

Canadians will be able to keep their vested rights with respect to social housing, health—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the question and comment period for both speakers of the Reform Party has expired. Resuming debate. The hon. Minister of Public Works has the floor.

[English]

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Madam Speaker, let me begin by joining with other members of the House in conveying to you and to Mr. Speaker my best wishes in your election as Speaker and deputy speaker of this Chamber.

In the weeks and months ahead, Madam Speaker, there will be many challenges you will have to face, but I hope you will be comforted in the knowledge that members of all political parties have demonstrated quite clearly their desire to maintain civility without having to sacrifice anything as it relates to our ideology.

There is no greater honour in a democracy than to be elected to represent one's fellow citizens. There is no greater obligation than to work together to try to create a better life for every person in the country.

I do not share the political philosophy of members opposite but I respect their right to hold their beliefs and to enunciate those beliefs. I hope that on many issues we can find common cause and common ground as we seek to build a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

May I say a special thanks to the people of my constituency of Cape Breton—East Richmond who have granted me the privilege in four general elections of representing them as their member of Parliament in this the highest court of the land. I acknowledge that privilege but I remind them, as I do all other members of this prestigious House, of the words of Edmund Burke when he said:

You owe them much more than your industry; you owe them your judgment.

• (1545)

The communities in my constituency were established by people who dared to dream. My constituents are the descendants of men and women who faced adversity and persecution, men and women who came to Canada seeking opportunity, tolerance and a better life. They sought a decent standard of living and they sought a fair chance to play their role in building a better country.

In 1994 the challenges are different but the dreams remain the same. The residents of my riding and indeed all Canadians seek economic growth, compassion, social programs and a generos-

The Address

ity of spirit. Canadians want a government that shares their concerns, a government that respects their views and their dollars, and a government that helps them to fulfil their dreams.

In the speech from the throne the government did not promise miracles. We cannot solve all the problems overnight, but we can and we must take steps to foster new economic growth. We can and we must take steps to ensure integrity and openness in our actions. We can and we must move to solve problems with creativity and co-operation. We can and must treat individuals all across this country, regardless of their differing political philosophies, with dignity and with respect.

The Prime Minister made clear throughout the election campaign his belief that we need to kickstart our economy. We are attempting to do just that with the new national infrastructure program which was announced by my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board. This program will create thousands of new jobs in a matter of months. It will help build the roads and bridges we need to link our country together and to move our goods and produce. We need modern infrastructure to compete in the modern world.

What is so encouraging about this particular initiative is the degree of co-operation shown by provinces and municipalities. To my knowledge this is the first time in our country's history when we have crafted such a complex economic program with such speed and indeed such goodwill. I hope this is a hallmark for future efforts in which all of us in government work together to achieve effective and efficient results for the good of the country.

As an Atlantic Canadian I want to note the significance this government attaches to the fixed link. The fixed link is a transportation initiative which will integrate the economies of Prince Edward Island with those of New Brunswick and thereafter the rest of the country. This, the largest of the building projects, will provide short-term jobs and long-term economic growth for that area of the country. I may say in a personal way it will provide hope to an area which suffers from unprecedented levels of high unemployment.

The whole thrust of the government's agenda is to give every region, every province, every community and every person a chance to be part of the economic mainstream. We want to knock down the barriers that keep Canadians from having a fair chance at success. That is the simple principle behind our plan, Madam Speaker, something to which you have spoken yourself personally in the House and indeed across the country, the introduction of a prenatal nutrition program. We think that babies have a right to be born healthy. Frankly I find it shocking that in a country as rich as Canada we have infants born sick just because their mothers were too poor to eat properly during pregnancy.