

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 16, 1964

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

NORTHERN AFFAIRS

ALASKA HIGHWAY—STUDY RESPECTING RECONSTRUCTION AND PAVING COSTS

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources): Mr. Speaker, as the house is already aware, the Department of Public Works is carrying out an engineering study to determine the cost of reconstructing and paving the Canadian section of the Alaska highway, and the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources is conducting an economic study to establish the benefits which would accrue to Canada as a result of this construction if it were undertaken.

Hon. members will be interested to know that the above studies are progressing, and for these it is now necessary to ascertain more precisely the design standards on which estimates of construction costs will be based and to obtain more detailed information about related engineering aspects. For this purpose there will shortly be technical talks between Canadian and United States officials. These talks will be without reference to possible means of financing.

Officials of the government of British Columbia and of the territorial government of the Yukon are being invited to participate in these talks and to have prior discussions with the federal officials. The question of paving the portion of the Alaska highway which lies in Canada, and of any negotiations with the United States government on the matter, remains open. Before any decision can be made it will be necessary to have more information regarding the cost of reconstruction, relocation and paving of the highway and regarding the economic benefits to Canada. A tentative date for talks with British Columbia and the Yukon is December 3, 1964, and with the United States, December 4.

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, if I may comment briefly on the minister's statement may I say I am sure that members of the house, particularly those from the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia

and, of course, the northern areas will especially welcome the minister's announcement. We have been waiting for some time for this development to occur, and while I for one am disappointed that the talks will not include the subject of cost sharing, nevertheless the talks will no doubt be fruitful.

As the minister is well aware, there are two bills pending before the United States Senate and House of Representatives which suggest that the United States undertake half the cost of reconstructing and paving the Alaska highway. I suggest that perhaps it would be useful to include a discussion of the financial and cost sharing implications of the paving and reconstruction of the highway, particularly since over half of the highway, 657 miles, is in the province of British Columbia. With the energy, ambitions and convictions of the premier of British Columbia I am sure he would be only too happy to enter into any cost sharing arrangement with the federal government and the government of the United States for the paving of the highway. My own suggestion has been for some time that the United States should bear half the cost, British Columbia should bear one third of the cost and the federal government should bear one third of the cost.

An hon. Member: What arithmetic.

Mr. Nielsen: I am sorry; the United States should bear one half of the cost, the federal government one quarter and British Columbia one quarter. I was quoting Social Credit theory, as one member suggests.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Nielsen: I really do suggest to the minister that these cost sharing talks should be beneficial. I am sure we are all extremely happy to hear that progress is finally being made and that concrete talks are going to be held with regard to paving this very vital artery through the Yukon to Alaska.

Mr. Bert Leboe (Cariboo): We do welcome the report that has been given to us by the minister today. We hope, however, that emphasis will continue to be put on getting those sections of the highway paved that fall within the alignment on the official survey. This, of course, would greatly assist in the time that