

We first had a White Paper called *Freedom to Move* brought down by the then Minister of Transport, which was given to the Standing Committee on Transport of the House of Commons to review. We had hearings here in Ottawa and in Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver. During these hearings we heard, both in terms of unprompted statements from witnesses, as well as through questioning by opposition members of the committee, that there was real concern about the impact of unfettered competition on some parts of our country. We heard about it in Atlantic Canada and we heard about it in the Prairies. We heard about it on the West Coast. We heard about it later when we travelled as a committee throughout northern Canada and the western Arctic. We heard pleas for some kind of protection and, quite frankly, only because the Opposition insisted upon it, was there mention of freedom to move in the report of the standing committee.

● (1240)

Then we got the original Bill which contained the following sentence: "Transportation is recognized as a key to regional economic development"; not the only key, not the prime key, but a key. As we know from events this week in Ottawa, even the word "the" becomes an important point within the context of drafting a new version of the Constitution. "A key" was an area focused upon. After second reading in the House, it went to the Standing Committee on Transport which was charged with the responsibility of reviewing Bill C-18 and Bill C-19. Fairly extensive hearings were held in Ottawa and when we went on the road.

We heard the same message. People were frustrated because they had to repeat it. From their point of view, as well as ours, the Government had not listened the first time around. It had not listened to leaders in Atlantic Canada, in western Canada, or in the North in terms of the very real danger of it being left to the market-place to make a decision. The market-place would decide, based upon its bottom line, what was good and not good for shareholders. It would decide to eliminate or reduce a service without any regard to the impact it would have upon the regions and, most important, the impact it would have upon the people living in those regions. We heard from eminent people in all parts of Canada.

In terms of our committee hearings on the road, we started in the West and worked back to central Canada; then we started in the east and worked back again to the centre. On the western side there was difficulty. I am sure the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent will remember the frustration we felt. No matter how hard we tried as members of the committee to bring out the concerns, we had great difficulty during our hearings in western Canada. However, there was a difference when we were in Atlantic Canada. Unlike some parts of the west, people in Atlantic Canada have not had good times. They have seen the policies of national Governments being imposed upon them. They have seen themselves being ignored time and time again by Governments of both stripes at the federal level. They were scared that if the legislation went through once again they would be the ones on

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the "outs", the victims. They saw that there were areas of the country where competition was appropriate and did not need protection, for example, the Golden Horseshoe—the Windsor-Toronto-Montreal-Quebec City corridor where there are many options between modes and within modes to provide for the natural compression of rates on one hand and natural improvement of services on the other hand.

However, in Atlantic Canada, province after province, representatives of Governments, such as the Premier of New Brunswick, the Hon. Richard Hatfield, appeared before us. Let me read what was his contribution. He said:

My overriding concern continues to be the lack of adequate recognition in Bill C-18 of the importance of transportation to regional economic development. The recognition of transportation as a key to regional economic development in Bill C-18 is an important step, but goes only half way.

Further in his statement he said:

The national transportation policy statement which should be part of the new legislation must recognize the need to have regional economic development objectives prevail over commercial viability objectives when these are in conflict.

Government Members were listening very carefully. It was clear that they were getting the message. When we returned to Ottawa, we began the process of first hearing from the Minister and then from his officials. Then we got into clause by clause consideration. It was clear that Conservative members of the committee, particularly those from Atlantic Canada, got the message. Whether it was the message of the actual impact or whether it was a political message, I do not think we will ever know. The important thing was that they moved and worked behind the scenes to improve it once again.

Then we got the current wording of the clause which goes further than "a key" and says that transportation is recognized as a key to regional economic development and that commercial viability of transportation links is balanced with regional economic development objectives in order that the potential economic strengths of each region may be realized.

Today we are trying to go one step further in the progression to allow us to have a statement in Bill C-18 which clearly gives primacy to regional economic realities over arbitrary decisions that are made by a transportation element in a region of the country, whether it be in Atlantic Canada, northern Ontario, the northern Prairies, the southern Prairies, northern British Columbia, or southern British Columbia. We would provide them with that primacy so that if a transportation mode were examining its situation, it would know that it could not move arbitrarily. There would be a protection, a control, or a regulation to prevent a change in a service which would have very negative effects on the economy of a region and the people who live there.

When we travelled and heard from the Premiers, the Ministers of Transport, rail unions, labour councils, and local development groups, we received a message we could not have heard had we sat here in Ottawa. Many of those people would not have been able to come here. It is not a question of whether or not the committee would find time for them. Perhaps it is