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Book Review of *Retiring the Crow Rate: A Narrative of Political Management* by Arthur Kroeger.

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Retiring the Crow Rate: A Narrative of Political Management. By Arthur Kroeger. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009. xiv + 260 pp. Figures, photographs, notes, index. \$34.95 paper.

It was the Crowsnest Pass Agreement in 1897 between the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the federal government that came to establish the freight rate structure for export grain. When the rates were made statutory in 1925 they remained fixed until 1983, when the Western Grain Transportation Act (WGTA) replaced the Crowsnest Pass Agreement.

The fixed-rail freight rate generally provided sufficient revenues for the two major railways, the CPR and the Canadian National Railway (CNR), to develop a network of branch lines of over 19,000 miles of track designed for horse and wagon technology. After 1960, when rail costs of moving grain exceeded the revenues, the two railways refused to maintain and upgrade the rail transportation system. At first the federal government with provincial government help provided subsidies to offset the railways' losses and maintain the rail system. But by the mid-1970s the federal government, believing it could no longer continue to subsidize an overbuilt and inefficient rail system where freight rates were fixed, set in motion a series of studies and task forces eventually leading to a new set of rail transportation policies that affected freight rates and the rail network. It is the story of how the Crow Rate was changed that Arthur Kroeger recounts in this informative, entertaining, and often humorous book.

Arthur Kroeger, known as the "Dean of Deputy Ministers," served as Deputy Minister under Transport Minister Jean-Luc Pepin. The team of Pepin and Kroeger formulated and conducted the process of negotiation with the key players, railways, farm organizations, and governments that led to the WGTA.

Although much has been written about the events of this period (1980–1983), this book provides a different and fresh perspective, one from the inside. Kroeger offers readers insight into the inner workings of government where a new policy is being developed and new legislation enacted. His narrative provides an understanding of the people involved, and the political, social, and economic culture of this part of the Great Plains. He recounts the divisiveness of the main farm organizations and provincial governments over the Crow Rate structure, a fixed rate that had penalized the livestock and processing sectors on the prairies. One learns how the compromises were made and the process by which a final consensus

was reached to formulate a new transportation policy and legislation. We are told of the ambivalence of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to the Crow Rate issue. Given the current concentration of power in the Prime Minister's office, this was an era when ministers were given a long leash to develop and formulate policy and legislation. Readers should look carefully for the author's biases and decide if these affected the eventual outcome.

The book essentially ends with the passage of the WGTA, which came into force January 1, 1984, with only a few notes regarding what happened afterwards. It is unfortunate that Kroeger ended where he did as the issue of how to pay the \$675 million Crow Benefit subsidy, a key component of the Act, is an important aspect of the transformation of the grain transportation and handling system in Western Canada. But this took place in the 1990s, and both Kroeger and Pepin had moved on—Pepin out of government and Kroeger to be Deputy Minister elsewhere. **Gary Storey**, *Department of Agricultural Economics, Emeritus, University of Saskatchewan*.