

Government Orders

The amendment, albeit short and straightforward, is important for Prince Edward Island, important for the entire Atlantic region and important for Canada.

The proposed amendment provides the necessary constitutional framework for the replacement of the ferry service between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick by a bridge across the Northumberland Strait. More significantly, the amendment provides a bridge for the future.

The fixed crossing will allow Prince Edward Island to become a full partner in Canada's economy. The fixed crossing will spur Atlantic Canada's economy in the short term and create real hope for viable long term economic growth.

Construction of the 13 kilometre concrete bridge means new skills, new technology, new jobs, new enthusiasm and new prospects for the future.

The amendment before Parliament today will allow a project to proceed which is fiscally sound and financially responsible, a project which represents thoughtful public transportation policy, a project which sets new standards for environmental review, assessment and management.

The federal government is bound by the 1873 terms of union with Prince Edward Island to provide continuous communications between the island and the mainland.

Since Confederation this obligation has been fulfilled by a ferry service. The province of Prince Edward Island now wishes to strengthen, modernize and improve dramatically the means by which the island is linked continuously with mainland Canada.

For that reason the federal government and the Government of Prince Edward Island signed an agreement committing the two governments to make the necessary constitutional change to permit the ferry service to be replaced by a bridge.

The amendment before us today is the last in a series of legislative steps required to enable Prince Edward Island to make that move forward. In the spring of 1993 Parliament debated and then passed Bill C-110, an act respecting the Northumberland Strait crossing.

I would be remiss in my opening remarks if I did not pay tribute to those members of my own caucus who participated in that debate and on previous occasion whereby the House deemed it appropriate to pass Bill C-110.

I want to congratulate all members, some who are present, some who are opposite, who participated in that debate. I wish to thank them sincerely.

In June 1993 the Prince Edward Island legislature passed a resolution authorizing this amendment. In October an agreement was signed by the federal government and Strait Crossing Development Inc. to begin construction of a bridge linking Prince Edward Island to mainland Canada.

The agreement is an innovative, prudent and intelligent approach to the building of public infrastructure. The agreement breaks new ground in government-private sector partnerships. Investment of taxpayers' dollars is limited but also protected.

The people of Canada will not be responsible for footing the bill for delays or cost overruns relating to this initiative. The total contribution of the Government of Canada will consist of 35 subsidy payments to the private sector development. The payments will be made annually at a cost of \$42 million indexed to inflation.

This formula effectively caps the cost and limits to 35 years the financial responsibilities of the Government of Canada to meet its constitutional obligation to the people of Prince Edward Island.

By contrast, pursuing the option of the ferry service indefinitely would subject the taxpayer to undue and unexpected cost without any reprieve in sight. As was made crystal clear by the Prime Minister both in our election red book and in the recent speech from the throne, the government's number one priority is job creation. The fixed link and this particular initiative will do that. It will create jobs.

• (1015)

Under the terms of the agreement, 96 per cent of bridge construction jobs will be filled by Atlantic Canadians. In total over 3,500 jobs will be created in the three and a half year construction period. Further, at least 2,000 indirect jobs will be created as a result of spin-offs. That addresses clearly and unequivocally the government's intent with regard to its priority of job creation.

The contracts also specify that 70 per cent of the total procurement requirements will be provided by Atlantic Canadians. Given the size and complexity of the undertaking, extensive spin-offs will offer Atlantic Canadians the chance to develop new construction, management and environmental protection skills.

What is most encouraging is that the economic benefits will continue to flow long into the future. The tourism industry estimates that once the bridge is in operation, the number of people visiting P.E.I. will increase approximately 25 per cent. It will open up new opportunities for even more employment in the vitally important hospitality industry of that province and other provinces as well.

The Prince Edward Island trucking industry will benefit to the tune of some \$10 million each year in time savings alone. Mr. Speaker, you are very wise and very learned. I have no doubt you are probably a very well travelled individual. If you have taken or perhaps would like to take a trip in the immediate future to Prince Edward Island, you would quickly understand why the trucking association is so much in favour of this initiative. It will decrease the time you will be parked at the ferry side waiting for the boat to transport you to the other side. Not only is it time saving but it is also an economic saving which will