

Trans-Canada Highway

Mr. Knowles: Is it not a good thing for the minister to learn that there are some grievances in the country?

Mr. Abbott: There will be other opportunities.

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

Mrs. Gladys Strum (Ou'Appelle): I want to assure the minister that I shall not take very long. If he has been waiting all day may I say that I have been waiting for two years. The highway that runs the length of my constituency is deteriorating every day winter and summer because of the government's indecision and inaction in the matter of a trans-Canada highway.

The highway which runs through part of my constituency, and was the first highway in the province to be built, will be, we believe, the Saskatchewan link in the trans-Canada highway.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Strum: From what the government has said, and from unofficial reports, that at least is the belief. Because of that, the province has not spent money on it, and rightly so. If you are going to tear up a highway there is no reason for spending a lot of money on it merely to spoil it.

In the few minutes at my disposal I want to place before this government the needs of my province in the matter of highway construction and maintenance assistance and to ask the minister to do for highways what has been done for housing. I see the government has appropriated an additional \$10 million for housing in the supplementary estimates. I ask the government to do for highways what they have done for defence. The budget for defence has been greatly expanded. Because of the sparse population and tremendous distances the western provinces are not in a position to spend the money on highways that the situation calls for. For instance, Saskatchewan has almost three times as many miles of roads as Ontario, almost six times as many as Quebec, almost three times as many as Alberta and more than twice as many as her nearest competitor, Manitoba, which has only 91,000 miles, according to the Canada Year Book, 1947. In fact, when you add together the miles of road in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Prince Edward Island the total is still 5,000 miles less than the number of miles of road which Saskatchewan maintains. When you consider that in that province we have less than one million population, and because of that a very much lower percentage of licences and a greatly diminished return in gasoline tax, it can be

readily seen that we have not adequate sources of revenue.

Canada should do what other federal states have done. In the United States they not only give grants for a trans-United States highway but they give grants for a number of categories. They have a federal grants-in-aid program. They assist in building state highways. They also give grants for market roads; they assist in taking a highway through urban centres. That is, they assist a place like Ottawa in maintaining a highway that goes through the city. We have had the experience of coming to a city limit and being stuck in a mudhole inside the city limit because there was no way of maintaining the road within that municipal area. I would urge the government to take seriously its responsibilities in the matter of road construction and maintenance. I remind the government that the federal government takes out tremendous resources in the way of income tax from the farmers of our province who operate on a large scale and who are the heaviest contributors to income tax of any rural part of Canada. We pay the luxury tax. We pay the sales tax, which has not been removed and which will continue to be levied. Because of the contribution which we make in Saskatchewan to the resources of the federal government, I would urge the government to make a decision and immediately to embark on a trans-Canada highway.

Australia is undertaking highways as a means of defence. A highway construction program there is part of their defence appropriations. They realize that highways are an essential part of any defence system. It would not be amiss if this government were to pay part of the highway grant on the basis of defence. Because of our tremendous distances we do need an adequate communications system, and of this highways are not the least important. My constituency will suffer until this government makes up its mind. I am speaking for my constituents, who have been hired all summer for the last two years and have been snowed in all winter.

Mr. Robert Fair (Battle River): There would seem to be another occasion on which this trans-Canada highway can be discussed. At that time I intend to have something to say on the question. Tonight I was glad to hear the hon. member, who has just taken her seat, say that they have a lot of roads and very little population in her part of the country. I suggest that, when people make up their minds to put this highway through, it be put through a part of the country west of Winnipeg and on through Saskatoon and Edmonton where we shall have population,