

Government Orders

• (1635)

I have had a considerable amount of indirect involvement with the Borden-Cape Tormentine ferry crossing. My father worked for CN Rail, later Marine Atlantic, as a deck hand and eventually a quartermaster for 32 years on that crossing. From age 12, as many youth did, we would drive back and forth on the car ferries. I have had first hand experience of the delays, of being stuck in the ice for as long as 18 hours. As a result of that experience I recognize the uniqueness of that particular area. Nowhere else in the world will one find the combination of wind, tides and ice there is where this bridge is going to be built.

It is for those reasons that I had to be convinced and looked so seriously at this project with a very critical eye. I have looked at the studies concerning the environment, the ice conditions, the fisheries, the socioeconomic impact and so on. This morning the minister outlined the number and breadth of the studies. I can tell the House of the very extensive public consultations on Prince Edward Island of those studies and of the bridge.

During the election campaign I found a sense of optimism as a result of the project, due to the fact that there would be an expected increase in economic activity during construction and improved transportation infrastructure following construction. There were concerns, and I do not think we can sweep those under the rug, from the ferry workers, from the fishermen and from the people of Borden. We cannot brush them off. They are very real concerns in the minds of those people and must be addressed. As a result of the studies, government has moved to address them in a number of areas. I want to put on the record the ways they will be addressed.

As a result of the environmental review the government determined that the construction and the presence of the bridge will result in no significant impact on the environment and the fishery. In order to overcome the difficulty the developer has been required to set aside \$10 million as a compensation fund. This fund will be administered according to the terms and process currently being developed by a fisheries liaison committee composed of a majority of fishermen.

Quite a number of Marine Atlantic ferry workers will lose their jobs. That is reality. The government has made the commitment that these employees will be treated fairly and equitably. They will have first right of refusal for the bridge operation and maintenance jobs. A fair severance package will be negotiated between the workers union and Marine Atlantic. The government will provide opportunities for retraining, and relocation assistance will be made available if necessary. A joint consultative committee has been set up to co-ordinate the activities dealing with the ferry workers.

As well, we have to address the concerns of the community of Borden. That is happening on an ongoing basis. One of the last studies done looked at the specifics of the project relating to SCI's bridge proposal and it passed the test. Justice Cullen of the Federal Court stated the following in his ruling with respect to the efforts of Friends of the Island to prevent the project from proceeding with respect to scientific studies and I think it is important to put that statement on the record: "The scientific evidence relied on by Public Works Canada declared all environmental impacts or potential environmental impacts were insignificant."

• (1640)

The respondent SCI and Public Works accepted those findings, were correct in doing so and thus the decision of Public Works was correct in law and certainly not made in a vacuum".

Other members have spoken of the economic impact and spin-off so I will not repeat those facts and figures. However in the long term after 1997 completion there should be economic benefits, savings to transportation costs in the trucking industry and more reliable product delivery for our agriculture, fisheries and manufacturing products. After all transportation is necessary in the delivery of goods to market. We have four years to go. I mentioned in a question to a speaker earlier this afternoon there are major concerns at the moment and major delays in getting our products to the marketplace.

The government has committed itself to ensuring that the risks to the environment and the fishery are minimized. It has committed itself to ensuring that any of Marine Atlantic's work force displaced by the completion of the bridge will be assisted through retraining, relocation assistance and early retirement programs.

I want to touch on one final point. It is the growing sense among some islanders that the link, combined with the possible loss of air traffic control service on the island, could lead progressively toward a diminishing sense of full provincial status. We may need at some point a full review of the transportation infrastructure throughout the Atlantic region, one that will allow all the stakeholders to participate in developing a system that will benefit the region going into the next century.

In conclusion, this project is an investment in our future. This amendment is part of the process to allow that to happen.

Mr. Lee Morrison (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, I am a little surprised because I know the hon. member is quite an ardent economic nationalist. I now find him vigorously defending a project that is going to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of two giant multinational corporations. I find this a little inconsistent.

Earlier the subject of ice delays came up. I will agree with the hon. member that one will get ice delays for ferries, even the