. We wanted to show solidarity with those municipal politicians who have continued the fight, both at home and here in Ottawa.

• (1640)

On November 8, not members of the Liberal Party, not members of the New Democratic Party, but members of an all-party committee of the House of Commons, the Standing Committee on Transport, those members who are charged specifically with the responsibility to observe the Estimates of the transport department and the policies of the Minister of Transport and to comment on behalf of parliamentarians on those policies, brought in a report which was tabled in this House. The report called upon the Government of Canada to declare a moratorium on the cuts to VIA Rail which are scheduled to be implemented on January 15. That was on November 8, nearly a month ago.

On the day that that report was tabled, the Minister of Transport, who had it in his hands in the House of Commons, who had all of about 90 seconds to look at it, walked out of this Chamber behind those royal golden robes, out into the foyer of the House, and after 90 seconds of contemplation told the nation's media that he rejected the report.

We have in the House a Prime Minister who is proud to stand on his feet on many occasions and tell us that he takes great personal pride in the parliamentary reform that has occurred in this place. He takes great personal pride, and by implication one would assume, credit for the reform of committees in which all members increas-

ingly express their own best judgment and not be subjected to the view of a party caucus on every given issue, but to really examine with their heart and soul, conscience and best judgment the important issues of the day and to pronounce themselves in the interests of Canadians, not in the interest of particular partisan advantage on any given day of the week. The Prime Minister does this, and he does so frequently.

On a major government initiative, a decision to cut VIA Rail's network by 50 per cent, to lay off 3,000 employees, to say to three million Canadians who rode the rails in 1988 that you cannot ride the rails in 1990, a standing committee of the House of Commons, having members from all three parties, and more important, having a majority of Conservative members, stated that that initiative is wrong. The committee has not thought it through carefully enough. It does not accept the environmental assessment. It does not believe the system can survive with these kinds of cuts. It does not believe that three million Canadians can find other adequate, affordable means of transportation. It does not accept that the environment will not be affected dramatically and negatively. It calls upon the government to declare a moratorium on those cuts.

Did we simply say to declare a moratorium and sit and twiddle our thumbs and wait for some great enlightenment to occur? No. The transport committee went on to say that since you, the Prime Minister of Canada, named a royal commission on transportation, since you, the Prime Minister, say you have confidence in the individuals you have named to this royal commission, since you, the Prime Minister, say we need to have a look at the total integration of Canada's transportation modes and we need a map for the future of transportation in this country, we need to chart a proper course, if you have confidence in these people, refer the question of VIA to them. Give it to the royal commission. Ask the commission to examine the question of rail passenger service and give us an interim report in one year.

In other words, let us turn not partisan minds, nor the vicious hand of the Minister of Finance to this question. Let us look at the long term. Let us examine Canada's position vis-a-vis the position of every other country in the industrialized world. Every other country in the industrialized world is in the business of building modern, efficient, high speed, high-tech, environmentally