

*Northern Affairs***Some hon. Members:** Question.

member has raised in this important bill. I presume that, like the rest of us, he has become somewhat disillusioned with the federal government. He realizes, as many of us do, that it will take a number of years before it proceeds with a full program to pave this vital road link, and he has suggested that a highway authority be established. Personally I think it is a very good idea to approach other parties who are interested in this road link. I have in mind the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, the state of Alaska, the United States government, and of course our own federal government here in Ottawa.

• (5:50 p.m.)

I have been over the road, and I am familiar with a large section of the highway. It is very scenic although extremely rough. It is full of potholes and it is dusty, and anything but an asset or an attraction to the great tourist industry which it could and should serve, were it paved as it should be. It seems to me that far too little attention has been paid by the federal and other government authorities to the vast untapped and undeveloped resources which we have in the north, the northeastern and northwestern parts of our nation. We do have the trans-Canada highway, stretching from one end of Canada to the other, and there is not one section of our nation which has not benefited economically from the building of this road link.

In the Yukon we have another section of Canada. I believe that this important section of our nation should also have a road link of a standard at least equal to that of the trans-Canada highway. This of course is where the federal government enters the picture. It is not my intention to talk out this bill. There is ample time for us to put it through the second reading state this afternoon.

Although perhaps it would be better if the federal government were to look after the task of building this road link, the mere fact that the federal government has failed to do so, and the mere fact that we have had recent statements which indicate that in the immediate future there is little chance that this vital road link will be paved, prompts me to say that I have no hesitation in suggesting to the house that we endorse the bill which has been put forward by the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson).

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish—

Mr. Watson: —to congratulate the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) upon bringing this bill to the attention of the house. I was recently a visitor to the Yukon and appreciate full well the tremendous benefits which would accrue to that part of Canada if the highway were paved from Dawson Creek to the Alaska frontier. I am told that not only do we need the 1,200 miles of pavement but that we also need to rebuild some 400 miles. I have learned also that all the bridges require rebuilding. The sum involved is high, but within our means. I agree with other hon. members who have spoken today that this is an economically feasible project and that we should be doing something about it now.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Watson: So far as the Yukon is concerned it would appear to me that we could substantially reduce commodity costs in that part of the country if transportation costs were reduced as a result of the increased speed which would be possible on the highway were it paved and partially rebuilt. One area of the economy of the Yukon which is undeveloped now is tourism. With the paving of the Alaska highway, tourism in the Yukon would blossom, and if access roads were built this blossoming of tourism would spread into the Northwest Territories as well. The faster access to the south would also be an additional stimulus to the development of the Yukon's tremendous mineral and timber resources.

For these and other reasons which hon. members have given today, the overwhelming economic evidence is to the effect that the highway can and should be built without any more delay. The tourist potential for Alaska alone underlines the interest which the people of the United States generally as well as the people of Alaska have in this project. There is no question but that Alaska would be visited by tremendous numbers of people from the northwestern parts of the United States who would like to see their 49th state.

I would hope that in the very near future the governments involved could get together in an effort to do something about this project. At the same time I would hope it would be possible for the authorities in the Yukon, who are concerned with having a corridor to the Pacific, to raise the question with the authorities in the United States and Canada so that we could solve these problems at the same time.