

THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SPEECH AT REPORT STAGE ON C-23, AN ACT TO AMEND THE CANADA MARINE ACT,
THE CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT, THE PILOTAGE ACT AND OTHER ACTS
IN CONSEQUENCE
APRIL 9, 2008

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be engaged in this debate. My Honourable colleague opposite gave me an indication that he wanted to be brief and he was looking for me to, how shall I put it, be like the leopard that could change its spots and perhaps follow his example in brevity.

On a Bill of such great import, he wanted me to be brief and not illustrate the importance of this Bill. I am going to try to follow his example. Even my Honourable colleague from Montreal says it is absolutely important for us to stake out a position on this and make sure that we elucidate it with the clarity that we would have on this Bill.

I am going to try to do it. With all due respect to the Parliamentary Secretary, this Bill, as I said, is extremely important, for a couple of reasons. One of them, of course, is that it falls into the great tradition of Liberal bills that have taken on another coat in this Parliament. It is one of the Bills that our government, in its previous Parliament, put forward for consideration. I was pleased that the current government saw fit to emulate the example.

It came before the committee. In the committee, it received thorough discussion, and for the second reason. That second reason is that this is an important economic measure brought forth to ensure that the infrastructure of the ports system in Canada functions according to all of those means and all of those standards that we have come to label as purely Canadian, which are the following: first, transparent; second, efficient; third, building on all of the partnerships involved in ensuring that the ports system will be reflective of the infrastructure needs of this country; fourth, that it involve the people who are expert in the maintenance and in the running of these operations, according to the business models that we expect would pass the scrutiny of our own system, including the Auditor General; and fifth, it would ensure that the inefficiencies that might exist by virtue of the fact that smaller entities operating often in competition with each other are amalgamated into an environment and into an authority that can provide the services required not only by shippers, i.e. their main clients, but also by the macro needs of the country, and that is an efficient transportation system to get our goods and our services, but primarily our goods, to the foreign markets.

Members will recall that in the last Parliament we initiated a couple of gateways to the economic dynamics of Canada, an Atlantic gateway, a Pacific gateway and, as well, an internal Great Lakes gateway, a central Canada gateway. All of these required the appropriate measures to ensure that the port authorities could function as units, as economic business units capable of delivering an economic service and capable of surviving the operational challenges that come to operating a business that has to meet others' needs.

It was important for us, especially in the committee, to understand that the ebb and flow of business patterns does change, but that these ports would be prepared to ensure that those changes in the economic cycles and in the special economic needs would be reflected in their capacities.

The Parliamentary Secretary and I tried to find common ground on this, as we found with the Critic for the Bloc. I always forget what the name of the riding is, but he will forgive me, I am sure. I cannot mention that it is Monsieur Laframboise, so I will try not to, but we tried to find a common ground and make positive recommendations on how to improve the legislation, and we did do that.

Mr. Speaker, you will not find a more humble member than myself, and I am appreciative of the fact that you were able to assist me, while we were in the middle of debate, in remembering the Honourable Member's riding, Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, so I want to give him due credit. Now I am going to be forced to give everybody else due credit as well.

I wanted as well to thank the Parliamentary Secretary, who has just illustrated how we operate cooperatively on the committee, because he has pointed that it is important to understand both the form as well as the substance of the letter “a”. If he is suggesting that perhaps by focusing on the letter “a”, which has ramifications for some of the economic and financial structures that are part and parcel of the bill in flowing to this particular amendment, I am only hoping that he will be at least as patient when I go through the other 25 letters of the alphabet associated with the bill.

However, he is absolutely right. We are talking right now about an amendment to all of that fine work that we put together as members of the committee. I want to say hats off to the new NDP member on the committee, who is struggling very hard to find something difficult with this bill, and I imagine he is going to have difficulty with the letter “a”. Otherwise, he is going to be absolutely happy with everything else.

As I said, the other things that one would be happy with, the other 25 letters of the alphabet or the style associated with the “a”, have to do with giving these ports the opportunity to function as true financial entities capable of meeting the challenges of the economic cycles and the opportunity to access all of those benefits available to growing businesses under the infrastructure program. I know the parliamentary secretary would have wanted to say that too. I see him nodding his head, indicating yes, this is right, but I want to thank him as well for reminding me that people can colour a particular letter not only in style, but in a particular kaleidoscope of colours.

However, any way we colour this letter “a”, the Bill was getting it done, as they say. It has become part of the lexicon of the House now, “getting it done”, and it gets done because people in the House are men and women of goodwill and they develop that goodwill from an emotive and religious disposition, an ideological disposition, and convert it into political will.

I think what has happened is that there has been an expression of political will to ensure that the Bill does receive the support of the House and that when we bring it here, as we are doing now, to discuss nothing more than one small fragment of this great plan, the letter “a” in all of its style and all of its kaleidoscopic colours, really what we mean is the Members of the committee, and there are many. I mentioned, of course, the member whom indirectly I could not mention but directly was able to with respect to his riding, and as well the Parliamentary Secretary. I do not want to lose sight of the fact that the chairmanship of the committee was such that it allowed us to work properly.

That is a lesson that some of the other chairs might learn. They could look at this and see that the positive legislation that has actually come forward in the House. Whether it has been under the letter “a” or the letter “b”, or whether it has come in red vestiges or blue coats, it has really been from that Committee of Transport.

My hat goes off to my colleagues who worked on that committee together to ensure that we could present the Bill. The only fly in the ointment was the letter “a” and I am glad that we are dealing with it today, so the letter “a” should be accepted as well and we would go on with this great bill.