

While no solution is final we must always strive to do the best we possibly can based on what is available to us. The evolution of the transportation system between Prince Edward Island and the rest of Canada has been matched by the evolution of transportation across Canada and around the world.

While those hardy souls who braved the Northumberland Strait in the ice-boats would be amazed at the technology and the convenience of today's car ferries, we must remember that transportation elsewhere in the world has advanced to the same degree.

• (1050)

In the high-tech, competitive age in which we live we must be guaranteed convenient and easy access to the marketplace of the world or we will never ever be able to escape the economic doldrums in which we find ourselves. The process of resurrecting the idea of this fixed crossing has been brought here today.

At the risk of going over some very well-tilled ground I would like to share for a moment with this House some of the very detailed discussions and debate that have taken place over the past seven years and which have brought us to where we are today.

The Government of Prince Edward Island, following the federal Department of Public Works' decision to seek proposals for a fixed crossing, called a plebiscite in 1988. The campaign leading up to that plebiscite precipitated what can only be described as a passionate debate in Prince Edward Island which still rages in some quarters today. The vote was approximately 60 per cent to 40 per cent in favour. If there was a vote taken today the result would be in the vicinity of 70 per cent in favour.

After that plebiscite the original 12 proposals were pared down to seven and following more study, down to three. I am sure I need not remind members that a federal environmental review panel in 1990 rejected the so-called generic bridge proposal, stating that the risks were unacceptable. The environmental review panel had heard many social arguments as well as technical and scientific arguments concerning the link. Then an ice committee was formed by the federal government in 1991 to look specifically at the problem of ice and its retention in the strait by the bridge. That panel concluded that a bridge could be installed across the strait with no significant delay in ice-out time.

Government Orders

Following this report the federal minister asked for three proposals to go forward and through a rather lengthy process we have arrived at the situation we are at today. Strait Crossing Inc. of Calgary, Alberta has been designated as the firm that will build the crossing, but the debate still goes on in Prince Edward Island between the pro-link and anti-link forces. The economic, scientific and social aspects of the link are hotly debated. The claims and counterclaims sometimes become exaggerated. On occasion the debate can fall from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The issue of the fixed link was taken before the Federal Court and some comments were made in the judgment about the environmental review process. This round of meetings, as one of the demands of the judge was that a process be followed, was held as was specified and many people turned out. The province of Prince Edward Island has put forward an amendment to the Constitution in that legislature.

I personally feel the time has come to brush aside the rhetoric, the claims and the counterclaims and get on with the job. We must look at the whole project, not in terms of our own self-interest and petty and rather mundane fears but in light of the cold, hard facts that have been presented to us.

There have been over 90 studies done on this project over the years, and millions of dollars spent on them. I am personally committed to preserving the environment. We have said this all through the process. We believe that the studies have concluded that Premier Ghiz's 10 commandments, as they were called, have been met.

Of course there are other issues that have arisen, such as the ferry workers. Negotiations have to take place to see that these people are looked after, whether through transfers, early retirement or new job training. I believe that these things have been met and that we can go on and build this project. I believe that is the next logical step in the process of our transportation systems across this country.

I am very amused with the rhetoric concerning this project that has poured forth from my colleagues on the NDP benches. The citizens of Prince Edward Island and the rest of Atlantic Canada are not very happy with the criticism that has been levelled at our region by these instant experts who drop into our region from time to time, meet with a few people and their Atlantic supporters and then fly away again and make profound pronouncements from afar about our way of life, our