

Alaska Highway

● (1650)

I want to compliment the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) on the bill that he has put forward for debate today. It is one that I know he sincerely believes in and on which he has obviously spent a good deal of time, not only in this debate but on previous occasions, putting forth the ideas and suggestions in this bill.

While I certainly support the thrust of his arguments and the objectives of his bill, I cannot support the manner and method in which he is trying to improve the highway in his part of the country. If my hon. friend would stop to think for a moment of the difficulties that we, as a nation, are continuing to have in repatriating our own constitution, he would realize that there are jurisdictional difficulties in trying to set up the kind of authority he is proposing here, involving provincial, territorial, and federal rights, as well as United States interests and so on. He could spend years trying to get the authority itself operational; in the meantime he would lose a lot of time and energy from the point of view of building and developing the highway. As I say, while I agree with the bill's objectives, I disagree with the route and manner he has adopted.

There are certainly precedents so far as federal participation in the construction of highways is concerned. While highways are a provincial responsibility under our constitution, they are going the route of many other services that have been primarily a provincial responsibility up to the last number of years. We can all think of examples. Social services, hospitalization, education, while under provincial jurisdiction, have received federal support and co-operation. In this respect highways are rapidly joining that particular club.

At the Western Economic Opportunities Conference of only three years ago, highways and other transportation needs were very much a priority item of the four western provinces so far as federal help and participation were concerned. I am sure the hon. member is well aware of the Northlands agreements which have been signed with the four western provinces, the most recent one signed through the Department of Regional Economic Expansion being the one signed in Victoria on February 9, earlier this month. The hon. member will have had the opportunity to see the press release that was issued and to appreciate that funds are going almost directly into his part of the province. I know he will be the first to say they are insufficient, and I agree with him, but at least this is a step in the right direction.

As a result of that agreement federal funds will be provided to continue improvements to highway 97 between Prince George and Dawson Creek, to highway 37 between Stewart and Watson Lake, and further assistance is being provided to other highways in the area. Expenditures on highway 16 between Terrace and Prince Rupert are also being made. So once again we are giving recognition to the need for highways in that province.

May I point out one other very important highway project involving his part of Canada as well as mine. One of the criticisms that I get when I go home is that we are continually funding programs in northern Canada. My part of the country is not as far north as his, I realize, but nevertheless we require funds for development in mid-

[Mr. McIsaac.]

northern areas, as the hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo) said. I think the hon. member was a member of the transportation committee that met a delegation from Edmonton, Winnipeg and other places—

Mr. Paproski: The great Yellowhead route.

Mr. McIsaac: Yes, that is right; the hon. whip is aware of that. That is a route that has already received federal support, and this is one more example of the federal government's support for the kind of project that is being put forward by the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River.

As I say, Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the thrust of his arguments in seeking my support for highways and communications in general in that great part of Canada, but the route and method that he is proposing in his bill are not ones that I can support.

Mr. Watson: Madam Speaker, may I ask the hon. member who has just spoken whether he would permit a question?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Would the parliamentary secretary allow a question?

Mr. McIsaac: Yes.

Mr. Watson: Would the parliamentary secretary undertake to ask his officials to study the economics, both of the propositions put forward in the bill we are discussing today as well as the possible trade-off of efforts in both east and west which would, as I have argued before in this House, provide highways for residents in Alaska, Yukon, B.C. and Alberta, as well as a highway that would be of enormous benefit to eastern Canada, despite what my hon. friend from New Brunswick has said?

[Translation]

Mr. Corbin: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): The hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) on a point of order.

Mr. Corbin: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson) has just put a question to the parliamentary secretary. Having already spent several years here, he should know the Canadian government has already made a feasibility study of the construction of a high-speed highway through Maine, and rejected it.

[English]

Mr. McIsaac: Madam Speaker, if I may just reply to the question of my hon. friend from Laprairie, some work has been done by the Department of Public Works and the Department of Transport on the projects mentioned by him. I am sure further work will be done in light of this debate and in light of any further bills and propositions put forward by the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson).

Mrs. Simma Holt (Vancouver-Kingsway): Madam Speaker, I shall only make a brief intervention. I want to remind hon. members—and I never like them to forget—that there is always a woman's angle as well as an age angle to issues of this sort. I can think back to when this