

*Government Orders*

enhance opportunities and provide many spin-offs for that sector of our economy.

The bridge will provide much greater certainty and reliability of delivery for P.E.I.'s farmers and fishermen. There will be new possibilities of growth for the province's processing and manufacturing industries.

P.E.I.'s businesses will be able to improve their bottom lines. An improved competitive position for the island's economy means an improved future for the young people of the island. I am certain all members of the House regardless of political ideology will want to support that enthusiastically.

Not surprisingly, over the years since the idea of a fixed link was first advanced, support has grown to the point where today over 70 per cent of islanders are in favour of the bridge. I do not mean the people from Cape Breton Island, I mean the people from Prince Edward Island. I wish to make that very clear.

The bridge is an exciting project for Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada. I know that some people still have concerns. I want to do my best to address some of the concerns this morning and perhaps respond to questions that hon. members might have.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitments enshrined in a tripartite agreement made with the provinces of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Government of Canada.

The ferry workers who will lose their jobs in June 1997 as a result of the ferry closures will be treated fairly. They will have first choice of employment on bridge operation and maintenance. A fair severance package will be negotiated on top of the provisions of the workers' current contract. We will work closely with ferry employees to find retraining opportunities for jobs in many sectors of the local economy which will benefit from the presence of the new bridge.

• (1020)

Fishermen affected by the construction activities in specific areas of the Northumberland Strait will be compensated for lost opportunity. As part of this particular deal the developer has set aside a \$10 million trust fund to be administered according to a plan developed mostly by fishermen themselves.

I also want to reaffirm the commitment to provide financial assistance through another agency which I happen to be responsible for, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, for sound business initiatives in order to help the communities of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick in the coming months and years. We will take the appropriate measures to help the affected individuals and communities because it is the fair and just thing

to do. I cannot stress too strongly that the overall effect of the bridge will be many immediate and long-term benefits. The bridge will contribute to an increasingly dynamic economy for those of us who reside in Atlantic Canada. In fact, the project constitutes a good deal, not only for the people of Prince Edward Island, not only for the people of Atlantic Canada but, I dare to suggest in the House of Commons, for the people of Canada.

In drawing up this agreement the public servants of my department have done a commendable job of ensuring that the taxpayers are protected from any unexpected, unnecessary or unwarranted costs. All of the risks have been assumed by the developer, including financing, design, construction, maintenance and operation.

I know some people, perhaps in this House, have expressed concerns that the ultimate owners of two of the development partners are not Canadian. But I am satisfied that this is essentially a Canadian undertaking whose benefits will largely accrue to the people of this country. It is true that Northern Construction Company and the GTMI company are Canadian subsidiaries of foreign firms, but both subsidiaries have been operating actively in Canada for in excess of 30 years.

I wonder if those critics—and I do not suggest for a moment that they are here on the floor of the House of Commons—wherever they may be, would seriously suggest stopping as it would be rather ridiculous if we were to say to GM, Ford and Chrysler: "Because you operate a subsidiary in Canada, in Ontario, you should not be allowed to operate because your parent company is a foreign one". That would be intellectually dishonest. We are in a globally competitive world. I know members opposite would want to agree with my conclusion that this is important for Atlantic Canadians and important for Canada as a whole.

Furthermore, this particular developer should be complimented for assembling world class technical expertise. The truth is that the proponent of the fixed link, Strait Crossing Development, is a 100 per cent Canadian owned company which happens to be headquartered in Calgary, Alberta. Who will benefit most from the project? The answer clearly is the citizens of Canada.

The developer was required to have all the project costs in trust at the time of closing, plus a 10 per cent contingency until substantial completion of the bridge has taken place. The developer has posted a \$200 million performance bond as well as a \$35 million compliance bond and a \$20 million labour and material bond. All these are supported by guarantees with the parent companies. The deal was struck in such a way that the parent companies are providing the necessary financial backing to the developer.