

## Feds still improving rail safety: minister

Pace of change far too slow, critics argue

**Mike De Souza, Postmedia News** Edmonton Journal

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Transport Minister Lisa Raitt says the federal government is pursuing efforts to improve rail safety following the latest disaster involving a train carrying dangerous goods.

"We were very relieved this weekend to learn there were no injuries involved in this incident," Raitt told the House of Commons Monday in response to questions from NDP transport critic Olivia Chow.

The CN derailment in Gainford, Alta., about 85 kilometres west of Edmonton, of train cars carrying liquefied petroleum and crude oil is the third high-profile railway accident in recent weeks.

It also follows the Lac-Mégantic, Que., runaway-train disaster in July that killed dozens of residents, destroying several buildings in a fiery explosion.

Within the past month, residents from the northwestern Alberta community of Sexsmith were forced from their homes when four CN cars carrying anhydrous ammonia derailed on Oct. 16, and seven CN cars - including some carrying petroleum - derailed about 130 kilometres west of Saskatoon on Sept. 25.

Raitt's comments also coincide with a new report to be released Tuesday by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that blames deregulation and poor corporate oversight for weakening rail safety in the years leading up to the Quebec disaster.

The report, by the centre's executive director Bruce Campbell, says the deregulation started 30 years ago under the previous Liberal government in the face of pressure from industry, and that it culminated with a 2012 order from Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cabinet that favoured self-regulation by industry and would require federal departments to eliminate one regulation in order to introduce any new rule.

Campbell noted in the report that an industry lobby group, the Railway Association of Canada, had also previously reported that it was lobbying government officials "to assure them that current regulations for dangerous goods transportation are sufficient." But it later removed this language from its lobbying reports to the government following the Lac-Mégantic accident.

A spokesman for the association, Paul Goyette, said that the claims of "sufficient" regulations didn't accurately reflect what the industry lobbyists were advocating. But he added that rail safety was "highly regulated" in Canada, with more than 99 per cent of millions of shipments of oil reaching their destination without incident. Raitt noted that the federal government has introduced numerous emergency safety measures in the wake of the Lac-Mégantic disaster in the small Quebec town, on top of \$100 million in rail safety investments in recent years. "Even with all of that, it still makes sense for us to work with shippers and to work with the rail industry and municipalities to determine where it is that we can do better," Raitt said in the Commons. "And that's exactly what we're doing."

Chow said the government isn't working fast enough to protect public safety.

"Canadians deserve better rail safety," Chow said. "When will this minister act and prevent future derailments and keep our neighbourhoods safe?" Raitt also noted that it was important to allow the proper authorities to investigate the recent accidents and report their findings.

Her department has issued emergency safety measures related to one-person crews and braking systems as well as improving testing and reporting on dangerous substances, in response to the emerging recommendations from the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, which is conducting the investigations.

Transport Canada has also been facing criticism for previous failures to improve its oversight of the transportation of dangerous goods, despite several warning in recent years from audits and delays in its own pledges to fix the problems.