

Government Orders

The bill will accordingly allow the company to borrow up to \$100 million on the private market through bond issues. This \$100 million will help to pay for part of the Gateway project—a ten year \$144 million project. Construction is planned on both sides of the border. It should be noted that the Government of Canada does not guarantee the \$100 million loans. Theoretically, then, these loans are not binding on the Government of Canada.

The need to increase the borrowing power of the company will also enable the government to correct an anomaly. This bridge is the only one to come under the authority of the Minister of Finance. All the other international cross-border highways are the responsibility of the Minister of Transport, and the bill assigns him responsibility for this bridge as well.

A third aspect of this bill is that in order to facilitate future increases in the borrowing power of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Company, the governor in council is authorized by this bill to increase the borrowing limit.

It should be noted that the bridge authority must cover its expenses and that moneys spent to improve the bridge will be recovered through an increase in traffic and tolls.

For all these reasons, we support this bill, all the more so because the Bloc Québécois has always supported the liberalization of trade and the NAFTA. The increased traffic on the bridge is a good example of the economic benefit to both countries of this liberalization. In opposing the free trade agreement, the Liberals showed at that time that they were unable to take economic decisions that would benefit Canada.

• (1315)

By proposing legislation in this House today that would help the bridge handle the increase in traffic resulting from this agreement that they so vigorously opposed, the Liberals are making amends, and in the same spirit I would be prepared to let bygones be bygones.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to inform the House the Reform Party is supporting Bill C-81.

The bill amends the act for the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Company, the company responsible for the Peace bridge linking Fort Erie and Canada with the city of Buffalo in the United States.

The Peace bridge is the second busiest border crossing highway link between Canada and the United States. This bridge carried nearly 8 million vehicles in 1994. One million of these were trucks containing over \$20 billion of traded goods.

With the implementation of our trade agreements and as a result of positive economic conditions, the Peace bridge finds itself not quite up to the task of facilitating smooth traffic flows.

Commercial traffic has accelerated to the point where there is a lot of congestion on the bridge and at the adjacent plazas. This has caused traffic jams on the access roads and local streets on both sides of the border.

To ensure the bridge can facilitate all trade and traffic, the bridge authority would like to implement bridge improvements called the gateways project.

To finance the gateways project, the bridge authority intends to market two 30-year bond issues in the United States totalling \$70 million in 1995 and 1997. It will use its toll revenue to service this debt.

We in the Reform Party recognize that strong north-south infrastructure links are crucial to building on trade agreements we have implemented with United States.

If these infrastructure projects can be financed by the private sector, so much the better. It is our understanding that the bridge authority is profitable and has no long term outstanding debt. It is also our understanding that the government is protected from liability should the bridge authority ever default on debts in the future.

Since the federal government is not financially responsible for the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Company, it is appropriate for the governor in council to approve borrowing increases.

In the future we will have to look at a different way of financing these projects. There will have to be more infrastructure financed by the private sector, by municipalities, as we cannot sustain these from the federal government. That would be looking down the road and I hope that approach could be used.

The other reservation we have is that the bridge authority should be held accountable in its meetings to the public. If various parties want to present briefs on the effects of toll increases or any environmental concerns, these briefs should be available to the public.

With this reservation, the Reform Party would support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.