an over–all load factor of 93.8 per cent with most of the routes carrying a load factor of 98 per cent.

How can the Minister of Transport justify eliminating The Canadian from VIA Rail's passenger network with these kind of statistics?

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I am not disputing the numbers given by my colleague opposite, but they should be checked because they are based on two, to four weeks or two to three months.

Mr. Speaker, decisions concerning VIA Rail have been taken and those numbers refer to previous years. It has been proven without a shadow of a doubt that the services use had fallen overall by 20 per cent over the last eight years. The decision has also been based on considerations of national interest and funds available for transportation as a whole. Again, we can check the numbers available.

Obviously, Transport Canada and I will make no decision based on numbers gathered over two or three weeks or two or three months. That is very obvious.

[*English*]

Mr. Nault: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. Many Canadians attempting to travel on The Canadian were turned away because the trains were booked to capacity. In my endeavour to get on with the debate and as the minister has discussed, statistics can be looked at in different ways. I asked VIA if it could give me a statistic on how many people were turned away, and lo and behold, they do not keep that statistic. But based on what I have been told, a large number of people are being turned away.

Based on that, would the minister reconsider his decision to eliminate The Canadian now that there are up–to–date statistics? Will he look at the possibility of keeping statistics on those who are turned away at certain periods during the year when the train is full and running at capacity? Those turned away are a statistic and an important one in the debate on VIA Rail and its use in this country.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I would like to understand the rationale of my friend and I cannot.

When the trains are full, normally we make a profit. We have to pay $1.5 million a day for the deficit of VIA Rail. We have to put in more and more money and this train, as any other train in the country, does not go over 50 per cent occupancy rate and not over 30 per cent or 35 per cent of cost recovery.

I will explain again what I have said for a couple of months. We cannot afford to put a billion dollars into a system which is not used by Canadians. If we were to turn people away, we would make money and we do not make money.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TRIBUTE TO JEAN–CLAUDE MALÉPART

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members already know that we have lost a colleague and a friend in the person of Jean–Claude Malépart. I will now ask some of his colleagues to pay tribute to his memory. The Right Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, God has taken from us one of his most faithful children, a man who valued and practised faith, charity and honesty.

Only a disease as merciless as cancer was able to fell Jean–Claude Malépart, a man of gigantic courage, generosity, will and perseverance.

[*English*]

Jean–Claude had the biggest heart in Parliament. He was, in his way, the conscience of the House of Commons. He had a natural eloquence, a commanding presence, always a man of the people, friend of the lonely, champion of the weak and voice of the poor. He was the greatest advocate of his generation of our country's senior citizens.

[*Translation*]

However, nothing in his youth seemed to prepare him for the important role he played in our society. His mother died a few days after his birth, and his father died when he was 12. He had to drop out of school to work in the factory in order to help support his family.

At this point, his employers noticed that Jean–Claude had a very special talent for helping his fellow citizens organize and for motivating them to carry out their projects. They decided to let him go temporarily and