

### *Adjournment Debate*

The minister and the department are pursuing this. In fact, once unanimous agreement is received I am sure that the hon. member's intentions with regard to the disabled people will become intact.

I really have to congratulate the provinces for their spirit of co-operation. I think that all of us in this House enjoyed the debate some weeks or months ago with regard to Bill C-280, and I really have to thank my colleague from Don Valley East for his perseverance in pursuing a just cause.

#### THE ECONOMY

**Mr. Joe Fontana (London East):** Mr. Speaker, for months and even years this side of the House has been trying to impress upon this government the importance of a cost-shared public works program. To date, the government at best has given an awful lot of excuses but very little concrete action. In fact, on February 5 the Minister of Finance rejected the suggestion for this cost shared public works program as proposed by our leader in our one-year emergency economic plan.

I understand that the Minister of Finance along with the first ministers at least came part way in terms of a national infrastructure program when they signed their communique on March 25, even though they only spoke of highways. At least that is a start. I would hope that, in fact, the government would continue to move toward cost-shared national infrastructure programs.

On April 7, 21 members of Parliament from all three major parties met with municipal leaders from across the country. There was consensus established on the need to address this issue and take action. This consensus did not stop there. There was national consensus and solid support for such a capital works program: Support from almost if not all of the provincial premiers, support from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, support of all the municipal leaders across the country, support from the industry, which considers the issue so important that it also has established its own lobby group to promote municipal infrastructure development by the federal government.

The Coalition to Renew Canada's Infrastructure consists of representatives from major Canadian corporations. The labour unions across this country, a number of

whom have communicated their support to members of Parliament as well as the ministers, also support such an important initiative for job creation.

The consensus of such diverse groups on the need to spend government money in co-operation with industry is a rare occurrence in this country. It indicates the seriousness of the issue and the need for this government to act quickly in fulfilling its obligations to improve the economy and provide jobs.

A group of over 100 American economists recently urged the U.S. government to spend \$50 billion in 1992 to improve the American infrastructure. Their communique stated, and I quote: "The spending of these funds would help to stimulate the economy. Since the economy has idle resources of labour and capital available to meet additional spending with additional production when the threat of inflation is minimal, it is appropriate to let these expenditures add to the deficit financed by borrowing and it would cancel most or all of the needed stimulus to aggregate demand if they were financed otherwise".

With all Canada's governments talk about improving Canada's competitive position, it should not ignore the possibility that the United States could spend billions of dollars to improve and invest in its infrastructure system. If we want to attract investment as a country, then we cannot allow the U.S. to surpass our available infrastructure.

Infrastructure is not only important for the environment, not only important for job creation, not only important for the economy, but it is also important for our competitiveness. There is no doubt, and industry, labour and governments at all levels will tell you, that in fact improving one's infrastructure is improving one's competitiveness.

Recent studies by the FCM indicate that such a program if initiated today with the low cost of borrowing and with the tremendous amount of people on unemployment insurance and welfare that would be put to work, and in fact start paying taxes, that the effect on the deficit would be minimal.

It is important I think that we draw on this national consensus from all governments, labour, industry and this House and be able to move forward on a national capital works program in this country now.