

Government Orders

• (1025)

I want to emphasize that the developer and not the Canadian taxpayers will be fully liable for cost overruns. If the project is not completed by May 31, 1997, the developer must pay the cost of operating the ferry service until the bridge is ready. Once the bridge is in operation the developer must operate and maintain it to the satisfaction of the federal government before having access to the revenues from the tolls.

The cost for crossing the bridge will be comparable to that of the current ferry service. Over the next 35 years these tolls will not be increased in any year by more than three-quarters of the annual rate of inflation. Through these and other provisions the government has made every effort to ensure that taxpayers are properly protected before, during and after construction.

Similarly, I want to make an honest effort to answer all fair minded questions and reservations raised by Canadians about the fixed link. In that spirit I would like to comment on the question of the possible environmental effects of this project.

This issue has been raised throughout the past five years, 60 months. I know it has concerned a number of members of the House. I do not intend to detail all the environmental studies and expert reviews that were undertaken except to say that there were in excess of 100 studies, most of them very comprehensive.

I was going to seek the indulgence of the House and bring before it the six feet of studies that have been undertaken with regard to this project but I thought it would be rather cumbersome to do so. It would be rather costly for the Government of Canada, particularly the House of Commons, to have reprinted in *Hansard* each and every word of all of those studies.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, from your study of the transcripts of this debate at another time, I placed before the House a number of studies. I refer to them not in totality but in summary fashion, bringing to the attention of the House just how important those studies were in answering a number of environmental concerns.

Today I am tabling with the permission of the House a list of all of the studies which have been done, both in French and English. If members wish to refer to them I am certain my department can make these studies readily available so they can examine them, study them at night, take them home on the weekend and review them, maybe get an independent study by their particular political party or their particular group. Then we could hear back from them in the months and years ahead on whether the studies, which number in total 100, were appropriate.

I wish to have the consent of the House to table these two documents if members wish to refer to them at a later time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, I am also prepared if members deem it appropriate to bring in the six feet of studies which have been done. If members wish me to do that they might want to indicate it to me with a note and I would be prepared to do that so everyone will understand that there are no secrets, no backroom deals that have been consummated with regard to this project.

I want to say that the project was subjected to the most open and fully transparent public consultation process which involved over 80 public meetings attended by over 10,000 individuals. This is quite remarkable in itself. I believe this project sets the standard of environmental review and will become a model of environmental management for undertakings of similar size and similar scope.

• (1030)

There is no doubt and there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that there are Canadians out there who under no circumstances whatsoever would agree to having a fixed link, whether because of the environment, personal bias, personal views, finances or otherwise. However, the vast majority of the people of Prince Edward Island who voted in a democratic referendum passed in their legislature voted in favour of the fixed link. We as a national Parliament must recognize that fact, as I am sure hon. members opposite will want to recognize in their interventions that will fall in line shortly.

In late August the Federal Court of Canada in response to a challenge ruled that the Department of Public Works and Government Services had gone well beyond what would normally have been expected in meeting the federal environmental review guideline order. I will quote from Justice Cullen's ruling when he said:

The criteria accepted and followed by Public Works Canada when making its self-assessment was more than adequate for the purposes and complied with the (environmental) guideline order.

However, I assure the House this does not mean the end of our environmental concerns. My department, as well as other responsible federal and provincial agencies, will continue to monitor environmental impacts during the construction period and beyond to ensure compliance with the agreement and to take action if it should be deemed necessary.

The fixed link is a very exciting initiative, a very bold initiative. It is an undertaking of historic proportions. It is yet another challenging opportunity to open up the country, to unite the country and to build it.

Yes, the 13-kilometre bridge, the longest ever over waters which freeze, is ambitious but so were the St. Lawrence seaway, the Trans-Canada highway and the great Canadian railroad. The