

● (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

TRANSPORT—CROWSNEST PASS RATES—ESTABLISHMENT OF
SHORT-TERM STUDY—REPORTED LOBBY BY FOOD PROCESSORS

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight regarding a question I raised in the House a few days ago with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). It concerns the whole matter of grain transportation and, more specifically, the Crowsnest Pass rate. My objective tonight is not to discuss in any way the pros and cons of our grain transportation problems, because I believe the issue has been discussed enough in those terms.

My purpose tonight is to ask the Minister of Transport or his parliamentary secretary about the establishment of a task force. I believe this is necessary in order to resolve the problem of the Crowsnest Pass rate, which is very important matter to the whole economy of western Canada. It is my opinion that at this time the government must proceed toward the resolution of the freight rate issue.

It is interesting to note that most farm organizations in western Canada are now at the point of advocating a change in the terms of the rates. Obviously, all farm organizations do not agree on the type of change, but nevertheless it is very significant that these organizations, which generally represent most of the farmers in western Canada, are advocating a change at this time.

As I understand it, one of the stumbling blocks to implementing a change in the rate, is the tremendous amount of bickering in cabinet. The Minister of Transport is certainly not the master of his own destiny; he is being stopped by various cabinet ministers. We hear that two of those cabinet ministers are Senator Hazen Argue, the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Senator Olson, who is responsible for the economic development portfolio. It is interesting to note that both of these gentlemen, who are perceived as being against any change or study of the Crowsnest Pass rate, are non-elected members of cabinet. I think the fact that both men are non-elected is a great disservice to Canada at the present time. The government should listen to the majority of people in western Canada. Unquestionably, the majority of people want a change in the rates. The exact details of any change could be worked out by a task force, and from time to time the Minister of Transport has indicated one might be established.

I think a task force should address two or three specific matters. Obviously, the terms of reference must be established first of all. There should be a very specific time limit as we do not want to be seen as studying the grain transportation problem in western Canada yet again. The task force proposals

Adjournment Debate

could then come before Parliament to be debated. If any legislative changes were required in order to facilitate the task force findings, they could be done at that time. This would take the issue out of the realm of pure politics for a short period of time.

In my opinion, any change which occurs in the rate must address itself to the livestock industry first and then to the processing industry. I think both industries are being harmed at the present time. In western Canada there exists a chance for increased economic growth and diversification, but that will only occur through some change in terms of the Crowsnest Pass rate. In other words, change must be just that—it must be a change. It must not be just an adjustment in terms of what we already have. The Crow rate issue has become an issue of regional development in western Canada. This is why it is vitally important that the issue be reviewed outside the political sphere by a task force. I believe there is a chance for growth and diversification in western Canada through proper changes to the Crowsnest Pass rate. If we allow this opportunity to slip by, I am very much afraid that it will impede the long-term growth of that very important region of the country.

● (2205)

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) for giving me an opportunity to speak on this matter. From what he has said tonight, I can see that he shares my concerns, the concerns of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bockstael) and those of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) about the urgency of this very important matter, and about the need to move toward a speedy resolution of the now famous, or I guess I should say infamous, Crowsnest Pass rates.

The minister has held many meetings during his western visits in the last few months to discuss the problems that flow from the Crow rate. Indeed, may I say here that he has received congratulatory notes from parties equally concerned. If I may paraphrase the comments, these urge him to continue his courageous efforts in seeking a resolution to the Crow rate. The hon. member for Lisgar also encouraged the minister, and I believe the tone of his comments was congratulatory as well.

I could go on and indicate the reasons changes are needed in the Crow rate, but I think the hon. member for Lisgar covered this area tonight, and I note that he too was urging a speedy resolution. I can refer the hon. member to the recent speeches by the Minister of Transport. In speeches to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and the Alberta Wheat Pool the Minister of Transport outlined in detail his position on the Crow rate. He emphasized his desire to seek a resolution openly and in full consultation with those most directly concerned. In speeches in Calgary and Regina before Christmas, the minister suggested that it would be useful to appoint a small task force, as has also been suggested by the hon. member for Lisgar, to work with concerned farm organizations to try to develop a consensus among those who are most directly affected by the Crow rate.