

Newfoundland Ferry Service

ince through which it passed. That gap is not being filled with funds from the federal government. This is the thrust of the small contribution that I wanted to make.

I think that one of my colleagues the other day raised the question in the House as to why there was no support for the ferry that joins Vancouver Island to the mainland, to which the reply was that the government cannot support transportation within the province. Unfortunately this is belied by some of the facts that have been brought to my attention.

There is support given in postal services on the east coast. There is also a ferry service, the construction costs for which were provided by a federal government grant to the province of Ontario even though it was from one point in Ontario to another point in the same province. So I do not want to have that sort of reply stand on the record unchallenged. There is a gap in the trans-Canada highway the filling of which has not been supported by this government, and I feel that it should be mentioned this afternoon in support of the motion before us.

Mr. Jim Fleming (York West): Madam Speaker, I am always pleased, as the member representing a suburban Toronto constituency, when I can rise and speak with some measure of support for a proposal put forward by a colleague from the great province of Newfoundland. I am very pleased that within my own riding, if I can be political, there are a number of people who hail from his part of the country, and it will be a happy day when I will be able to investigate the "great homeland" that they talk about so often.

When I read the first part of the motion that:

—the government should consider the advisability of reducing the present passenger-car fare and freight rate structure of the North Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques and Argentia, Newfoundland ferry service to better conform with the cost of travelling—

Up to the part in which the hon. member says that we should consider assisting them, I find that there might be merit in the proposal.

I am not an expert and have not done any deep investigation of what the subsidy level now is, but I have a few facts on it. I do believe it is reasonable to allow people to move freely and provide for them access back and forth from any part of our nation to another. I hope, later on in my comments, to point out that we do not need a water barrier of 90 miles to have difficulty communicating in transportation back and forth in Canada today.

● (1630)

Indeed, in southern Ontario there are examples of shorter distances than that, with hard firm land and no mountains in between, where people have difficulty commuting. They are in fact land-locked. I do not believe, as one hon. member mentioned, that there is significance in the fact that this 90 miles stretch is a borderline between provinces. It is not just a line on the map, but is a considerable boundary which isolates that province.

However, the motion loses much of its saleability when it says:

—to better conform with the cost of travelling a comparable distance on the trans-Canada highway system—

[Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich).]

If it had simply said that fares should be reasonable on this 90 mile barrier it would have been better. I know there are subsidies, but perhaps they should be larger and the fares should be decreased. There are other instances in this country where there is no regular service, such as places in the far north, and there is as much difficulty there as between these two points in Newfoundland and the mainland, and where the costs are even greater. Those people are at a greater disadvantage but no one suggests that the air fare from Edmonton to some point in the Northwest Territories should be the price of the gas it would take for a motorcycle to go that distance overland. I am surprised at that comparative suggestion in the motion.

Although the price should be kept as reasonable as possible, Madam Speaker, still people must pay for service. One of my concerns about soaring medicare costs is that the federal government in forcing the provinces to join in a portable medicare program, encouraged a system where there is no requirement for a token payment for the services received. Sometimes this sort of thing doubles or triples the burden on the taxpayer because such services are taken advantage of, and in the end the people who need them are at a disadvantage because the doctors are so busy they cannot take care of everybody. In the same way I think there should be some requirement for the user to pay for transportation.

Considerable amounts of money are already being expended on transportation services, and particularly in the maritimes. The gulf service is not the only service provided on the east coast. The government provides ships and port facilities at no cost, between Prince Edward Island and the mainland. In fact there are seven ships operating between Prince Edward Island and the mainland, one between Yarmouth and Bar Harbour, and 20 others in service in that area. So there is a good deal of assistance; in fact millions of dollars in capital costs, and also help in offsetting operating costs on the route we are discussing today. Perhaps there should be more, but we should remember that the money we spend is the money of the Canadian taxpayer and there is only so much in the coffers.

One hon. member mentioned the many problems faced by the people of Newfoundland—the high unemployment rate, the high cost of transportation and the high cost of food. It should also be recognized by hon. members opposite, and I am sure it is, that the federal government has attempted to lend assistance to all parts of Canada that find themselves under economic duress. For instance, unemployment insurance aid in Newfoundland today has grown tremendously from what it was a few years ago, but there is only so much money and it must be spread in many directions.

In the last parliament I criticized the government because of the lack of an over-all transportation policy that would allow our large urban areas to relate to our rural areas, and allow people from all parts of the country to come and go easily. I am not happy that it costs more to fly from here to Vancouver or Newfoundland than it does to fly to other parts of the world at a greater distance, Madam Speaker.