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CRISIS IN CHURCHILL, MANITOBA

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Wednesday, May 23, 2018

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CRISIS IN CHURCHILL, MANITOBA

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Colleagues, today we note an anniversary. I love celebrating special anniversaries. They allow us to reflect on the accomplishments and impacts the specific period represents.

But today's anniversary is not celebratory. It marks a crisis which has extended far longer than it ought. One year ago today, May 23, the rail line to Churchill flooded, halting rail connections to the port, the gateway to the North and to all Indigenous communities between Gillam and Churchill. Negotiations for ownership and repair are still unresolved. The headlines say it all.

March 16th:

'We're at our wits end': . . . winter of discontent . . .

Yesterday:

Company walks away from Churchill Railway weeks after announcing interest.

That doesn't concern Mayor Spence. The community, with Canada and Fairfax/AGT, continues negotiations with positive support, and we hope for resolution soon.

Hardships escalate for families, workers, the whole community and all who travel there, tourists, the economic mainstay, and those doing business with Churchill and points further north. Only one grain ship loaded and sailed last summer. The grain had wintered in the port's elevator.

Manitoba and Saskatchewan farmers tell me shipping through this Hudson Bay port is a most efficient and convenient route. Yet grain and other commodities cannot get there. Prices of foods and goods have escalated too many times more than those in Southern Canada. Job losses have increased. Churchill is

now a fly-in community. Though when I flew up late January, a broken cart at the airport prevented landing. We went to Rankin Inlet.

No rail, no roads, save the seasonal ice road, and that day no air. I certainly hope no medical emergencies required transport south that January day.

Even last June, stressed kindergarten children told teachers, "Daddy doesn't know how he is going to feed us this winter." Palettes of donated food waited in Thompson for transport to Churchill, a \$6000 flight cost, I'm told. The organizers don't have that kind of financial capacity and governments declined.

Many activities are compromised, including the delivery of building supplies and research materials and tourism by train, though polar bears are there in the winter and belugas are there now. This continues to dramatically affect the community.

Remember the cranes loading the railway engine and railcars onto a boat from Montreal?

Colleagues, I wonder what the cost of all this continues to be in both dollar and human terms. How does that compare to the cost of repairing the line at the outset? On this sad anniversary, we can only ask, when will an agreement to buy the railway be successful and when will repairs be completed?

As the mayor said yesterday:

We did not want to find ourselves at this point. One year without rail service is unacceptable. Our community is resilient and we will get through this.

I go to Churchill early in July and will see the situation first hand. Thank you.