

This committee, made up of members from all three parties, heard from spokespeople from right across Canada about the future of VIA Rail. The people who came before us represented every single possible political stripe. We heard from the mayors of all the major corridor cities, representing every political stripe. We heard from all of the railway unions. We heard from the major tourism associations of Canada. We heard from business organizations in Canada. We heard from provincial governments representing a variety of political stripes. The testimony we heard was almost unanimous in saying that VIA Rail, that ribbon of steel that built this country, is fundamental to maintaining this country.

As I stand to address this motion concerning the future of VIA Rail and to beg the government in a non-partisan way to listen to what members of Parliament have said, it is ironic that across the street today 10 Premiers and a Prime Minister are sitting down to discuss the economy of this country and to discuss as well the constitutional future of this country.

As they discuss legal terms defining the potential constitutional renewal of Canada, and as they look at macro and micro economic models for Canada's economic development, it is ironic that if we go across this country today and ask Canadians to give an example of something that contributes to nation building and holding this nation together, the vast majority of them will not revert to macro or micro economic models, nor will they present us with an alternate plan for constitutional renewal, but they will say that a rail service linking this country, as vast and as sparsely populated as it is, is fundamental to national unity.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Tobin:** Mr. Speaker, who is being hurt when the Government of Canada decides to eliminate VIA Rail? It is ironic indeed that we paid tribute today to the 100,000 veterans of Canada. A majority of those veterans are senior citizens. Together, with millions of other senior citizens, they depend on VIA Rail.

Today on the Hill there is to be a rally by the Canadian Federation of Students. It will be a large demonstration, demanding that the Government of Canada at least pay attention to their concerns. Millions of students in Canada depend upon VIA Rail. The poor and the

disabled depend upon VIA Rail. For all these citizens VIA Rail is not a luxury item. It does not represent a pleasant disposal of a few hours on the train; it is a fundamental, basic and affordable means of transport.

The Minister of Transport says; "But that's okay. If they can't take VIA Rail, they can fly." Well, it may be true that the Minister of Transport can fly. It may be true that I can fly and most of my colleagues can fly. It may be true that the business community can fly because it is charging it back to the office account, but senior citizens do not have office accounts and our young people do not have office accounts to use as a tax write-off. The poor and the disabled do not have office accounts. What they have had and what they depend upon is VIA Rail.

What does this report say to the government? Does it say: "Let's maintain VIA Rail in its current form forever"? Does it say: "Let's run the deficits the Prime Minister says he is concerned about forever?" No, it does not. It says clearly that VIA Rail as currently constituted with the equipment it has is not acceptable and it says clearly that the solution is not destroying a rail passenger service in Canada. It is rebuilding a rail passenger service in Canada, building a modern, efficient, high speed, environmentally friendly mass means of transport rail passenger service.

It points out that every other nation in the western and industrialized world is entering the year 2000 with a modern, high speed, efficient, environmentally clean rail passenger service, save one. Every other nation in the world as an investment in their future says that they cannot go on congesting airports, congesting highways and polluting our environment. Every other nation in the world, it seems, understands the Haida saying: "We don't inherit the land from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children." Every other nation in the world wants to give back the land to their children in good shape, environmentally clean, with affordable means of transportation.

Canada alone among the nations of the world says: "No, we are going to go backward. We cannot do it. We do not have the resolve. We do not have the finances. We do not have the technology, nor do we have the vision". The standing committee rejects that concept by the Government of Canada. We believe we do have the vision. We do have the know-how. We do have the resolve, and Canadians are prepared to make a proper