

Private Members' Business

My colleague from the Liberal Party also pointed out the kind of contradictions that are implicit with the decisions made by this government around VIA. The dismantling of passenger rail service in this country is a major problem. I give you an example. There is a lobby pushing right now for a \$17 billion overhaul of the Trans-Canada Highway.

• (1730)

Airlines are asking for deregulation, and VIA is being shunted out. Rail transportation, as has been demonstrated in Europe, is the most environmentally appropriate means of moving big quantities of people. We have to take all the environmental costs into account. When we are talking about subsidies and the government's linear thinking on what constitutes a subsidy, we have to consider what are the real environmental costs of the dismantling of VIA Rail.

In order to advance the debate, I would like to put to the House an idea put to me by my colleague from Prince George—Bulkley Valley. It is the idea of an environmental gazette. I know the government now has many documents such as those which are let for contracts so that businesses may see what was coming up and have an opportunity to bid.

The same goes for regulatory reform, with a document produced by the government so that people who are interested in such things can see what is planned by the government and to assess how they can take part.

An environmental gazette follows on from that idea. It puts it back into the public process so that people can understand all federal projects or provincial projects and, as the motion states, even private projects which have to be assessed. They would be in this gazette and the project, with a rating of what the problems or lack of problems might be, would be assessed for the public record.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to put that forth in an honest attempt to try to advance the debate. As I said, I and my party support the motion, but we feel increasingly frustrated that there is lack of action in this area.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Desjardins (Témiscamingue): Madam Speaker, I must admit that I did not expect this debate to be about VIA Rail. I think VIA Rail is taking up a lot of time in the House and I also think we should focus more on the motion itself and on considerations that are more pertinent to the motion presented today by the Hon. Member for Fraser Valley—West (Mr. Wenman).

I would like to start by congratulating the Hon. Member on a motion that is in the national interest, and of course the environment is a priority for Canadians and this Government. However, I must inform the Hon. Member that quite honestly, I have some reservations about his motion because although it is practically a motherhood issue, the motion does give rise to several problems and I am sure the Hon. Member will agree.

First of all, I suppose it helps to represent a region like Abitibi—Témiscamingue or Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean or the Gaspé to realize what a severe impact reckless industrial development during the past decades has had on those regions. A short visit to Abitibi—Témiscamingue is enough to see to what extent industrial development has affected our environment. Thousands of lakes are contaminated, the air we breathe is polluted, the ground we walk on is contaminated, all as a result of 50 years of uncontrolled industrial development. In a region like mine that is entirely dependent on our sawmills and our mining industry, I hardly need to describe what our ecology is like today, and that is why a motion like the one before the House is certainly a step in the right direction.

In 1987, we had the Brundtland Report which introduced the concept of sustainable development, broadly endorsed by Canada and our Government.

The Hon. Member's motion is certainly in line with this goal of providing for sustainable development.

The motion before the House today reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider introducing legislation to fully protect the Canadian environment through the institution of mandatory environmental impact assessment procedures which would allow for assessments, prior to the construction of installations, public or private, of projects which may prove to be potentially damaging to the environment.