

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

**Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I think the point raised by the Hon. Member with respect to the environment deserves further comment. What we are saying, what we said and what we intend to repeat to the corporation's board of directors, first of all, and to Canadians in general, is that we can no longer afford to invest \$650 million annually in a mode of transportation that is used by 3 to 5 per cent of the population. We must ensure that the modes of transportation used by Canadians have a financial structure that the Government can afford to support. We must not be unrealistic, Mr. Speaker. We can no longer afford what we have been paying during the past ten years in terms of subsidies to VIA Rail.

*[English]*

## VIA RAIL—POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF OPERATIONS

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transport. We noted last week some \$500 million in cuts in VIA subsidies over the next five years. This morning the Minister of Transport fired the chief executive officer of VIA Rail because the chief executive officer believes that those cuts are inconsistent with the notion of maintaining a VIA Rail passenger service in this country.

**Some Hon. Members:** Shame, shame!

**Mr. Tobin:** My question to the Minister of Transport is a straightforward one. Is the Minister of Transport prepared to come clean with the people of Canada today and admit that the reason he fired the chief executive officer is that the Government of Canada has decided to close down VIA Rail's operations entirely in this country?

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

**Mr. Tobin:** The Government of Canada does not have the courage to make a clean statement. The president left because the cuts are inconsistent with maintaining a rail passenger service in Canada.

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

**Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I will not pound the desk. It is not the way to convince Canadians who do not believe.

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

**Mr. Bouchard (Roberval):** I would like to say that there was an agreement with Mr. de Belleval that his departure would be appropriate in light of the fact that we had a new mandate with VIA Rail and it was not what he had exposed to Canadians in the last three months.

I met Mr. de Belleval this morning and I believe that he understands our position. You can yell and scream and say what you want, you will not change the reality of the finances of this country that you are responsible for.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Tobin:** The Minister can twist and turn all he wants and he will not hide the hypocrisy of his answer today in the House of Commons.

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

**Mr. Tobin:** There is no courage in scurrying away like an anxious crab from the truth.

## PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE—TAKEOVER BY PROVINCES AND MUNICIPALITIES

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** I would like to ask the Minister of Transport, what other conclusion can Canadians come to other than this Government, despite all its promises both during the election and over the last dozen years, is abandoning VIA Rail, when we see the Minister of Transport of Canada promoting the notion in Canada's newspapers that the provinces and municipalities ought to take over the rail passenger service in Canada?

**Some Hon. Members:** Shame!

**Mr. Tobin:** I ask the Minister again, why does he not come clean? Why is it Mr. de Belleval is fired but Mr. Hanigan, a former Tory candidate is kept on as chairman of the board of VIA Rail?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I already said in English. Mr. de Belleval and I agreed that considering the positions he had taken, it was preferable for him to resign, and that is what he did. The Hon. Member has already made up his mind about the options that VIA Rail will propose to the Government. I have not. This morning I told the board of directors: Submit proposals that you feel are appropriate, considering the financial reference level we are giving you, we will listen. That is what I said, and that is what I can do, Mr. Speaker.