

Government Orders

will of course be adjustments for inflation, but there would be in any case.

• (1040)

As of 1997 we are looking at an annual increase of roughly \$14 million which the federal government will have to continue awarding to Prince Edward Island and, given the expected benefits, I do not think it is an exaggerated amount.

We applaud this private sector initiative involving the construction and the operation of the bridge. A word of caution is in order, however. I think that all parliamentarians should demand that the government be extremely attentive and monitor construction activities closely.

I realize that construction will be carried out by a private firm, but it is essential that the government monitor the work closely. What happens if the project goes over budget? This is the point that raises the most concerns. Costs might start to get out of hand. After all, we are talking about a major undertaking, the construction of a 13 kilometre long bridge across a strait in which a great deal of ice forms during the winter. There will be a substantial amount of pressure on the bridge footings. What happens if there are cost overruns?

The documents that we have in our possession do not show what the government's responsibility would be if such an event were to occur. Legally, I believe the government's responsibility is limited to guaranteeing annual payments. However, what would happen if during construction, the private sector companies fell on hard times, financially speaking?

We all know what happened with the Channel. Of course the two projects are vastly different in terms of sheer scope, but the fact remains that constructing a 13-kilometre long bridge capable of withstanding extremely harsh weather conditions is a sizeable undertaking. Has the government considered what it will do if the project goes over budget? It should shed some light on this point and tell us what steps it intends to take to ensure that there are no cost overruns.

Regarding the environment, I am not as familiar with this aspect of the issue as the minister, who clearly has up to date information. Opposition members do not have access to files as readily as ministers. However, when I was Environment Minister, I had sought assurances that a very stringent environmental study would be done. I believe that such a study was carried out and that the minister is correct in saying that the most extensive precautions have been taken.

The government should, however, exercise caution during the actual construction phase because certain operations will affect the environment. The minister has said that he will be taking certain measures, but exactly which ones, that remains to be

seen. Perhaps it would be good to know what measures are being planned.

Consideration must also be given to what will happen after construction is completed and the bridge is in operation. We know that fisheries, particularly the lobster fishery, will be affected and that some form of compensation is planned. I think that during the coming debate, the government should tell us a little more about its plans to provide compensation.

[English]

I will say it in English for our friends in P.E.I. We think this is an equitable measure of progress which should promote the economic development of this province of Canada. That is why we will support it.

[Translation]

I would also like to draw the government's attention to a problem with the drafting of the constitutional amendment before the House. The problem seems to be one of agreement between the French and the English versions.

This could, in my opinion, cause some major legal problems since as we know, following the 1982 amendments, pursuant to section 56, I believe, of the current Constitution, both the English and French versions are equally authoritative.

The same cannot be said for the Constitution of 1982. Despite the commitments made in 1982, we are still awaiting the official, authoritative French version of the Canadian Constitution. In passing, I have one small question. How is it that a country like Canada, which claims to be bilingual, still does not have an official French version of the Constitution? We will get back to that some other day.

The fact remains, however, that this amendment which will be adopted today will be equally authoritative in both languages since the new constitutional system is in place. Looking at the resolution, we see that the English version reads as follows:

• (1045)

[English]

"That a fixed crossing joining the island to the mainland may be substituted for the steam service referred to in this schedule". May be substituted. In the French version we read:

Qu'un ouvrage de franchissement reliant l'île et le continent remplace le service de bateaux. . .

[Translation]

While in English you have something that may or may not happen—the government has the power, the option of replacing the old steam service by a fixed crossing—in French, the government has to do it. There are very significant nuances. I am somewhat surprised that the government's legal services failed