

Supply

That this House approve the recommendation contained in the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Transport, calling for a moratorium in the Government's proposed cuts to VIA Rail.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to congratulate my three colleagues in the House, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, and my colleague from Regina for their most eloquent words. In fact, they are the most eloquent words I have heard in many a year in this House from three members on the occasion of Remembrance Day.

I am pleased to speak to the motion which stands in my name on behalf of the Liberal Party, but I suspect it stands in the name of many members of Parliament from all three political parties. It is quite traditional on an opposition day when a motion is put before the House that the motion would read along the lines that the opposition condemns, or the House condemns the government, et cetera. I want members to note the way in which this particular opposition motion is written. It states:

That this House approve the recommendation contained in the second report of the Standing Committee on Transport, calling for a moratorium on the government's proposed cuts to VIA Rail.

It is a motion that is cast in the affirmative. It is a motion that does not ask for approval of the work of a particular political party. It is a motion that does not seek partisan advantage for any political party or ideology, but rather it is a motion that seeks the approval of the whole House for the work of a standing committee of this House, a committee comprised of members from all three parties, Liberals, New Democrats and Conservatives.

It is a motion that calls for the approval of the consideration and the judgment of the group of members from all three parties in this place who are charged with the responsibility to reflect upon, study and to pass comment on the transportation policy of the government. It is a non-partisan motion. It seeks no advantage for any party; it seeks to strike no blow at any party.

In the spirit of parliamentary reform, it calls upon Parliament to take note of the observations of a group of members, men and women, charged on behalf of Canadians to examine the estimates and to examine the policy of the Department of Transport.

Why am I taking the time to point that out? Why am I making such a fuss about that? I will tell you why, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a rare day in this place when a standing committee is prepared to say of a government initiative, and it takes great courage on the part of all of its members, including Conservative members, that we have given consideration to that government initiative, in this case the cuts to VIA Rail and the elimination of 50 per cent of the routes and 2,700 jobs. We have given that government initiative our consideration. We do not come out with a report that says it is an evil design, it is a brutal measure, it is an arrogant decision. We could have, but we did not.

We comment substantially as a committee, as a non-partisan group, on the cuts. We make some very compelling arguments to the government, as members from all three parties, that the decision that has been taken has been taken in haste, the implications of those cuts are not well understood, and the future of VIA Rail is, at best, and that is putting it very kindly, highly questionable, if these cuts proceed as they are ordered to do in just two months time on January 15.

• (1030)

Let us review for a moment what the government has put before the people of Canada. The Prime Minister has said that they have developed a plan which he believes will save VIA Rail. Intrinsic to that plan is to eliminate 2,700 jobs at VIA Rail; to eliminate every service other than the major corridor service in Atlantic Canada; to reduce the frequency of VIA Rail services on the major corridor routes between Windsor and Quebec city dramatically; to eliminate The Canadian train, historic not only in this country but renowned around the world; and to do all of that at a time when there is no new money to purchase new equipment or to revitalize VIA Rail.

The worst critics of this decision have said that it is a plan designed to fail. This is a built-in obsolescence policy. As you cut the feeder routes, eliminate the frequencies in the major corridor cities and eliminate routes like The Canadian, a great tourism draw for Canada around the world, surely that is a plan which in 18 months will result in yet a further decline of VIA ridership. Finally, the government will come to the House 12 to 18 months from now and say that the new statistics show ridership has gone down yet again, so let us now sever entirely the lifeblood of VIA Rail.