

Oral Questions

Could the Minister explain why he did not look at other ways of reducing his deficit instead of going after Canadian families?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, one of the best encouragements for people to start a family and raise children is to have a job and the assurance that that job will be there and will pay more. If people have jobs and are trained as a result of the substantial increase in the moneys that we have made available, these are what are important to families. This will give people the confidence that there is a strong future for them.

Let me remind the Hon. Member—he is shaking his head. I do not think there are many people in the country shaking their heads, having seen a million and a half more people with jobs. I see the Hon. Member nodding. He agrees with me.

Mr. Malépart: No.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): There are a million and a half more people who have jobs today. That situation is giving people the confidence to build and grow and leave a better country for their children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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TRANSPORT

SUBSIDIES TO VIA RAIL

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. One hundred and four years ago, under a Conservative Government, the last spike was driven to connect one end of this country to the other by rail. This morning the Minister of Transport delivered the last spike to the heart of VIA Rail by announcing the subsidy restrictions for the next number of years. Will the Minister confirm that the result of the subsidy level for 1993-94 is that VIA will only have sufficient funds to provide for those nine protected services, and therefore will not have the money to operate the Transcontinental, the Atlantic, the Windsor-Québec City corridor and a number of other routes in this country? Will he confirm that that is the result of his decision?

• (1510)

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I will not confirm anything which has been said. This morning, I gave some reference levels to the Board of Directors of VIA Rail which correspond to the reality

of the finances of this country, something we always have to keep in mind. I totally share the concern of the Minister of Finance. Transport Canada has to consider that also. We have set the new reference levels that the Government of Canada can provide to VIA Rail. Within those reference levels we would like to have proposals or options which will permit not only what the Board of Directors of VIA Rail want, but can afford. I believe that not only this Government but also the Member will have to consider the affordability of what we do in Canada with regard to transportation.

CUTS TO VIA RAIL

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since 1986 this Government has systematically undermined VIA Rail's ability to improve its service and to reduce the cost to taxpayers. It refused to give VIA the equipment it needed in order to turn it into a modern passenger rail system. It did not give it legislation. It has now fired the President of VIA Rail, who had the guts to oppose this Conservative Government's policy.

Will the Minister go back to Cabinet and say: "This does not make sense. I do not want to be the Minister who goes down in history as having destroyed passenger rail in this country".

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, if my friend wants me to talk about history, I will. It is true that 122 years ago this country was built by transportation—

An Hon. Member: Still is.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Can you listen, please, it is important. The decisions of today will be the past tomorrow. I do not want to give your children and my children a past made up of debts, deficit and inflation. I would not be proud of that kind of heritage for my children.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF RAIL TRANSIT

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): When one looks at transportation in this country, one recognizes that from an environmental point of view rail passenger transportation is the most environmentally sound opportunity we have.

Is the Minister suggesting that he is more willing to conserve the dollars and cents of the Minister of Finance than the environmental health of this country by forcing people to drive on highways instead of riding the rails? Is that what he is suggesting to the people of Canada?