

● (1420)

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, Senator Bielish has given us a good outline of this bill, which affects the Central Western Railway in our province of Alberta. As she has said, this short-line railway is in a somewhat peculiar position because of the timing of the beginning of its operation in late 1986 and the coming into force of the new National Transportation Act on January 1, 1987.

The fact that Central Western preceded that new law meant that it was not incorporated in the new provisions of the law for short-line routes to be set up under provincial jurisdiction rather than by an act of the federal Parliament.

Therefore, Central Western is currently viewed as being a little bit of both. It is a provincial entity, under a special act of the Alberta legislature in November 1984, and it is a federal entity as of November 1986. Therefore, it must respond to no fewer than nine different federal and provincial departments and report under four different reporting standards instead of two.

Bill C-5 would simply place Central Western Railway under the same rules as any other short-line railway in Canada so that it could operate under provincial jurisdiction in a manner similar to that of the Southern Saskatchewan Rail Coop, which started after the National Transportation Act came into force.

I should like to tell honourable senators a bit about what this railway does. It operates in an area which used to be served, as Senator Bielish has said, by Canadian National in the railway subdivision of Stettler, Alberta. It runs for 108 miles between Dinosaur Junction, north of Drumheller, and Ferlow Junction, which is south of Camrose in southern Alberta.

The railway serves some 700 farmers located around nine small Alberta communities: Edberg, Meeting Creek, Donald, Red Willow—where I had the personal pleasure of examining the tracks on which this particular railway runs—the town of Stettler, Big Valley, Rumsey, Rowley and Morrin, Alberta. It carries all types of Canadian Wheat Board grains both for domestic and export delivery. It has 18 employees. The 12 operating workers of the railway all hold “A” card certificates under the uniform code of operating rules.

The driving force behind the Central Western Railway is an extremely energetic and innovative gentleman by the name of Tom Payne, who first started working on the idea of maintaining this rail link in his area back in the early 1980s. So this railway has a bipartisan history, having begun its development under the then Minister of Transport, Lloyd Axworthy, and having been carried along by the former Minister of Transport, Don Mazankowski, and is now under the present incumbent, Doug Lewis. It is providing needed service to the farmers and to that whole area of the province in which it operates and it has, as Senator Bielish has pointed out, an excellent safety record.

While the bill was before the legislative committee of the House of Commons representatives from the Canadian Labour

[Senator Bielish]

Association and the United Transportation Union appeared before that committee. Basically they believe that the Central Western Railway and all other short-line railways—if they be permitted at all, which is not a matter for debate on this particular bill—should fall under federal jurisdiction rather than provincial jurisdiction. On behalf of the opposition, I suggest that the bill be given second reading and referred to committee to hear any necessary representations.

Hon. Hazen Argue: Honourable senators, we have just heard excellent explanations of this bill by Senator Bielish and Senator Fairbairn. This measure was brought about because of the drive by the railways of this country to abandon wherever they possibly can branch lines in western Canada. This type of service, which is a last-ditch stand by local residents, is likely to be used more frequently in the future. Senator Fairbairn referred to Saskatchewan. An operating association has come into existence and it maintains service along a small part of the CNR line that is no longer serviced by the CNR, which goes through Parry, Dummer and Truax. I would like to do some further research on how that line has been set up and how it is operating and to have an opportunity to speak further at second reading stage. Therefore, I move the adjournment of the debate.

Hon. C. William Doody (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I wonder whether the honourable senator is aware of the particular circumstances surrounding this bill. I am told that there is some urgency for it in terms of the department's requirements. I believe that involvement with a Supreme Court case is adding some urgency to the bill. It had been our hope to get the bill through second reading and referred to committee today. It is then our hope that the committee will have time to consider it once the chairman has determined what witnesses should be heard and has found mutually convenient times for them to appear. It is even possible that the bill could be referred back to the Senate tomorrow. That being the case, perhaps the honourable senator would find it convenient to speak on third reading or even to ask his questions in committee. Of course, the option is still open to him and, if he so desires, he can certainly adjourn the bill at the present time. We will not call for a vote. We would prefer to have the bill move ahead, but it is the senator's choice.

Senator Argue: Honourable senators, with that explanation and request by the deputy leader, and he being a person in the Senate who is always very reasonable, I am pleased to have the bill receive second reading at this time. I hope to have an opportunity to make some further remarks on third reading.

Senator Doody: Thank you.

Motion agreed to and bill read second time.

● (1430)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?