

*Bridge Construction*

Mr. Walter F. Foy (Lambton West): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this motion because I believe it deserves the attention of all members of the house. First of all, I should like to say that even though this motion was introduced by the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. McCutcheon), who is a member of the opposition and represents in this house the Walpole Island Indian Reserve, I am both honoured and pleased to second it.

Before giving my reasons for saying that this motion should be passed I should like to give a brief description of this island reserve. I have distributed to hon. members pictures of some of the ice floes which are such a great problem to the people on the reserve.

Walpole Island is about ten miles in length and about six miles at its widest point. The reserve is located at the junction of the St. Clair River and the Snye, about 30 miles to the south of Lake Huron. The band comprises about 1,500 members and their reserve is entirely surrounded by water. The proposed bridge would span the Snye River for a distance of 300 feet at the suggested point from the island to the mainland. Incidentally, the Snye River is the only channel for freighters carrying cargo to the city of Wallaceburg.

The only means of transportation to the island reservation is by ferry. The ferry that crosses the Snye is operated by motor-driven cables from the mainland. Even during the months when navigation is open, accidents are numerous. The cables foul freighters and many pleasure craft. But when the cold months of winter set in and navigation is closed, the hazards are unbelievable. The industries north of Walpole Island continually pour waste, accompanied by extremely hot water, into the St. Clair River. This, plus the mild climate during the winter months and the fast current, prevents a complete freeze-up of the river.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the ferry operates during this treacherous period when it can. It must break a path through the thin ice and very often must fight large masses of ice which float down the St. Clair River into the Snye. The mode of transportation under these conditions reminds me of what I have read about the Daniel Boone days but certainly not of the year 1966.

On this island there are approximately 8,000 acres of the finest corn-growing land in this country. This land is leased to white farmers who employ the Indian people on the island and this provides income for the band

members. The acreage could at least be tripled if there was modern access from the mainland to the island. Here, then, is one reason that this bridge should be constructed.

● (6:40 p.m.)

In summer Walpole Island is a resort area and about 1,000 people live there for the season. This is another source of income for the Walpole Island Indian band, but this increase in population multiplies the problems of commuting back and forth from the mainland to these resorts. There are only 25 permanent jobs on the island. The remainder of the labour force, men and women, must commute to the mainland to work and earn their living. A further source of income to the Indians is the many hunters who require guides and other services during the duck hunting season. These are a few of the many reasons why this bridge is a necessity for better economic, social and living conditions, to say nothing of safety which is certainly of major consideration.

However, the most distressing factor, from my point of view is the education of the Indian children. Each hon. member knows the stress that every level of government puts on education today for all children, not just for Indian children. We as members say we must educate our Indian children and youth so they will be able to help themselves, so they can learn trades and professions and be independent. We say our ultimate aim is that the Indians be self-supporting, that they live in dignity with a standard of living equal to that enjoyed by all other Canadians. But what about the Indian children on Walpole Island? There are 182 pupils who commute by bus and the ferry to the city of Wallaceburg to attend high school. There are 193 children in the lower grade school on the island.

The ice floes are a menace during the winter months; yet those children attending high school must venture on an antiquated cable-drawn ferry through this ice floating along in the strong current. When the ice floes reach a density and volume which prevent the ferry from operating there is no other way for the students to cross the Snye. Therefore they are unable to attend their classes. For the same reason teachers from the mainland are unable to reach the island and their classrooms in the lower grade school. As a result 375 pupils are compelled to miss school through no fault of their own. They have the added problem of trying to