

*Government Orders*

It will allow for a fixed crossing joining the island to the mainland. For greater certainty, as I quote from the motion before the House, nothing prevents the imposition of tolls for the use of such a fixed crossing between the island and the mainland, or the private operation of such a crossing.

The debate today is of great interest to me for several reasons, one of which is that I have a great affinity for the island, an affinity that goes back to several visits I have made to the island, several by ferry and several by air. The people of Prince Edward Island are very kind and generous who care an awful lot not only about their own island but about Confederation and about this country.

All members of this House recognize that not all islanders are in favour of the fixed link. There are many people who have earned their living off the water as fishers, people in the Northumberland Strait, and also islanders who enjoy their way of life on the farm, a good, quiet rural way of life. They are quite satisfied with the ferry service.

I was very pleased today to be in the Chamber when the member for Davenport spoke eloquently about the alternatives that the government has chosen to ignore. One alternative in particular calls for an updated ferry service that would allow for the prevention of some of the environmental problems that the fixed link proposes.

• (1755)

That is partly the other reason why I am pleased to speak today. The whole issue of environmental assessment is one that I have spent a great deal of time working on in the previous Parliament and something that is of great concern to me.

The member for Davenport spoke about the need to take into account what environmental assessment means when considering the future of major projects that will be discussed and taken care of in our country.

We have many major projects under way in this country that have not been subjected to environmental assessments and others that when they have been assessed under strict environmental guidelines have been found to be substantially inadequate.

The point that I will come to very shortly in my remarks concerns the failure of the previous government and now apparently this government in dealing with this process of instituting an environmental assessment process that will ensure that we have an adequate response to the needs of the environment on projects such as the Northumberland Strait bridge.

I hesitate to mention the name of the previous Prime Minister in this place. Bill C-110, the act respecting the Northumberland crossing, an act debated in this House in June of last year and

passed by this Chamber, was really one of the very last acts of the previous government before it adjourned for the summer recess that eventually ended up in a federal election and the election of a new government.

The record of the previous government on the environment left a tremendous amount to be desired. I am quite surprised that the new government would pick up exactly where the old government left off, especially on a project in which the one single federal environmental assessment review of a general nature on this project called for the shutdown of this particular project, the bridge. I will come to more of that in just a second.

I want to acknowledge that I believe something has to be done with regard to the access to Prince Edward Island, to improve the access to and from the island for products, for tourists and for residents.

When Bill C-110 was in the House, an act respecting the Northumberland crossing that gave the go ahead to proceed with the construction prior to this constitutional change, the debate in the House was characterized by Mr. Jim Fulton, then the member from Skeena, who had quite a number of things to say.

I would like to reiterate for the benefit of the House some of the things that Mr. Fulton had to say. Mr. Fulton was a long time environment critic for the New Democratic Party. As such, Mr. Fulton served our party and our nation very well. This speech on Bill C-110 at the time was almost Mr. Fulton's last intervention in this House prior to his retirement. One could tell from the way he approached this issue how important it was to him and how important he thought the environmental assessment process was to this country.

As I had previously stated and argued very strongly at the time, the bridge was never assessed by a public panel. All of the studies that the government has talked about, the 90 or 91 studies, were done in a sense by vested interests in the Northumberland Strait and in the bridge construction. The environmental assessment review process that I have supported very strongly in the development of a new Canadian environmental assessment act would require independently financed environmental assessment for projects such as this.

• (1800)

Mr. Fulton referred to the bridge never having been assessed by a public panel. As I indicated a few minutes ago, when the environmental assessment review office took a look at a general concept of it the generic bridge concept was turned down.

The Federal Court ordered that there be no irrevocable decisions by government until the provisions of the environmental assessment review process had been met. Members will recall that prior thereto EARP had also been avoided in the Kemano project. The Federal Court also found that in the Kemano II project the government had acted both illegally and