

July 7, 1989

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORAL QUESTIONS

Conference on Privatization

Mr. Anguish: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of privatization, and I see where the minister is planning to help some of his buddies at a so-called non-partisan gathering for the Institute for Saskatchewan Enterprise with their privatization conference next year, and he's going to be footing the Bill for those attending the party. And I was wondering if the minister could tell the Saskatchewan taxpayers today if this footing the Bill for some 2,000 people is not just kind of setting the stage for the provincial election campaign, and I'm wondering if the minister can tell us today how much is this little party going to cost the taxpayers to support your privatization moves.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Mr. Speaker, certainly there is a conference planned for next year, about 2,000 people supposedly coming, from various countries in the world, here to Saskatchewan to discuss public participation. Certainly my department may look at hosting some type of function which is very... we do this often. I think we've done it with agribition, with the farm progress show. I think it just shows the spirit of Saskatchewan to host our guests when they come here, to have perhaps a little informal mixer or something of that nature. I don't know what that will cost, but certainly I can tell you we will be very vigilant upon it and we will put forth the best welcome to Saskatchewan that we possibly can.

Mr. Anguish: — Well maybe we could also invite around 2,000 Saskatchewan people who don't have enough food to eat; they should be invited as well, Mr. Minister, if you're throwing a party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Anguish: — The headlines say that: "Saskatchewan to Pay for Privatization Party." And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you can assure us today in this legislature that not one cent of Saskatchewan tax dollars is going into this bash to support your ill-fated plans for privatization in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — The member mentioned about Saskatchewan people in attendance. I'm sure there will be a large number of Saskatchewan people in attendance because there's a lot of interest in public participation in this province, and I think you'll see a good contingent of Saskatchewan people here.

As I said previously, it will be our intention to perhaps host an informal or a get-together, a welcoming. It will be very stringently scrutinized, and I think this is what

Saskatchewan should be doing. When you get 2,000 people coming from various countries of the world, I do not see anything wrong with having a little welcoming ceremony for them.

Mr. Anguish: — Well, Mr. Minister. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would like to remind the hon. member that he direct his questions to the Chair.

Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, a new question. I'd like to ask the minister of privatization, Mr. Speaker, that obviously he won't tell us how much his little bash is going to cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, so let's deal with the agenda. We can see by the agenda the conference is sort of a Tory agenda for the future, with discussions on the privatization of health care, social services, recreation, culture, municipal transportation and public works. Can you give the people of Saskatchewan your assurance that the time around coming up to next election you'll not be deceitful as you were in the last election and come clean on your plans, and if you're going to privatize these services in Saskatchewan, tell the people of Saskatchewan before you try and bamboozle them with an election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, the member fails to understand... certainly it is not my convention or my conference at all. It's the Institute on Public Enterprise. It's an international conference, and I'm sure there are many people from Australia and New Zealand that will be attending from those governments, which I don't think you can really call a Tory bash.

Mr. Anguish: — It certainly seems like... Mr. Speaker, a question through you to the minister of privatization, sir. To the minister, I would think that it would be disgraceful, and you should be ashamed to think that in the year 1990 you're going to have a birthday bash and you're also going to throw money for a privatization party for your friends to launch you into the next election campaign, when people in Saskatchewan go hungry and people are without jobs and people are leaving the province. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Now instead of paying attention to this political agenda of yours, I'm wondering if you could come clean with the people of the province of Saskatchewan. Instead of having a privatization party next May, maybe we can have it as a farewell party for the most ruthless government in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan will be proud to see that here in Saskatchewan, in the middle of Canada, a trend that is moving all around the world in various countries. More than 50 countries have chose to come here to one of the focal points where they see that things like employee buy-ins, things like WESTBRIDGE computer company coming from the 40th ranked company to the eighth

in one year, new acquisitions, brand-new employee buy-ins, the Meadow Lake saw mill — I can go on and on to tell you why people from around the world are pleased to come to Saskatchewan to discuss public participation and the initiatives that have been undertaken by this government, and I welcome them here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Political Contributions and Offshore Marketing

Mr. Koskie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the absence of the minister responsible for the potash corporation, I'd like to direct a question to the Deputy Premier. Mr. Minister, I have here a copy of *Greenmarkets*, which is a newsletter in respect to the fertilizer industry. And in that article it states in part:

There are numerous industry reports that firms seeking to sell fertilizer into India have been asked to make election contributions as a side condition to sales.

I ask you, Mr. Minister: can you tell us whether or not Canpotex, one of the largest dealers in fertilizers to India, has been requested to pay any kickbacks or bribes to the Congress Party in India; and can you tell us how such an approach would have been handled?

Hon. Mr. Berntson: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that they haven't asked me. And I can. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The minister has been asked the question. There are two other members who have decided to ask each other questions simultaneously. Let us allow the minister, the Deputy Premier, to answer the original question.

Hon. Mr. Berntson: — I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, while I have no day to day involvement in the operation of Canpotex, I would be very, very surprised, Mr. Speaker, that even if Canpotex were asked, that their response would be an absolute and flat no.

Mr. Koskie: — New question to the minister. The one good part of his answer is that he said he had no involvement. That gives us some confidence.

Mr. Minister, according to *Greenmarkets*, one firm which has been approached, the firm has confirmed that such practices are going on and that contributions are sought, related to the tonnage sold to India.

Mr. Minister, the position of your party is pretty clear, because we recall last February one Bruce Cameron, a PC Party official, wrote to Peter Matthews, the president of the party, requesting some kickbacks in respect to advertising firms that had done work. So there's some similarities between the two parties.

And the people of Saskatchewan are concerned whether this practice is going on. And I ask you: will you undertake to have the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, a major player in Canpotex, demand a full report of the offshore marketing and everything it knows about such practices in relation to sales to India?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Berntson: — Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to make such inquiries of Canpotex.

Mr. Koskie: — A final question. And, Mr. Minister, will you report back indicating the findings in respect to that report, because the people of Saskatchewan totally lack confidence in your government to handle any of the affairs in respect to the affairs of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Berntson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said that I would ask the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to inquire of Canpotex as to the existence of such practices, Mr. Speaker, and I will be happy to report, Mr. Speaker, to the House on the response of such inquiries. And in the absence of any evidence of such allegations, I will expect an apology from members opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Payment of Crow Rate

Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I direct my question to the Acting Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, according to spokesmen from the Prairie Pool, they're going to be heading for a show-down this year with the federal government on the method of payment problem that we're going to be looking at. The pool believes that the Crow benefit should be paid to the railroads, as it has been. The federal government says it should be paid to farmers. Your group over there has some half-baked idea that nobody's listening to.

My question is this: Mr. Minister, will you today give the Prairie Pools, other farm organizations and farmers your commitment that you will support the method of payment to continue going to the railroads?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the debate relative to method of payment has been going on for some several years now. Various groups have at various times pointed out some deficiencies in the present method of payment. Several studies have been done to suggest that there may be some alternative methods that might remove some of the existing flaws as they relate to a disincentive to livestock feeding, a disincentive to food processing, those kinds of things.

But the reality is, of course, Mr. Speaker, as of this day, at least as far as I am aware, no single study or no alternative method of payment enjoys a majority view of support by farmers across the province, or indeed farmers across western Canada, or indeed farmers across all of Canada.

I think our government would support any plan, Mr. Speaker, that did enjoy that kind of majority support. At this point in time, I don't think we see one, but certainly we would support one that enjoys majority support, Mr. Speaker.

enjoys majority support, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think if that minister knew anything about what he was talking about, he would know that the Prairie Pools handle 60 per cent of the grain going out of this province. If that isn't a majority, I don't know what is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — On every issue where there's a dispute between Saskatchewan farmers and the federal government, your government has lined up squarely behind Brian Mulroney.

Now, Mr. Minister, if the method of payment is changed, that would mean an increase of 44 per cent in the freight rates or \$7 million out of farmers' pockets. And eventually, if the payment goes to farmers, you know that it's potential that that payment will be lost altogether, costing \$400 million to Saskatchewan farmers.

My question to you again is: if you don't have the courage to call an election so that we can provide leadership for the farmers in this province, will you let go of Brian Mulroney's hand now and stand up for the farmers of Saskatchewan and say, yes, you will support the method of payment going to the railroads?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, relative to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, what we do know about the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, in addition to what the hon. member has said, is that they are very much supportive of diversifying our agricultural economy. I think all of us have seen. . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — And, Mr. Speaker, that's very consistent with our Premier's efforts to diversify our economy, this government's effort to diversify our economy. We recognize that we've got to be something more than just drawers of water and hewers of wood. We've got to take the wheat and make something more out of it. We've got to take our resources like lumber and make something more out of it.

The pool is very much of that same view. That's why, Mr. Speaker, the wheat pool has itself diversified. They've bought into Robin's Donuts. They want to get into food processing because they, too, recognize that that is the way of the future. We support that, Mr. Speaker, 'cause we are, too, interested in diversification.

When I hear the hon. member harkening back to the days of the past it reminds me of 1982, pre-election 1982, where the minister of Agriculture then said, go in April and go on the Crow. That's part of the past, Mr. Speaker. We've got to look forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — New question, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, we all know that the federal government is trying to save money by cutting out just about everything they can cut

out. We know that this policy of paying, if we pay. . . the method of payment to producers. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Having difficulty hearing the member from Humboldt, and ask for your co-operation. Order, order.

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Minister, as I said, we all know the federal government is trying to save money, and we've seen evidence of that time and time again.

But this policy, if you change the method of payment to the farmers, opens the door for cost-based freight rates. That means somebody in Meadow Lake will pay an awful lot more than somebody sitting on the main line. That's a very strong potential.

We know it will accelerate branch line abandonment. We know that pressure from GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the free trade agreement, and from Quebec and Ontario to any payment to producers out here, there's pressure to get rid of it because they say it's unfair.

My question to you is this: in light of all these facts, why do you continue, or what possesses you to continue going on with your blind-eyed ideology against the farmers of Saskatchewan who are the majority saying, pay the method of payment to the railroads; why do you continue to do this instead of going with the Saskatchewan farmers and saying, Brian Mulroney, this time you're wrong?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, I think we're all aware that going from the present system to a new system represents a challenge. There are concerns that have been identified. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. We're having a little difficulty hearing the member for Weyburn now, and I'd like to ask for the same co-operation.

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, many studies and many farm groups have identified that if you were to go to a different system, it may present some new challenges or some new concerns. Similarly, the system that we have now, the **status quo** is not perfect. Many studies and many groups have identified that it too is flawed.

The hon. member talks about some of the concerns if one was to move away from it. Others have made the case, and I think in spades, about a disincentive to livestock feeding; about how it really maybe doesn't do the best job in the present system as it could in terms of enabling us to diversify our economy, get into food processing, some of those kinds of things.

So I would just suggest to him that he should take his ideological blinkers out, throw away the NFU (National Farmers Union) manual, that it becomes the Isley policy document on agriculture for the honourable group. If they have some good ideas, fine, but don't blindly be led by everything that's in that document.

Let's look at how we can. . . and don't be a change

resister. Let's look forward, Mr. Speaker. I think that's what the wheat pool wants to do; that's what the farmers across Saskatchewan want to do. That doesn't mean to say that we jump blindly into any avenue without having researched it thoroughly. We will support what the farmers of this province will support. They support our Premier on things like deficiency payments, drought programs, production loans, and cash advances.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, new question. If you're so sure of yourself, Mr. Minister, why don't you screw up your courage and call an election and we'll see who supports them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Minister, my question is this. You say that there are some disincentives to livestock under the present system. Will you provide this House with information as to what the cost would be to the grain farmer as opposed to what the cost would be . . . saving to the livestock producer.

Why do you not look at the whole picture instead of putting one group against the other. Why don't you look at the whole picture and say, the best method is to pay the railroads and there are other alternatives for the livestock producer to encourage production in this province. But why do you continue to try to separate the two and trade off \$440 million that are going to grain producers for a small saving in the livestock sector. Why don't you go to the livestock people and say, here's an alternative?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Well I think if my memory serves me right and if you look at past history under former NDP ministers — Mr. MacMurchy might come to mind — their stated policy was that we ought to be a single wheat economy here, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you that this side of the legislature does look at the entire picture. When we came to office, Mr. Speaker, we noticed — I guess it had gone unnoticed by the NDP — that you could get a cash advance on grains, Mr. Speaker. You could get a cash advance on grains, but you couldn't get a cash advance if you produced calves or hogs. That to us seemed like an either/or situation where we had unfairness in two of our major agriculture sectors.

This Premier and this Minister of Agriculture corrected that. We do have cash advances. We do have a more proactive irrigation program now. We are looking to diversify our agricultural economy. We are getting into biotechnology. Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of proactive agricultural policy that this government has.

We have yet to see the NDP agriculture policy. The Leader of the Opposition. . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the Minister of Health an opportunity to stand on his feet and

answer a question, rather than shouting from his seat throughout question period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Shortage of Occupational Therapists

Ms. Simard: — Mr. Minister, you've been aware since late June that there are no longer any occupational therapists at the Children's Rehab Centre in Saskatoon. I believe you're aware of that, Mr. Minister. The Saskatchewan Cerebral Palsy Association, among others, has asked your government to take steps to correct this drastic situation. So far, Mr. Minister, you've done nothing.

Please tell us what your policy is, if you have any, in order to take steps to correct this situation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the lack of numbers of occupational therapists in this country; it's low. There is a short supply of occupational therapists and in fact physiotherapists across Canada, in this country.

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — So, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the specific issue that the member raises, I can bring her back a report on the rehabilitation centre and the case that she refers to today, early part of next week.

Ms. Simard: — New question, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you will know that the cerebral palsy association submitted a brief to the Murray commission in which they stated that there should be 14.5 occupational therapists. This comes about as a result of a 1986 study. Instead there were only three, but as of today there are none, Mr. Minister — no occupational therapists there.

Some 65 per cent of the patients at the rehab centre are receiving less than adequate care. This is a long-standing problem. It's more severe in Saskatchewan than many other provinces as a result of your government's policies. I ask you again: what are you going to do to correct this situation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, while I acknowledge as I did in my previous answer, while I acknowledge the shortage of occupational therapists in Saskatchewan and across Canada — there's no question there's a shortage in that area — I'd say to the hon. member and to anybody watching, for young people to enter that profession is a good place to go. And they will be hired, and there are applications. We have subsidies, we have bursaries for people who take that particular profession — take training in that profession, and so on.

For the member over here, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the policies of this government as it relates to rehabilitation, let me just outline a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. One, right near us in the city of Regina where we sit today, the

Wascana Rehabilitation Centre that they would not build — that they would not build — that they would not staff.

Mr. Speaker, the rehabilitation record of this government is an exemplary one. The record in terms of hiring the numbers of occupational therapists, physiotherapists to staff them is not at the level that we would like it or that anyone in Canada would like it, because we do not have enough people in this country to fill those fast-growing professions.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are vigilant in attempting to hire these people. We are vigilant in addressing rehabilitation as we have done there in the area of rehabilitation for children, in the area of drugs and alcohol. You name the area of rehabilitation in health care, Mr. Speaker, this government has been there and active in it, and because of a shortage in that whole area that was left to us by that group over there who refused to build things like the Wascana Centre.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Simard: — New question, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, the Wascana Rehabilitation Centre is suffering similar shortages of staff because of your lack of long-term strategic planning in the area of occupational therapy and other. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Ms. Simard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, occupational therapists have been asking for a school of occupational therapy in Saskatchewan for a long time, and so far you've refused to meet that request. The cerebral palsy association study recommended to your government that there be 23 physical therapists at the centre. It has five and a quarter, and their study recommends 14.5 speech therapists, and it has only 1.5.

It's obvious, Mr. Minister, that the entire therapy aspect of this centre has been badly neglected. When is your government going to make this a priority and get these centres properly staffed, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member and to the House, there's no question that we need more occupational therapists. There is no question that we need that. And the reason we do is because of the emphasis we're placing on rehabilitation. A growing need in the whole delivery of health care is rehabilitation, whether it be for an ageing population or whether it be for the increasing and the right emphasis that's now being placed on rehabilitation of people injured from work, or handicapped people from whatever reason. There's no question that that's true.

But, Mr. Speaker, the member stands here and says that at the Wascana Rehab Centre that they're short of staff and that they could have more occupational therapists; I agree with that. But staff members at the Wascana Rehab Centre right today, and patients, long-term patients, will tell you how pleased they are with the centre, how pleased they are with the way in which they can carry on their work — I'm talking about staff members now, Mr. Speaker — and they'll also tell you of the days when they

sat there in inadequate facilities and watched them build the T.C. Douglas Building right across the lawn from them while they had no centre for their rehabilitation needs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 87 — An Act to amend The Urban Municipality Act, 1984

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Urban Municipality Act, 1984.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 88 — An Act respecting Custody of, Access to and Guardianship of Property of Children, Child Status and Parentage and Related Matters

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill respecting Custody of, Access to and Guardianship of Property of Children, Child Status and Parentage and Related Matters.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 89 — An Act to amend The Department of Energy and Mines Act

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Department of Energy and Mines Act.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

MOTION UNDER RULE 39

Abandonment of Passenger Service by VIA Rail

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I rise on a motion under rule 39, requesting leave with respect to a motion concerning the. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now I'd just like to remind the hon. members that the business of the House cannot proceed if there are constant interruptions. That's a very, very basic element of procedure in our House, and I think that while we have some heckling from time to time, these constant interruptions are not courteous and we should allow the member from Melville to proceed.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under rule 39 seeking leave for a motion. . . and I'll give you the nature of the motion, Mr. Speaker. The motion is with respect to reports of the abandonment of rail passenger service in the entire province of Saskatchewan. The motion calls upon the federal minister and the Prime Minister to seek and hold public hearings prior to any such decision.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this matter is an emergency; it's urgent and pressing. I submit that the members of the opposition have maintained this position for the last week

or two, that it is now time for some agreement in this Assembly on this. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'd just like to remind the minister that at best we allow just a very few words as an introduction to the motion. I would like him to ask leave and put the motion that the House may decide whether or not they wish to proceed with the debate.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Mr. Speaker, you wish the actual wording of the motion then?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion. . .

The Speaker: — With leave of course. The minister must ask for leave.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: —

That this Assembly expresses to the federal Minister of Transport, and to the Prime Minister, its grave concerns regarding recent reports recommending that VIA Rail abandon entirely rail service in this province; and further, that this Assembly urges the federal Minister of Transport to hold public hearings prior to making any decisions.

I ask for leave to proceed with this motion.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the opposition for granting leave on this motion.

An Hon. Member: — Unlike you a month ago.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is now quibbling from their seats about the nature of this motion. And, Mr. Speaker, I might say that this motion has, in addition to the proposals raised. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I realize it's Friday morning and I realize it's July and perhaps some members may rather be somewhere else, but we're here and the business of the House must proceed. And we can only proceed if hon. members co-operate. And I'm asking the hon. members once more to co-operate. The debate will go forward and all members will have the opportunity to speak.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was an attempt at reaching an agreement on the exact wording of this motion for the past two weeks, and there was much politicking on this topic. Finally, the government has decided that the motions presented were not sufficient and that this motion, in addition to the requests for the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport to reconsider their decision, this motion asks for public hearings to be held prior to any decision being made with respect to the loss of or change of passenger rail service in the province of Saskatchewan. The position that the government takes, and I'm sure the members of the opposition will agree, that public hearings are in order and that this motion should be passed unanimously in this Assembly.

There's great reason for holding public hearings on this particular issue. There is a report now prepared. However, the situation we have in Saskatchewan, and in particular in my constituency of Melville, is that we do not have enough information to conduct a logical and reasonable debate on this particular topic of exactly how we should continue with passenger rail traffic in Saskatchewan.

Yes, certainly there is a concern about the mounting deficit of VIA Rail. However, there is also a widely held view in my constituency, and held by myself I might add, Mr. Speaker, that VIA Rail has been mismanaged over the past eight or 10 years, and therefore the deficits run up are not necessary, considering that the VIA Rail service could have been managed in a much better manner.

Public hearings would give us some answers with respect to the Canada-wide implications of a loss of the national passenger service, with respect, first of all, to the effect of the loss of this service on the citizens of Canada, and weighing how much of a deficit would be in order to maintain such a service.

In addition, there is tremendous tourist potential for a Canada-wide service. Tourists from other lands cannot see Canada while flying over it at 31,000 feet. Even on a clear day you can't see much of Canada from that altitude, Mr. Speaker. And so therefore, not only for the traffic and the passengers of Canada, but for the tourist potential, public hearings would be very useful to determine the foreign exchange that could be earned. And the foreign exchange potential should be weighed against any potential losses of VIA and any potential subsidy that a federal government might have to provide.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, public hearings would indicate to us what the actual passenger traffic is with respect to the province of Saskatchewan. The hearing would reveal to us the actual cost. The citizens of my constituency indicate to me — and I might say, Mr. Speaker, they are the ones who drive these passenger trains, who operate them — that these trains are operating substantially full. The best information we can gather is that the train across Saskatchewan is running at 68 per cent full. Surely a train that is running full on many occasions, and could have many more passengers if operated properly, should be able to break even or get very close to that.

I will deal further with the proper operation of a VIA train with respect to some of the horror stories that my neighbours in the city of Melville have explained to me with respect to the operation of the VIA train under the management that the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau put in place with respect to the operations of VIA.

So then secondly we have to consider the effect on Saskatchewan with respect to the loss of passenger rail service.

And thirdly, Mr. Speaker, in particular a city like mine, the city of Melville, the impact has to be considered first of all with respect to the loss of passenger service. The city of Melville does not have bus service directly to Winnipeg.

It does not have bus service directly to Saskatoon. Many communities along that route do not have service to those centres.

At current, VIA Rail will not stop in the town of Ituna, Saskatchewan, with 800 citizens there, to pick up passengers, even on a telephone call to Winnipeg central dispatch, nor will the train stop to drop off a passenger.

In addition, there are many occasions where the train has to pull out for freight and stop in Ituna, Saskatchewan, but you're not allowed to get off it or get on it. It seems to me that if you're going to run a railroad and not allow passengers to get off and on, that you are likely to run up a deficit. These are just a few instances of the problems with respect to the management of VIA Rail. And the problems go on and on.

Secondly, with respect to the city of Melville, Mr. Speaker, many of our citizens have over the years earned passes, as part of their retirement package, to ride on VIA trains. These are paid for by the railroad, are part of their negotiated contracts over the years. And this, to abandon passenger traffic, would be an easy out for CN (Canadian National Railway) in the city of Melville to escape their obligations to honour the passes they have given to their employees over the years as part of their compensation package.

This weighs very heavily on the senior citizens who formerly worked on the railroad, not only financially but with respect to direct links for them to visit their relatives in other parts of Canada, in particular British Columbia and Ontario.

Lastly, and not leastly, with respect to the considerations of passenger traffic in the city of Melville, we have the situation of the loss of jobs in the city of Melville. Mr. Speaker, in my term of office I've been able to bring to the city of Melville in excess of 200 jobs, and it seems that whenever I bring a new job to the city of Melville, CN Rail sees fit to remove a job from the city of Melville. Here we now have VIA Rail looking at the same type of situation which would cost approximately 10 jobs in the city of Melville.

Now the federal government spends money on job creation all over Canada, but they never seem to be able to spend any in the city of Melville. Now I know that it is the responsibility of the MP (member of parliament) to represent his area, but I might say, Mr. Speaker, that that duty has fallen upon myself as the MLA in many, many instances, and with a 20-year MP in opposition it is very difficult to get strong representation in your city such as in the city of Melville.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the loss of jobs is a concern regardless of the kind of representation we've had federally. Regardless of the actions of CN and VIA over the years, it's incumbent upon representatives for Melville to impress upon CN, VIA and the federal government, the element of fairness, that we in the constituency of Melville and Yorkton should also feel part of Canada. And in the last 20 years you would hardly recognize in the constituency of Melville that you were part of Canada with respect to federal spending or any

kind of federal benefits other than old age pensions and family allowances. I won't go on on this, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to lament the difficulties of having an opposition member represent you for 20 years, but I can say that the burden falls heavily upon the provincial representative.

(1045)

Mr. Speaker, public hearings are in order with respect to getting to the facts of how VIA actually operates and why it loses so much money. For example, my neighbours who drive the VIA train can testify to the fact that the VIA train does not run at a speed that would get people across Canada in any kind of a reasonable time. They can drive the train much faster according to the ability of the track to handle the train. However, my neighbours who drive this train must slow down so they don't get ahead of schedule. Can you imagine running a railroad as slow as possible so that you don't get ahead of schedule!

And VIA hasn't seen fit to compact the schedule so that the train could get across Canada probably a day sooner than it does. I've ridden on this train, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that it turns out — the turn-out is turning off the main track and waiting for another train to go by — it turns out for every kind of minimal reason you can imagine. And then it runs rather slow so that it doesn't get to the station in Melville ahead of schedule and embarrass VIA Rail. So certainly management has to be reconsidered with respect to VIA Rail.

The equipment — I could go on for hours, and I won't, but the equipment is atrocious. It is antique and belongs in a museum. You can't expect a railroad to run with equipment of that nature.

We do not know exactly who is receiving the subsidy with respect to the \$600 million the federal government pays out. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the bulk of the subsidy has not gone to VIA Rail and to passenger service, it has gone to CN and CP for the use of their lines.

There is a widely held view in the city of Melville, and I might say, Mr. Speaker, I also subscribe to that view, that the big beneficiary of the VIA Rail transition and the VIA Rail subsidy has been CN and CP, and that the loss in revenue, should the subsidy be cancelled or the passenger traffic be cancelled, will primarily fall upon CN and CP.

I believe that if we have public hearings, Mr. Speaker, they will reveal that all of the profit that CN has made in the last eight years could be attributed to the money they received from VIA Rail. And therefore the management of CN also has to be considered with respect to subsidies of railroads and where the subsidy is actually going.

Mr. Speaker, public hearings will reveal exactly what the financial situation is with respect to VIA Rail and the charges that are being made against VIA Rail by CN and CP.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is very important, not only because it asks the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport to consider maintaining passenger service in

Saskatchewan, but also because it calls for public hearings so that the people, so that the Government of Saskatchewan, so that all of Canada can get the details of exactly how VIA Rail has been managed and how it could be managed.

We have to consider alternatives. It is possible that schedules may have to be changed. It is possible that routes may have to be reduced with less service. Maybe we can only have a train every second day, but certainly, Mr. Speaker, we cannot simply sit down and say, that's it, there will be no train at all. It's possible that with newer equipment, better schedules, better management, more people will ride the train. It's possible that more tourists will ride the train. These possibilities must be examined. We submit, on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, that public hearings will clear the air and will give us the information so that educated and reasoned decisions can be made.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly expresses to the federal Minister of Transport, and to the Prime Minister, its grave concerns regarding recent reports recommending that VIA Rail abandon entirely rail service in this province; and further, that this Assembly urges the federal Minister of Transport to hold public hearings prior to making any decisions.

I so move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by my seat mate, the Minister of Transport, the member for Melfort.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very much my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to join my seat mate and colleague, the member for Melville, in addressing this very important motion, Mr. Speaker. I do feel that since yesterday, in reviewing the motion that was put forth rather quickly yesterday, that MLAs on this side of the House have had an opportunity to review the proposed wording, and we, although are quite agreeable to the tone of yesterday's motion, we had some changes that I think more accurately and more clearly represent this government's true position on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that there are a couple of considerations here, a couple of major considerations, and I'd like to deal with both of them at length. And firstly, Mr. Speaker, is the hard, fast dollars that are associated with these types of decisions, and they are indeed significant. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, is rail service and its history and its future and the benefits to the people of Saskatchewan and indeed to the people of Canada that have to be looked at in the large geographic area like this country that we have, that stretches for many thousands of miles from east to west.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that both of these areas deserve considerable attention and discussion and I'd . . . First, I'd like to talk about the money, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that VIA Rail was instituted about 12 years ago — 1977 if my information is correct. And, Mr. Speaker, since that time VIA Rail has certainly provided a reliable service to the taxpayers of this country in many respects. But, Mr. Speaker, it definitely has been a

publicly subsidized form of transportation, and I might add, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion a heavily subsidized form of public transportation.

In these last 12 years, Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that VIA Rail has absorbed more than \$5 billion of taxpayers' money. I stress that, Mr. Speaker, that that is 5 billion, not 5 million or 500,000 or anything else, but \$5 billion. And, Mr. Speaker, if you look at that on an annual basis in the last few years, that translates into something in the order of \$600 million per year. And, Mr. Speaker, to my way of thinking, and I believe to any reasonable person's way of thinking across this country, that is a considerable and significant number of dollars — \$600 million. What it translates to, Mr. Speaker, is probably something like \$50 per person over this entire country and, Mr. Speaker, this issue has to be considered.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that across this country I believe that it is well-known and well-understood that this country is facing some severe financial pressures. We have heard all sorts of talk, and rightly so, about the deficit federally, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that all reasonable people say, hey, we have to look at that deficit; we have to examine all aspects, all aspects across government to look at how that deficit impacts on all of us.

And, Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that it was fair and it was reasonable and very much justified that the federal government took a look at VIA Rail and said, hey, \$600 million is a lot of money; let us examine whether or not this money is being spent in the most expeditious fashion. And, Mr. Speaker, there are those, there are those who disregard totally and completely the financial aspects of which I speak. And Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that for those people who disregard totally these financial matters, I say, Mr. Speaker, that is irresponsible. That is very irresponsible, Mr. Speaker.

I submit to you that when we talk about \$600 million that goes into VIA Rail on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, every reasonable person knows that that comes out of all of our pockets, Mr. Speaker. A portion of it comes out of your pocket; a portion of it comes out of every taxpayer's pocket across this country. So, Mr. Speaker, I say in the interests of taxpayers, in the interests of the deficit, in the interests of common sense, one has to look at \$600 million and the fact that it comes out of all of our pockets.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is only one part of the equation. I am not here to say that we should have a rail transportation system, a passenger rail transportation system across this country that has to pay its way, has to pay its way fully. I don't know that that's the position I would want to take. That, as well, would be a pretty hard and extreme and probably unjustified position to take.

There is no question that a passenger rail service across this country has some very serious and significant benefits. Some of them can be measured in dollars; some of them can be measured in pride in the country; some of them can be measured in the aesthetics, in the tourism potential. In many, many areas this service has value. It definitely has value, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, there are thousands of people across this country who would agree.

But, Mr. Speaker, it becomes a question again, again I suppose, of balance — what is fair and reasonable and right for this country and for this province at this particular point in history and into the future.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that the federal government in calling for, firstly, a five-year corporate business plan to be submitted — I'd say that is responsible. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has called for not only a five-year corporate plan, but I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, they have as well called for a 20-year long-range plan for VIA Rail. That I understand, Mr. Speaker, will be — that, Mr. Speaker, will be submitted to the federal cabinet and the federal minister, I would expect some time this month.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm submitting to you that \$600 million is a lot of money — comes out of all of our pockets. The rail service definitely has many benefits to people across this country. But in light of both of those factors, calling for a five-year business plan, and in turn calling for a 20-year plan stretching out over the next 20 years, I think is just right for the people of Saskatchewan and right for the people of Canada to take a look down the road. Let us not be short-sighted, Mr. Speaker; let us look into the future and develop a comprehensive plan for what this transportation system should look like.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that within that plan you will find that many areas are looked at and addressed. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that within that plan I trust, I trust that levels of service, levels of service will be looked at. I would expect, Mr. Speaker, that the rates at which customers or passengers pay will be looked at. I would expect, Mr. Speaker, that internal management, internal management of that corporation would be looked at. Is it operating efficiently, or is it top-heavy in management, or is it top-heavy in other aspects of employees? Is it operating efficiently? Can we do a better job on behalf of the taxpayers and the passengers in providing that service? Are there alternatives to the present service?

What I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is the lowest cost alternative — and I want to stress this, Mr. Speaker — the lowest cost alternative would be the complete elimination of the service. I don't believe that that is fair nor reasonable, but that would be the lowest cost. Just blow it right away.

The other end of it, Mr. Speaker, would be no, let us disregard the costs, let us disregard the \$600 million per year and keep the **status quo**, keep it just as it is.

Mr. Speaker, both of those are extreme positions. The *status quo* is too expensive, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, and this country cannot afford \$600 million a year coming out of all of our pockets. That, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is not the position that I or this government would want to take. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, the complete elimination of the service, the complete elimination of the service is another extreme position that I don't believe. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'd like to call the hon. members to order and especially the member for Quill

Lakes. I would ask him not to interrupt the speaker and not to cast reflections on the Chair from his seat.

Order, order. And I also bring the member for Regina Elphinstone to order. I'm going to ask the member for Regina Elphinstone once more to cease and desist from speaking from his seat when the Speaker is on his feet.

(1100)

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate your intervention in calling members opposite to order. As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the lowest cost alternative would be the complete elimination of service. I don't believe that that is what I nor this government would stand for.

The other alternative, Mr. Speaker, is the *status quo*. Put your head in the sand, totally disregard economics, totally disregard \$600 million coming out of all of our pockets, and leave it as it is.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is some room for common ground here. I believe there is some room for reason, and that is a lesser cost alternative to present day service. And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that upon consideration by the federal minister and his colleagues, I would trust, and I've made representations to this effect, that that would be the case, Mr. Speaker, that a lesser cost alternative would be found.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the public of Saskatchewan, the interested parties within Saskatchewan should have an opportunity for input. Mr. Speaker, I believe that their advice would be very well taken, Mr. Speaker, to listen to a number of interested parties within the province of Saskatchewan. And I say, Mr. Speaker, not partisan views, not partisan views at all, but views from the people of Saskatchewan who are genuinely interested in this country's future and this particular aspect of transportation.

And, Mr. Speaker, that is what this motion calls for, is to allow interested parties the option to come and express their opinion and perhaps hear all of the facts, Mr. Speaker. And I certainly don't have enough information myself. Mr. Speaker, I personally, and members on this side of the House, want to look at that five-year suggested plan that has been proposed. And I say only a suggested plan, Mr. Speaker.

I know virtually every member on this side of the House would want to view that report and have input in one way or the other. And I feel, Mr. Speaker, that that position is representative of the vast majority of people in Saskatchewan who would have interest in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I do want you to know and I want members of the legislature to know that my information is that currently the northern remote regions, for instance, have a very good chance of surviving within this plan. And, Mr. Speaker, of course we know that that does affect many communities in Saskatchewan on the route that runs into Churchill, Manitoba, and through Hudson Bay and Kamsack and Canora and elsewhere.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that that position has already been stated by the federal government — that remote, remote area runs will remain. The other runs, Mr. Speaker, the jury is still out on them. What we're saying is there should be some public input.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to perhaps conclude by just stating that rail passenger service is part and parcel of this big thing that we call transportation. And, Mr. Speaker, my position is Minister of Highways and Transportation, and I have a vested interest, as do many members on this side of the House, in transportation, the transportation field in general.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're talking of transportation, not only of passenger rail service. But I think we have to look at our highway system within the province of Saskatchewan — an extra \$10 million of real hard dollars put into our highway system this year, Mr. Speaker.

We have to look at the bus transportation system across this province. We have the Saskatchewan Transportation Company suffering heavy losses, can also be viewed as a public subsidy, Mr. Speaker, a public subsidy. It is a conscious decision by this government to keep the routes on STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) for the most part intact. Providing service to rural Saskatchewan is a firm commitment by this government. And that, Mr. Speaker, is part and parcel of this big thing called transportation.

I also say, Mr. Speaker, regarding bus service, we have made in the province of Saskatchewan the conscious decision to, as well, assist some private operators on routes that are not fully paying routes. And there is a public tender subsidy program that has retained many private bus line services to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I further add to this big thing called transportation the air aspect of transportation. And, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to play a role in discussing with the Time Air Corporation on their movement into Saskatchewan and their take-over of Norcanair.

And, Mr. Speaker, Time Air has certainly been a benefit to Saskatchewan. I believe they have improved service. They are having some difficulties right now with losing the postal run in northern Saskatchewan, but, Mr. Speaker, this government has assisted, this government has encouraged companies like Time Air to bring service into Saskatchewan. And this is just another part and parcel of this big thing that I call transportation.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an important issue. It is part and parcel of an overall thrust of this government, Mr. Speaker, to pay close attention to transportation needs on behalf of all residents in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that I and my colleague from the constituency of Melville have, as clearly as we could, today expressed the view of this government. I believe that this motion that we have on the order paper here today, Mr. Speaker, clearly, clearly gives the position of this government. I believe that the members opposite should agree with this position, but, Mr. Speaker, I will anxiously await members of the opposition and see

whether or not, Mr. Speaker, and see whether or not, Mr. Speaker, they blindly take the totally irresponsible financial position that \$600 million a year coming out of all of our pockets does not matter.

Will they take that position, Mr. Speaker? That is the question that we have to ask. Will they take that position that \$600 million per year coming out of all of our pockets as people across this country does not matter? Will they say that the *status quo* has to remain? I ask you that question, Mr. Speaker, and it will be interesting to see.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, will they say, will they say, blow the trains away? I doubt that. Or will they come to some common sense type of a position that says, indeed \$600 million is a lot of money per year, but indeed there are benefits to passenger rail service in Saskatchewan, and the public of Saskatchewan should have the opportunity to have full input into a lesser cost alternative and full investigation of all of the facts, not of the political rhetoric, but all of the facts that will bring a common and reasonable decision on behalf of the federal government to this particular issue.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to articulate this position to you and other members of the legislature today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Speaker, finally, finally, finally we've got this government in Saskatchewan aware of the fact that there may be some potentially destructive situation for Saskatchewan in what's happening in Ottawa. It's taken a long time to move them just to this position.

I had an opportunity to meet with the Minister of Highways and Transportation briefly this morning, and we discussed what could be done on this resolution. I agree with the general thrust of most of what the member has put forward. As a matter of fact. . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brockelbank: — As a matter of fact we worked out some agreement on part of the resolution. However, there are some parts of the resolution which leave the position of Saskatchewan not too clear, which we want to clarify. And as a consequence of that, Mr. Speaker, I will be offering an amendment towards the conclusion of my remarks today.

I said, Mr. Speaker, that finally we've dragged this government into the Chamber to discuss VIA Rail. And the abandonment of VIA Rail, the proposed abandonment of VIA Rail has now sunk in to the members across the way, and we're beginning to discuss it. This is step number one, a very important step.

It began, as far as I'm concerned, on June 7, Mr. Speaker, when there was a meeting held in Melville, Saskatchewan, which was attended by the member for Melville, the minister. It was attended by myself, representing the. . . as a critic on Highways and Transportation for Saskatchewan, and by the member of

parliament for Yorkton-Melville constituency, as well as a representative of the Liberal Party.

In addition to that, there were many officials from towns and villages and cities. And when I say officials, I mean mayors, aldermen, others, representing the interests of a variety of communities at that meeting in Melville on June 7 — one month ago, Mr. Speaker — exactly one month ago.

At the meeting, the meeting itself generated a resolution which said that the members there should attempt to pass a resolution in the House here, which would encompass the spirit of the meeting that took place on June 7.

An Hon. Member: — Did they ask for hearings?

Mr. Brockelbank: — The member for Melville spoke to that issue; I spoke to the issue; the member for the House of Commons spoke to that issue. Six days later I brought forward a resolution which was acknowledged by the media and by any fair-minded person as being a non-partisan resolution before this House.

The member for Melville had had six days to think about it before I brought forward the resolution and — or the motion — and the motion was, quite simply:

That this Assembly strongly urge the Government of Canada to reinstate federal funding sufficient to maintain and improve VIA Rail passenger service which is vital to rural and urban Saskatchewan.

That was turned down by the Assembly because the members opposite decided not to move ahead with the resolution at that time, would not give permission to move ahead.

More recently, upon further announcements coming out of Ottawa, members on this side of the House attempted to bring forward a further resolution, or a motion under rule 39, which this motion has come forward today under, to the effect that it would address the question of the loss of VIA Rail passenger service to Saskatchewan. Again that was not permitted to go ahead by the members opposite.

However, I'm quite prepared to discuss their resolution which is before the House now. I'm not going to stand and quibble about a few words here and there. We'll offer an amendment which we think will clear up the insufficiency in the motion that the government has moved at this time.

I want to comment briefly on the remarks of the member for Melville and the member for Melfort, who moved and seconded the motion that we had before us. The member for Melville has sat on his hands for at least a month on this issue and suggested that, you know, there was no serious problem. Obviously he wasn't concerned about a problem. And he now brings down praise upon his own shoulders about what a saver of jobs he has been in the constituency of Melville.

And, Mr. Speaker, any time you feel free to tell the member for Weyburn to keep quiet, I would appreciate it,

and I know the debate would go much smoother.

The member for Melville suggests that the member for the House of Commons for Yorkton-Melville is doing nothing, doing nothing in the VIA Rail situation. Well I wish you could have been at the meeting, Mr. Speaker, because when we spoke to the audience that was there that evening, the member for Melville — the member representing the constituency — managed in his brilliance to get himself booed in his own constituency. Now that's unusual that a member of the Assembly strives to have that done in his own constituency; maybe in some other constituency, but to get himself booed in his own constituency in a meeting of this nature takes some engineering.

(1115)

I might say at the time, I might say at the time that the member of parliament for that constituency was not booed. He was given a very strong applause and support at that meeting because of the strong stand he took on retention of VIA Rail passenger service in Saskatchewan. The member for Melville was wishy-washy on the issue of VIA Rail, it was quite clear at the meeting, and he brought the booing on himself.

Now I think that will lay to rest who is doing the job for the people of Melville, as far as VIA Rail is concerned. The member of parliament was certainly there; he was doing his job. The member of parliament was actively assisting in the circulation of a petition with regard to the retention of VIA Rail passenger service in Saskatchewan. Incidentally, that petition was sent to Ottawa and had over 6,000 names on it — over 6,000 names. Many of these names were collected in town offices and in city municipal offices. People came in and signed the petition — over 6,000 of them, Mr. Speaker.

The member for Melville makes a direct attack on the management of VIA Rail. He doesn't realize that the political situation here is what's paramount. It's not the management of VIA Rail. Their cousins in Ottawa put the management in VIA Rail. They put the managers there. They've been in charge of managing it since 1984, Mr. Speaker, so they shouldn't stand here and complain about their cousins in Ottawa not managing VIA Rail properly. Quite clearly they're in charge of the management in Ottawa. The political masters are in charge. The political masters are the Conservative Party, because they're the Government of Canada.

And we have to find out who is in charge. Is the Conservative government in Ottawa in charge of this situation? I suppose we have to address the political question and send a political message to Ottawa. And I say it in the finest sense of the word, small "p" political. I don't suggest that it should be a New Democratic political message or a Conservative political message. It should be a political message that is clear to the Government of Canada that the people of Saskatchewan are concerned about the possible loss of VIA Rail service in Saskatchewan.

The Minister of Highways and Transportation in his comments today suggested that there's a substantial

public subsidy in VIA Rail. I think no one will deny that, Mr. Speaker. There is a substantial public subsidy, but there's also a substantial public subsidy in the air lines, in the highway system, and other forms of transportation. Nobody's denying that.

So to suggest that as an argument for holding public hearings doesn't make too much sense. There is a subsidy there, we will admit it. But it's interesting to note the Minister of Highways and Transportation said there should be some other options. There should be some other options, an alternative way of running VIA Rail in Saskatchewan.

I want to know what the minister's position is because he was very clear not to come out with any kind of position. He stressed the obvious one is that you completely abandon VIA Rail and we have no passenger service, or you keep it in place. But in between, the minister would not state what his position, but he says he wants an alternative. There should be some alternative, he says.

Well here's one of the alternatives. It's the Orient Express idea, and it's been advanced by a promoter, Blyth and Company, and they're proposing an elite service for VIA Rail. And I suspect that you could get VIA Rail in Vancouver or you could get VIA Rail in Montreal and you could travel across Canada either way on VIA Rail on this alternate service. And Blyth and Company suggest that the tickets for a three-day trip between Montreal and Vancouver will cost travellers \$2,495, Mr. Speaker.

Now there's an elite option. Is that the option that the Minister of Highways and Transportation is suggesting to this House in his preliminary remarks on this motion?

He suggests that we may want to stay with the *status quo*. Mr. Speaker, we've been trying for a month to get this government off their *status quo* of ignoring VIA Rail passenger service. We've been trying to get the country off their *status quo* and doing something positive.

He says we should have public hearings. The Minister of Highways and Transportation says we should have public input. Well, Mr. Speaker, if you were listening at the last federal election as I was listening and as all the people in Saskatchewan were listening, they heard the Prime Minister and his politicians that are associated with him in the Conservative Party suggest the following.

They said, oh we're not going to do away with VIA Rail; we're going to put more money into VIA Rail; we're going to improve the service of VIA Rail. That's the public input. We had it in the last federal election. The Prime Minister as much as said it himself. And I take the Prime Minister at his word.

And what we have to do now is to arm the Prime Minister against this consultant's report which says VIA Rail in Saskatchewan should be abandoned, that we should have no rail passenger service. We must arm the House of Commons, the people that are in charge there, with our view that something has to be done.

It's a political situation. Let's recognize it for exactly what it is, a political situation. The Prime Minister will have the

value of our input on this particular resolution. He's already said he's in favour of it; he's going to put more money in VIA and he's going to improve the service; he's going to get new equipment. That's what the Prime Minister of Canada said in the last federal election.

We want to support the Prime Minister in providing new equipment for the VIA Rail passenger service across Saskatchewan. That's what we want to do with this resolution.

In the budget that the federal government has brought in, they suggested quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, that there should be reductions in the VIA Rail subsidy. VIA received \$641 million subsidies last year, and the Mulroney government is instructing a company to absorb \$500 million cut in subsidies over the next four years.

The corporation will obviously be forced to implement poor quality service, cuts in staff, abandonment of routes, or quite possibly a combination of all three. And this prediction of mine, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately appears to be coming true. Had we acted a month ago, Mr. Speaker, had we sent a clear message to Ottawa a month ago about Saskatchewan's position on VIA passenger service across the province, we might not have been in the situation we're in today. We might have headed it off. But we allow the people in Ottawa to get entrenched in their thinking about VIA Rail and ignoring the political promises they made to the people of Canada, the people of Saskatchewan, about improving VIA service and keeping VIA service running.

When VIA Rail Canada was set up as a Crown corporation more than a dozen years ago now, the company was stuck with old, and in some cases worn-out equipment that brought with it the high maintenance costs. The agreement signed with the two major railway companies to supply services forced very disadvantageous conditions on the new Crown corporation.

Badly needed improvements were not made to road-beds, tracks, crossings, switches, and routes that would have made possible a switch to modern light, rapid, comfortable trains. Those few light, rapid, comfortable trains acquired by VIA have been used on the so-called Quebec City/Windsor corridor, and in particular on the Montreal/Toronto/Ottawa runs. Most Canadians have not seen any new passenger service rolling stock since well before VIA Rail was formed in January 1977.

But even with all these obvious defects, Mr. Speaker, VIA has performed well for the travelling public. Even with these burdens, these handicaps on them, they've performed reasonably well. Ridership was up in each of the first five years of operation by as much as 12 per cent in 1978, and never less than 5.4 per cent.

In the mid-1980s ridership slumped slightly, in 1985 and 1986, but in 1987 passenger numbers came back significantly, and again in 1988 a 9.4 per cent increase in passenger volume was recorded. Also in 1988 a 12.9 per cent increase in passenger revenue was recorded, which equals an additional \$25.1 million in ticket sales over the

previous year.

VIA in the last couple of years has tried hard to bring this trend about. Enhanced coach services, the Rockies by daylight, expanded first-class service — namely VIA I — and a strong pitch for tourist business have all helped. And you've heard the pitch for tourist business, Mr. Speaker.

Last year VIA trains had the highest occupancy in five years, and the trend is clearly up, clearly up. These are not the elite that are riding our trains, although there may be some riding them, Mr. Speaker. These are the average people of Canada. The pensioners or retired have time on their hands, they're free to travel, they're not bound in by timetables or time strictures. They can get on the train and see Canada. They're not rich. Low income people have access to VIA Rail, and they're obviously patronizing it.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, if the VIA Rail service is enhanced as the Prime Minister of Canada promised in the last federal election, which my friend from Morse seems to ignore. . . the member from Morse suggests that the Prime Minister didn't promise that. Well it's quite clear. In the federal election the Prime Minister of Canada and his candidates promised improved VIA service, more and better equipment, Mr. Speaker.

I think if you get the onerous contract that was foisted on VIA Rail by the railway companies back in the formation of VIA Rail, you'd probably do a lot to lifting the debt and the subsidy if you'd put the burden where it should have been. But VIA at that time was a convenience for the railways, and they off-loaded, they off-loaded their old equipment, they off-loaded the run-down equipment onto VIA and consequently stuck it with the debt, and as a result VIA has to have massive subsidies just to keep its head above water. VIA's trying. Their government in Ottawa is in charge, at least in theory. They're in charge. They put the management in VIA.

I believe that VIA Rail does work and can be made to work even better, even better. We are strongly committed to passenger rail service for all Canadians, and especially making passenger rail service accessible to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. It is quite clear that there are reasons for concern, and you're aware of them, Mr. Speaker.

I suppose we should examine whether VIA Rail is popular. I've looked at a couple of polls, for whatever they're worth, and these polls, one was taken in March of '89, so it's a relatively new poll, and this was the STV phone-in poll in Saskatoon. This was the phone-in poll where anybody phones in. They have to pay 50 cents extra on their telephone bill for each phone call. And a number of people took the opportunity to phone in to that VIA poll on March 29, 1989. And it says, the question, for the information of the member for Pelly, was: do you think passenger train service should be kept as it is in Canada? The answers: yes — 88 per cent; no — 12 per cent. So clearly the people of Canada believe that you should retain passenger service in Canada.

(1130)

Now when they say, kept as it is, doesn't mean that you keep the inadequacies of the system, it means you improve the system. The people want the system; you improve it.

There was another poll taken recently, Mr. Speaker. It was after that one. It was on April 14 '89. "89 per cent in favor Canadians for VIA". And that's the poll. It's a headline in the *Star-Phoenix*, April 14, a Gallup poll.

Almost nine (out of the) 10 respondents to the survey — 89 per cent — indicated it would be a bad idea for Ottawa to discontinue Canada's national passenger train service, says the poll in the *Montreal Gazette*.

In fact, most respondents want passenger train service expanded.

The poll was taken April 5-8, a week after Transport Minister Benoit Bouchard indicated Ottawa's attempt to reduce the federal deficit could lead to the demise of Via.

Few passengers use the trains and Ottawa could use Via's \$611 million subsidy for other things, said Bouchard, adding that a decision on Via's fate will come in June.

And that is a fairly good indication of whether the public supports VIA Rail in Canada.

Obviously, are there any reasons for concern? We have to examine that, Mr. Speaker. On June 7 a report in *The Globe and Mail* suggested as follows, "May end passenger service if VIA asks, Bouchard says."

Transport Minister Benoit Bouchard said yesterday he would consider shutting down all rail passenger service in Canada if VIA Rail were to propose such drastic action in the revised business plan it must deliver this month in response to a huge cut in its subsidy.

"I know it would be better if I didn't say that," Mr. Bouchard said outside the House of Commons after being peppered with questions about whether he was prepared to consider shutting down VIA Rail.

A little later — that was on June 7 — a little later, on June 23, again in *The Globe and Mail*:

No hearings to be held about cuts in VIA Rail.

The government will move quickly to cut Via Rail services without the time-consuming process of National Transportation Agency hearings that allow objections to be heard, Transport Minister Benoit Bouchard said (today).

And he goes on to state in this article on June 23:

"We have to move as quickly as possible," Mr. Bouchard told the Transport Committee. "It's quite possible we will go to the

Governor-in-Council” for the orders to shut down routes.

So the minister is committed to shutting down the routes without hearings. I think we have to alter the minister’s position. There is reason for concern, and we must make our voice heard on this issue in Ottawa. And the way we can do it is by having a joint resolution to which we can all agree and sending that off to Ottawa.

I want to refer to the article which raised our alarm again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just a couple of days ago, and this article appeared originally in *The (Ottawa) Citizen*, was reprinted in *The Globe and Mail*. The article I have is from *The Citizen* and it says:

Passenger train fans express resign disappointment Tuesday over reports that VIA Rail intends to slash its network in half over the next few months. (It goes on to say) No rail connections between central Canada and the West. (This is in the mill.) The plan would see the lay-off of approximately 3,000 to 3,500 people (3,000 to 3,500 people thrown onto the unemployment rolls). The plan recommends the most drastic cuts to prairie and Atlantic residents.

So we should be alarmed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We should be doing something about it here in Saskatchewan. We expect that the minister will attempt to short cut, to short cut the process. We must get a message to the minister right away, and we want the minister and Prime Minister’s opinion that they will agree to retain rail transportation service in the Prairies. It’s vital to Saskatchewan.

I want to deal with some other evidence which I think will be helpful to the members of the House. This is from a report; it’s called *The Last Straw*. I have the report in my hand; I got it from the library, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It shows the pioneers of Canada in the railway business driving the last spike in the railway that bound Canada together from coast to coast. This last spike was driven in British Columbia. It shows the hon. gentleman in his top black hat and his white beard driving the last spike.

This was a dream of that Canadian, our first prime minister, John A. Macdonald — John A. Macdonald, the Conservative prime minister of Canada, whose dream it was to bind Canada together with a ribbon of steel. And he accomplished his dream by driving that last spike in British Columbia back a number of years ago.

This report is entitled *The Last Spike*, but spike is scratched out — purposely — and it says the *The Last Straw*. This is the report of the task force on rail passenger service, October 1981.

There’s some important and interesting submissions in this report. Oh, by the way, this is by the Conservative Party of Canada, so I’m sure all members across the way will be glued to the comments I’m making about who the luminaries were that made submissions, that made submissions to this report.

Well, let’s start with the Premier of Saskatchewan, the

now Premier of Saskatchewan. He wasn’t at that time. He was in the opposition at that time. But the Premier of Saskatchewan had a contribution to make, and he said this — it mentions his name, it says Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan:

In fact, next to natural resources, transportation is the most important factor in the minds of the people in this part of Canada.

That is the Leader of the Conservative Party in Saskatchewan in 1981 suggesting that transportation is the most important factor in the minds of the people of Saskatchewan at that time. This is the Premier of Saskatchewan. The Premier of Saskatchewan made the draw from his comments. The people that put this report together, the Conservative Party of Canada, draw again on the comments of the Premier of Saskatchewan where the Premier of Saskatchewan says:

In Saskatchewan Dr. (and you know his name, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he’s the Premier of Saskatchewan now) provided a figure of 13 jobs in the province known already to be eliminated by the cut-backs.

While the Premier of Saskatchewan now, who was the Leader of Opposition then, was alarmed that 13 jobs had already been eliminated by VIA cut-backs in 1981 by those terrible Liberals in Ottawa, and the Premier of Saskatchewan was obviously alarmed at that, because he made a submission — he went to this Conservative Party task force on passenger rail service and made this submission about 13 jobs being lost.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we’re talking, not about 13 jobs here, we’re talking upward of 3,000 jobs in Canada — a lot of those jobs, in the hundreds, in Saskatchewan. Where’s the Premier? Where is our Premier? Why is not our Premier speaking up on this issue? Why wasn’t he speaking up a month ago? Why didn’t he come in with his resolution or a motion before this time? This is the 11th hour. Where was the Premier of Saskatchewan?

There are other notables contributed to this Progressive Conservative study on the task force on rail passenger service in 1981. Let’s see if I can come up with another one here. Mr. Dan McKenzie, member of parliament from Manitoba.

I know the members opposite don’t like to have the record read back to them. They don’t like it — the member from Weyburn especially. The member from Weyburn especially is very sensitive when somebody reminds him of what he said in the past. And when we remind the members of this House what the Prime Minister of Canada said before the last election about putting more money into VIA, improving the service, buying new equipment, the member for Weyburn gets very hostile and he makes a lot of his speeches from his seat at that time. And it’s too bad they’re not on the record because maybe we’d like to have him on record. He very seldom gets on record, and when he does it’s a cracked record; that’s the problem. . . (inaudible interjection). . .

Well, we want to deal with Mr. Dan McKenzie, Conservative MP who made a submission to this task force, from Manitoba. He said, he pointed out that his inquiries had produced no support for the cut-backs, termed them an abrogation of western Canadian rights. Now there was a Tory standing up for western Canada — Mr. Dan McKenzie of Winnipeg-Assiniboine — in favour of VIA Rail passenger service. If we can just enlist people like Mr. Dan McKenzie, who's in Ottawa, to the view that he held in 1981, we have no fear of losing all of our VIA Rail passenger service in Saskatchewan, as this commissioned report suggests.

But we have to, we have to enlist the support of the member for Wascana who insists on, like the member for Weyburn, making a lot of his speeches from his seat. And again, unfortunately, they don't get onto the record of this House.

There are many other prominent people that made contributions to this task force report of the Conservative Party in 1981. Take Charlie Mayer — Charlie Mayer, MP from Manitoba Portage-Marquette. And the member for Weyburn will be glad to hear what Mr. Mayer had to say about this, quote:

Railways and rail passenger service (let me repeat that, rail passenger service) are as important to many western Canadians as culture and language are to Canadians in Quebec.

Now that's pretty important. Passenger rail service as important to western Canadians just as much as culture and language are to Canadians in Quebec. And Charlie Mayer said this. Are we to deny Charlie Mayer, former cabinet minister. . . Is he still cabinet minister?

An Hon. Member: — Oh yes.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Still a cabinet minister. And if we can just enlist Mr. Charlie Mayer's view that he held in 1981 in support of our position that passenger rail service should not be cut out completely in Saskatchewan. . . In other words, they should hold the Prime Minister to his promise that they would improve it, improve the service, buy new equipment. That's what we should be doing. We should stick to the Prime Minister's promise of what he said he would do.

There are many other contributions. Well, there was Bill McKnight was there. I think he's a federal cabinet minister. If we can just enlist his support — Mr. Bill McKnight. He made a submission to the task force on VIA Rail passenger service.

There are a number of others. Oh, there's Mr. Ralph Katzman, made a submission in support of VIA Rail passenger service. I don't know, maybe when we get into Highway estimates we can find out if Mr. Katzman will support that, since he's now employed by the Government of Saskatchewan.

(1145)

But these people that supported this. . . And I don't want to just draw on the names of politicians at the provincial

or federal level, Mr. Speaker. There were mayors from all the cities — Winnipeg, Saskatoon, many other cities along the VIA route, many of them in Saskatchewan who attended to this commission and supported — supported — the retention of VIA Rail passenger service in 1981, who, like our Premier, were alarmed that 13 jobs had been lost, when in fact looming up on the horizon are hundreds of jobs being lost in Saskatchewan and passenger rail service being lost.

The members opposite say, but no decisions have been made. Well if we wait around here, like the member for Weyburn would have us do, until the decisions are made, it will be too late. What we have to do is get a message to Ottawa — it has to be sooner rather than later, and I agree it's getting pretty late now — which supports the position that Saskatchewan people want us to take that VIA Rail passenger service should be retained.

This is supported by the polls; this is supported by members of parliament; this is supported by members of the legislature; it's been supported by the mayors in the villages and towns.

To just give you a sampling of some of the people that attended the meeting at Melville on June 7, one month ago today: the mayor of Melville; aldermen from Moose Jaw; support from the city of Saskatoon; aldermen from Yorkton; the mayor of Biggar; the mayor of Watrous; the mayor of Kamsack; a representative from Ituna; a representative from Canora. There were many people representing communities along the VIA route in Saskatchewan who want to retain VIA passenger service and in fact want to have it improved.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said that I find some shortcoming in the motion that the member for Melville put before the House this morning, and before I resume my seat I want to offer the amendment that I said I would offer, and the amendment is as follows:

That all the words after "further" be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

that this Assembly urges the federal Minister of Transport and Prime Minister to immediately disavow such reports, and make a firm commitment to the continuance of rail service in this province with no reduction from current levels.

Now that is the amendment which, if accepted, I believe will make the motion that the member for Melville and the member for Melfort put forward, will make it complete, Mr. Speaker, because what the original motion that they put forward changed from the previous day, which was denied under rule 39, was making a commitment to the continuance of passenger rail service. It is absolutely imperative that we make a commitment here and now to the continuation of passenger rail service. We must indicate that we're in support of that. If, as the member says from Melfort, that he's unsure, he says he doesn't want to go with all the subsidies and he doesn't want to completely abandon it, but he's somewhere in between, then I think what we should have is an amendment which will allow the federal government to

express the opinion that there be a firm commitment to the continuance of rail service in this province, with no reduction from the current levels. So I move this, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw South. I so move, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely happy, Mr. Speaker, to be seconding the motion to the resolution by my colleague from Saskatoon Westmount.

Mr. Minister, in the course of seconding this amendment, I wish to make a few remarks, both to the amendment and to the main motion.

Yesterday in this House, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation, under questioning from the Leader of the Opposition, said in his responses that no final decisions have been made by the federal government, by the federal cabinet, in regard to the future of passenger rail service in Canada. He said that once, and then he said it again, and then he said it three times. Three times yesterday that minister said, tried to assure this House and the people of Saskatchewan, that no final decisions have been made in Ottawa regarding the future of passenger rail service in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I disagree. I fundamentally disagree. As sure as I stand here, I believe that the decision to end passenger rail service in Canada has been made — has been made. I believe, in the federal government's desire to reduce its massive deficit, it has turned its attention on passenger rail service in Canada and has decided to end that service across the country.

Now they understand the political unacceptability of making that announcement, and so they have gone about a process of trying to fudge their announcement through a number of studies and announcements and business plans, and so on. But, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the decision has been made in Ottawa to end passenger rail service in Canada, and nothing that the Minister of Transport in this province says will change my mind on that score.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely incumbent upon this legislature to send to the federal government the clearest possible of messages and in the most concise terminology; therefore the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Therefore the amendment that clearly would indicate the position of the legislature of Saskatchewan, representative of the people of Saskatchewan, that rail service in this province, rail service in this country, should receive the commitment to continue. That should be the position of this legislature and the position of all members, particularly in light of the fact that the decision at the federal level has been made.

Mr. Speaker. . . (inaudible interjection). . . I would remind the member from Weyburn, there's ample time for him to get into this debate. When I resume my seat, we'll be happy to have him stand and share for the record his view on the future of passenger rail service in the country.

Mr. Speaker, when I suggested that the decision has been made, it's not an opinion that is shared simply by myself

or other members of this side of the House. From *The Globe and Mail*, Mr. Speaker, on Monday, June 12, the column written by Hugh Winsor — and Hugh Winsor, as you well know, is the national political editor for *The Globe and Mail* — Mr. Winsor comes to the very same conclusion. And he entitled his article that day, "Secrecy, manipulation the instruments as government strangles Via." And within the body of his article he says, and I agree entirely:

Pursuing its over-all goal of reducing the deficit, the cabinet's (the federal cabinet's) expenditure review committee decided to kill Via Rail, except for some minor services to remote areas. . .

Further in the article:

Mr. Bouchard didn't say that he would kill Via Rail, even though death was the certain outcome of cutting the Crown agency's subsidy. It will just take longer this way, and the Transport Minister can confuse the public with talk about studies, task forces and business plans.

Well the Minister of Transport in this province, I guess like his federal counterpart, is trying to confuse the issue here by talking about studies, task force, business plans, public input. That's just fudging the issue, Mr. Speaker. The decision in Ottawa has been made, and the only course for this legislature to take is to issue a clear and concise unanimous statement, the kind of statement that is contained in this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, like the member from Melville, I share great concern about the loss of VIA Rail as it will affect. . . (inaudible interjection). . . now the member from Wascana is anxious to get into this debate. I invite him, when my remarks are concluded, to stand up and state his position on the future of VIA Rail. I will certainly sit down when I've concluded my remarks, and I will wait for the member from Wascana to speak to this debate.

Mr. Speaker, like the member from Melville, the community that I represent has a long history as a railroad town, and if the federal government is allowed to persist, to pursue this policy of ending passenger rail service, that will have some very direct and very serious consequences on the community that I represent, and, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw those consequences to your attention and to the attention of all members.

Today the community of Moose Jaw and the communities along the main line of the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) across the southern portion of the province, today my community and other communities, Regina, Moosomin, Broadview, all along, are served by the passenger rail train that we've known for many, many years as the Canadian, part of the VIA network; we're served by the Canadian. Twice daily the Canadian passes through on the CP main line through our communities.

Mr. Speaker, if we lose the Canadian from Moose Jaw, if we lose it from the CP main line in southern Saskatchewan, in my community alone, Mr. Speaker, that will mean the loss of some 20 jobs — some 20 full-time jobs in the city of Moose Jaw. Those jobs consist today of

seven locomotive engineers, three conductors, two baggage men, three train men, a ticket agent, and four car men. Mr. Speaker, if passenger rail service is ended, if the Canadian ceases to pass through our communities, the city that I represent will lose 20 full-time jobs.

Mr. Speaker, that represents in my community a wage of some \$996,000 on an annual basis. If you add to that, Mr. Speaker, the fuelling contract that exists in the city of Moose Jaw for the Canadian, for VIA, if you add the value of that fuelling contract which is available to a number of dealers in Moose Jaw, the economic loss to the community of Moose Jaw is well over a million dollars. Mr. Speaker, that's an economic loss that the community I represent simply cannot stand. To lose 20 jobs in Moose Jaw, to lose a million dollars out of our local economy, would be a severe blow to the city that I represent.

But even more, Mr. Speaker, even more than simply the financial implications are the community implications, because when we lose these 20 jobs, we lose perhaps 20 families — 20 individuals, 20 couples — households who are involved in our community in a whole variety of ways. Mr. Speaker, the consequence for the city of Moose Jaw in losing these jobs and these people would be tragic.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, three years ago, about three years ago, the Canadian Pacific Railroad chose to withdraw the passes earned by railroad employees for travel in their retirement. The CPR railroad unilaterally withdrew those passes.

Mr. Speaker, seniors, retired railroaders from the community of Moose Jaw, led the way across this nation in fighting the railroads to regain the right of those passes. And, Mr. Speaker, they won their battle. They led the way out of Moose Jaw across the nation and they won that battle. They won their pass back; now they may lose the train. Mr. Speaker, now they may lose the train. A pass that was won over years of hard work for those railroads, won back three years ago, now the prospect of losing the train. Mr. Speaker, that's an important consequence in the community that I represent. It's an important consequence all across this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a broader issue here. In this nation today we are, at least in rhetoric from the federal government, committed to making all of our economic decisions in light of the environment, in light of consideration of sustainable economic development.

Mr. Speaker, I have not heard one word, not one word from the federal government or from members opposite regarding the sustainability, the environmental sustainability of this decision to end passenger rail service.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when we are more and more concerned as a people about our environment, it only makes good sense that an efficient, well-run, well-managed rail service conserves fuel, is primarily better for the environment of Canada than for increasing air or road traffic.

(1200)

Mr. Speaker, I feel this has not been addressed by the federal government in any of their consideration. They have simply decided, as a quick way to cut costs, to end VIA Rail across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, there's a great irony in all of this. When the Liberal government was in Ottawa and proposed cutting back on VIA Rail, well the federal Conservatives at that time screamed loud and long and supported them in their fight. When they ran before the next election, they promised improvements to VIA Rail, improved service. What happens now? They want to cut the entire rail passenger service in Canada. Mr. Speaker, that's ironic.

It's ironic too that 122 years ago a Conservative government and a Conservative prime minister had a vision of this nation. He had a dream that would forge a nation from coast to coast, from sea to sea. And that dream was to be built and to be forged on a rail line, on a ribbon of steel that would run from coast to coast to enable Canadians to travel from coast to coast, to enable immigrants and settlers to come to the west and homestead. That was the dream of a Conservative government and a Conservative prime minister, and they built that dream and they built this nation.

Now these 122 years later we have another Conservative government and another Conservative Prime Minister who seem to be willing to destroy that dream and to destroy that ribbon of steel that has linked our country from its beginning from coast to coast.

Mr. Minister, you see, what I'm afraid has happened is that the current Prime Minister and the current Conservative government in Ottawa somehow have a vision of Canada that ends on the borders of Ontario and Quebec. And so we have a Conservative government in Ottawa, you see, that sets interest rates for downtown Toronto and not for Main Street, Moose Jaw, or Melville or Moosomin, but for downtown Toronto, as if somehow Canada ends at the borders of Ontario and Quebec.

We've got a Conservative government in Ottawa now who just, without notice, will devastate the communities of Summerside, Prince Edward Island, Portage la Prairie; a Conservative government that's willing to close rural post offices; and now a Conservative government in Ottawa that's willing to do away with passenger rail service in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that one Conservative prime minister would build this country, would build the rail line in this country, and now another generation and another Conservative Prime Minister is willing to destroy the dream and tear it apart.

Mr. Speaker, there is more to passenger rail service in this country, there is more to VIA Rail than just economics, than just finances. In the 122 years, some things about this nation have not changed. We are a vast nation from coast to coast. We are a sparse population scattered across a vast nation. We need those links to tie us together. It's not just in reality that the passenger rail service in Canada ties us together; it is a symbol.

Mr. Speaker, that train that twice daily passes through this

community, that passes through my community, it's called The Canadian. . . (inaudible interjection). . . Well the member from Wascana seems to want to attack VIA Rail from his seat. I would appreciate him getting on his feet and doing it there.

Mr. Speaker, that train, in my view, is well-named. To name that train The Canadian is well-named because it is that ribbon of steel, it is that link to every part of our country. And I don't think, Mr. Speaker, there's one of us, I don't think there's one of us who has grown up on the CP main line who has not at some time stood on a rail crossing. . . Mr. Speaker. . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, thank you for bringing the Minister of Health to order.

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would just simply ask the hon. member to carry on with his remarks and not comment on the Speaker's actions. I don't think that adds to the debate.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I don't think there's one of us who have grown up anywhere near the CP main line in southern Saskatchewan who have not at one time or another stood at a rail crossing and watched the Canadian as it rolls by and not pictured ourselves sitting in that dome car, left with the thought and the dream of travelling perhaps to the Canadian Rockies, perhaps through the great Canadian Shield, perhaps into the Maritimes.

I don't think there's any one of us who grew up along the CP main line in southern Saskatchewan who hasn't seen that silver train sitting in the station at night, on a cold winter night, and seen the steam rising, and to have that sense of adventure, the magic and the mystery that goes with passenger rail service, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think there's any one of us who have grown up along the CP main line who hasn't seen that Canadian passing through on a summer night across the prairie, and the little dots of lights travelling along this prairie.

Mr. Speaker, there's more to passenger rail service than simply economics and finances. There is a magic and there is a mystery and there is a link. There is a link in that train that pulls our nation together.

It was the dream of the Conservative Party in 1867, of a Conservative prime minister in 1867. Now what we have is a Conservative Prime Minister and a Conservative government in Ottawa, supported by their Conservative friends here in Saskatchewan, who seem to think that Canada ends on the borders of Ontario and Quebec, and that those links that can draw us together, like passenger rail service, are no longer important. And in their desperate attempts to lower the deficit which they've created, they're willing to sacrifice this heritage of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, Canada without a passenger rail service is like Canada without a maple leaf. And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to support the amendment that has been

brought forward by my colleague from Saskatoon Westmount, and I hope members opposite will support it so that from this House can go the clearest possible of messages from the federal government, that the people of Saskatchewan wish to see the continuance of passenger rail service in this province and in all regions of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Andrew: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a few comments before I ask for leave to adjourn debate on this particular motion.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is this. If you go back yesterday to question period when this issue first came up — and I think it's important to read the *Hansard* from yesterday as to what was said — and in questioning by the Leader of the Opposition to the Minister of Transportation for the province of Saskatchewan, what goes on is the Leader of the Opposition proposed a motion, Mr. Speaker, and listen to what it said:

I'm going to send a copy over to you. You can consider it, and if you have some word changes. . . (and then) if you want to introduce it, that's fine by us; we don't care who gets the credit for it.

And then he goes on and lists what the motion was and then asked that — and to give the benefit of the doubt to the Leader of the Opposition — asked that what we have here is a motion that all sides of the House can then agree to, have a unanimous resolution, send that unanimous resolution off to Ottawa, and maybe by it being a unanimous resolution of the House, it might have more impact than simply one side of the House or the other side of the House. That was the intention of it.

And then the words of the Leader of the Opposition is:

. . . some word changes we'll accept them.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there were some modest word changes proposed. The motion was introduced by the member from Melville and the Minister of Transportation, designed so that everyone in the House could support it — perhaps not exactly as every member would like to see it, but so everyone could accept it, and then a unanimous motion could be introduced.

Now there was some concern as to whether or not this was being grandstanded, but we put that aside, Mr. Speaker. So the amendment that was introduced today basically says that we should make no changes whatsoever to the current way things are being done.

Now, Mr. Speaker, is that designed to adapt to change or adjust to change, or is that designed simply to say: *status quo*, don't change, leave it exactly the way it is?

Now the members say, vote against it. But the purpose of it, as advanced by the Leader of the Opposition, was to get a unanimous view of the whole House, Mr. Speaker.

I would simply suggest that what we try to do is go back to that premise advanced by the Leader of the Opposition, and that is to try to adopt this thing so that everybody can agree to it, and therefore it can have some force and effect, Mr. Speaker.

Now this amendment advanced today by the member from Saskatoon Westmount is not designed to do that, Mr. Speaker. So I would think what we should do is reflect upon this over the weekend, see if we can't get it resolved so that we have one motion that all can agree to, and accomplish the purpose as stated by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn debate.

The division bells rang from 12:12 p.m. to 12:19 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 26

Muller	Meiklejohn t
McLeod	Martin t
Andrew	Toth
Lane	Sauder
Taylor	Johnson
Swan	Swenson
Muirhead	Martens
Maxwell	Baker
Schmidt	Wolfe
Hodgins	Gardner
Gerich	Kopelchuk
Hepworth	Saxinger t
Hardy	Britton

Nays — 14

Prebble	Anguish
Shillington	Goulet
Lingenfelter	Pringle
Tchorzewski	Calvert
Koskie	Lautermilch
Brockelbank	Trew
Upshall	Van Mulligan t

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure Highways and Transportation Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 16

Item 1

Mr. Chairman: — Would the minister introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and the members of the legislature, officials from the Department of Highways

and Transportation. Seated to my right is the deputy minister, Mr. Jack Sutherland; to his right is Mr. Myron Herasymuik, the assistant deputy minister, operations; directly behind me is Paul Fitzel, executive director of support services division; and to Mr. Sutherland's right is Phil Pearson, executive director of transportation, planning and research division. And Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to bring these officials here to the committee today to discuss the estimates of Highways and Transportation. And I look forward to the many questions that I am sure members of the opposition have.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Chairman, I want to start off the estimates today by sending over to the minister a number of what I regard as more or less routine questions which the minister could peruse and assure me that he would be able to supply the answers to me in a reasonable length of time. I'll send these over as soon as I get a page.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Chairman, I'd like to advise the Assembly that not only myself having been in contact with the federal minister, I want to advise the Assembly that officials in my department have been in discussions with federal officials or federal counterparts, if you like, and have as well been closely monitoring the situation. I feel that we certainly have adequately expressed our representations to the federal government.

In direct response to your question, I would say no, at this point in time on this particular issue, over the last short while there has not been any direct correspondence by myself to the federal minister, other than personal, direct meetings with the federal minister.

Mr. Brockelbank: — What we have here, Mr. Chairman, is a most critical situation with regard to VIA Rail. The minister rises in his estimates and gets off on a tangent about being out of the House for 17 days. That has nothing to do with VIA Rail. It's a red herring to try and draw people off the track of this government's position on VIA Rail. We want to find out what their position is.

The minister says the only representations that he's made of recent times is a personal representation to Benoit Bouchard, the minister. Nothing in writing. He's confirmed that there's absolutely nothing in writing about this most earth-shaking of a development with regard to VIA Rail in Canada.

Obviously somebody has been touch with the tourism minister in Alberta and the tourism minister in British Columbia, because they're talking about taking over VIA Rail. Has the Government of Canada been in touch with you or your Premier, Mr. Minister, asking you to provide options about VIA Rail and how it should be handled in Saskatchewan? Has there been any communication? There obviously has been with other provinces.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Chairman, I have the following response. And I think we could look back in history, and not all that long ago, and find numerous examples of what I'm going to say.

I think it's extremely important that good, solid representatives in the province of Saskatchewan work towards and seek and ultimately have good working

relationships with other levels of government, and extremely important for the well-being of the people in this province that members on this side of the House, and indeed members on the opposite side of the House have a good working relationship that is in the best interest of the people of Saskatchewan.

I feel, Mr. Chairman, and although we have disagreements with the federal government from time to time, for the most part we have a good relationship. And, Mr. Speaker, had I just sent a letter, as has happened on other issues in the past, what would the opposition have said? Oh, you just sent a little letter. Who's going to read that? Why didn't you fly to Ottawa? Why didn't you chat with Benoit Bouchard when he was here? Well, Mr. Speaker, I took that direct approach and I spoke, and I spoke strongly on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, to Mr. Bouchard.

I say, secondly, Mr. Chairman, indeed the strike of 17 days has something to do with this issue because this issue has to do with federal-provincial relations. And, Mr. Chairman, my method of operation and the method of operation of such people as our Premier in negotiating with the federal government has been and still is today of very serious importance to the people of Saskatchewan.

And the proof of the pudding of that relationship, Mr. Chairman, is in such things as billions of dollars in drought payments, billions of dollars in deficiency payments, billions of dollars in help in various areas that have helped the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that our methods of dealing and negotiating with the federal government have been, for the most part, fairly successful, Mr. Chairman, I submit to you far more successful than antics of the NDP such as walking out on strike for 17 days, such as encouraging mass demonstrations, obstructionistic tactics, and whatever else the radicals on the opposition side of the House can come up with and put forth to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brockelbank: — Another diversion by the Minister of Highways and Transportation. Mr. Minister of Highways, you've taken so many detours on the VIA Rail thing today, I'm beginning to wonder if you're, you know, a specialist in detours because you're certainly detouring on this issue.

The only thing that you've done today in the legislature or recently that has any bearing on VIA Rail is today in the House where you brought forward a motion. You and your seat mate brought forward a motion, and then you adjourned the debate so we couldn't decide what the outcome of the motion would be.

A motion of some urgency I gathered, because you brought it forward under rule 39 which provides for a matter of some urgency to require unanimous consent of the House. We agreed with you. It's an emergency; it should be dealt with.

But then you adjourn it, and then you stand on your feet

and you talk about everything but VIA Rail, Mr. Minister. I think you have to face up to the facts that things are happening here and you're not doing anything about it.

I want to ask you whether your seat mate, the member for Melville, reported to you on his trip to see Mr. Bouchard after the June 7 meeting. Did your seat mate, the member for Melville, report to you on his contact with Mr. Bouchard about VIA Rail?

(1245)

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Chairman, I would like to refer to yesterday's events in this legislature, whereby the Leader of the Opposition, and I will quote, Mr. Chairman, says:

I'm going to send a copy over to you. You can consider it, and if you have some word changes we'll accept them. If you want to introduce it, that's fine by us; we don't care who gets the credit for it.

And that was the Leader of the Opposition.

So, Mr. Chairman, this government took that motion that was forwarded to us, I think five or 10 minutes after 2. We looked at it and said, no, that does not quite clearly express the position of this government with respect to VIA Rail. And so we made some changes to it that the Leader of the Opposition said the day before he'd accept, made some changes forward to it, brought it to the legislature this morning.

And then the members of the opposition take that motion that I feel very adequately and accurately and correctly articulated a very good position on behalf of the people of this province, and they took that, Mr. Speaker, and they changed it back to just about what they had yesterday, but added a little hooker on there that said, "with no reduction from current levels."

Mr. Chairman, I say to you and I articulated this morning, that position is indicative of the irresponsibility of members opposite. The members opposite continue to pay no heed, no attention whatsoever to the \$600 million deficit that that corporation runs on an annual basis.

Mr. Chairman, I submit to you that that \$600 million doesn't come out of the air; it comes out of everybody's pockets. Let us not hide our heads in the sand and think that money grows on trees. It comes out of all of our pockets and it is a fundamental consideration, and I say not the only consideration, certainly. VIA Rail, the issue of rail passenger service in Saskatchewan is an important issue. Rail passenger service has some benefits.

But we cannot just agree to a motion that says forget the money; we're just going to leave service exactly as it is and take a hard and fast and extreme approach. Let us take a more moderate approach, Mr. Chairman, one that is realistic in today's society.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite asks about the member for Melville and what his representations have been. And, Mr. Chairman, I sit in this legislature with

pride beside the man today who introduced what I view as a fair motion; beside the man, the member for Melville, that went home to his constituents, was responsive, was responsive to an issue, a local issue, faced the issue; went to a public meeting, clearly, expressly articulated his thoughts and his views as an elected member in the constituency of Melville; stood before and on behalf of the people of his constituency and talked about the issue. Mr. Chairman, I feel that was responsible.

The member from Melville did say at the meeting that he was prepared to go to Ottawa if need be. Mr. Chairman, I do know that the member opposite has not at this time gone to Ottawa, and, Mr. Chairman, I would think that the member who sits beside me, the member from Melville, has some degree of confidence in his Minister of Highways and Transportation in adequately expressing concerns to the federal government.

But, Mr. Chairman, I say here again, rather than condemn a member who is working very hard on behalf of his constituents and facing the issues of the day, why not offer just a little bit of credit, just a little bit of encouragement for a member who has in the past and continues to speak well on behalf of his constituents.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brockelbank: — Well I notice that the Minister of Highways has equal facility with the road-block as he does with the detour sign, and he's road-blocking this issue.

The member for Melville at the meeting in front of 150 witnesses says, I'm going to Ottawa; Benoit Bouchard is a personal friend of mine and I'm going to talk to him. There's witnesses out there in Melville in his constituency, and there are mayors, and there are representatives from cities and villages, and there are local people, railway workers, and he stood before them and said, Benoit Bouchard is a personal friend of mine and I'm going to go and see him in Ottawa. . . (inaudible interjection). . . Well you've had plenty of time, Mr. Minister. You've delayed the motion that's before the House.

You know, he complains about us offering an amendment. In the arsenal of democracy there's a thing called the sub-amendment. If you didn't like our amendment, you could remove some of it by the sub-amendment.

But I don't suppose you were thinking too clearly, as indicated by the fact that you took an urgent motion brought up under rule 39 and delayed it, wouldn't vote on it. This is something urgent that's got to get to Ottawa to let them know what our view is.

Can you imagine what Benoit Bouchard, the personal friend of the member from Melville, is thinking right now as he gets the word from Regina? He says, the Tories are sitting on the motion at Regina, so we're safe from Regina's point of view. They're not going to raise any ruckus.

Because what you're going to do, Mr. Minister, I suspect, if we don't goad you a bit, is to put it on the order paper like government motions where we've got one on interest rates.

An Hon. Member: — And who put that one on?

Mr. Brockelbank: — And who put that one on? Well it was the member from Melfort. He put it on. . . this is his old trick of road-blocking again. This is a definite road-block. He put something on on interest rates on the order paper, Mr. Chairman. That has been standing on the order paper, it's got to be two months — two months. He won't discuss it. He passes it. Every time it comes up under orders of the day, he says "stand," and won't discuss it.

And is that the fate of the motion on VIA Rail, on this most important issue, which they have now road-blocked by their vote in the House today. That is indeed unfortunate. It's within my knowledge, Mr. Minister, that the Minister of Transport is looking to the provincial governments to assume responsibility for rail services to operate within their provincial boundaries. That is a paragraph out of a letter to the Premier of Saskatchewan.

Now what representations have been made from the Minister of Transport to the Premier of Saskatchewan? He's obviously. . . the Minister of Transport is making these representations because he got through to Alberta and B.C. Now the thing that I don't understand is, don't you open your mail? Where's the letter, where's the communication, in whatever form it was, because it got through to Alberta and B.C. Why hasn't it got through to you, Mr. Minister, about what your options are for VIA?

Because I'll tell you quite frankly, Mr. Minister, if it is permitted that each province will take over the operation of VIA Rail, you'll have a Balkanized railway. You'll have 10 little railways. No, you'll have two big railways in Ontario and Quebec, and you'll have eight more little ones which will be of no value to anyone, or very little value.

If we're going to retain a national railway passenger system, it is categorically and publicly indicated to the Minister of Transport that under no circumstances would this province accept responsibility for rail passenger service. And I want to know why the minister isn't doing that on his own initiative if he's got nothing from the Minister of Transport, or the Prime Minister, or the federal government. Why, on his own initiative, hasn't he put something down in writing and said to the federal government, get that idea out of your head that you're going to Balkanize the railway across Canada as far as passenger service is concerned?

What's going to happen here, Mr. Minister, if you're not on your toes, if you're not on your toes in this issue, you'll have the province of British Columbia and Alberta running a quasi-Oriental Express through the mountains, which will be very attractive to the tourists. . .

An Hon. Member: — Those who can afford it.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Yes. And then you'll have another

train, maybe in Ontario or Quebec, obviously, and you'll have a few northern routes. But by and large you'll have a freight system, not a passenger system.

Mr. Minister, what is your plan, what is your game plan to head off a potential disaster in this area? I want to know your plan in detail.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Chairman, I would firstly respond to earlier comments in the member's last few moments of talking about road-blocking and accusing I, or this government, because a debate was adjourned today for very good reason, of road-blocking.

I find it extremely interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite would have the gall, I guess is the only apt word that I can think to describe it, but have the gall to talk about road-blocking. Mr. Chairman, I submit to you, and I submit to all members of this legislature, that in the history of this province there has never been, has never been a more obstructionistic opposition than currently exists. There has never been an opposition before that has sided with the words: we plan to make this province ungovernable. If you can imagine, Mr. Chairman, if you can imagine: we plan to make this province ungovernable.

And, Mr. Chairman, it was predicted at the beginning of this session that there would be obstruction, there would be delay, there would be lack of deportment, there would be trouble caused by members opposite. And here we sit today, Mr. Speaker, well past, well past 60 or 70 days, or just. . .

An Hon. Member: — Seventy-two.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Seventy-two days, 72 days. And, Mr. Speaker, that member opposite, that member opposite who sides with a party that continues to filibuster and delay and obstruct, who continues to debate, for instance, the potash issue now probably on the 30th hour or thereabouts; probably on the 30th or 40th day since potash was first introduced. Probably, Mr. Speaker, potash has been debated now since when? March?

And, Mr. Chairman, that member opposite has the gall to talk about road-blocking by the government. I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that I have ever heard anything of quite such a hypocritical nature.

Be that as it may, Mr. Chairman, the member asks: what is the government's plan. Mr. Chairman, I submit to you that this minister's plan, this government's plan is to continue on in negotiations and discussions with the federal government, with the federal government in the similar manner to which we have been successful in the past. And I use the example of success in literally billions of dollars pumped into our agricultural economy with respect to drought and deficiency payments at a time, Mr. Chairman, when never before has it been needed or appreciated so very much.

And, Mr. Chairman, I believe that I have prior to this moment articulated the representations I have had with Mr. Bouchard. I have talked to you, Mr. Chairman, about

the personal contact that I made just two days ago with his office. I have told you, Mr. Chairman, that our government initiated today a motion that would call on the federal government to hold public hearings on the issue and allow Saskatchewan people input into the matter.

I intend, Mr. Chairman, to follow that motion up, although it was not allowed to pass because of silly amendments by the members opposite. I would say, Mr. Chairman, I intend to follow our motion up by expressing immediately to the federal government the position as articulated in our motion, and that will be done forthwith, Mr. Chairman.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:04 p.m.