

Northern Affairs

war as a partial defence for Alaska. Admittedly, it is somewhat unfortunate that more time was not available, as some sections are poorly located.

I hope to take a little time explaining the history of the road. I also hope to show how this bill may have application to it. At the end of the war the road was turned over to Canada, and the army took it over in the first period. It cost us about \$12 million a year to maintain, and our army was in control. Later, the Department of Public Works inherited the highway and has been successful in reducing the annual cost of maintenance to about \$6 million. This expenditure appears to have maintained the road at an operational level but has not allowed for any real improvements to be made to the highway.

There have been a number of consultations with the United States government, at arms length, with a view to the United States government paying half the costs of maintenance and paving. Some years ago the United States government sponsored a report which, I believe, was subsequently submitted by the Bettel Institute. Their findings indicated that the cost of improving and paving the highway could be profitable from the standpoint of a tourist attraction, alone.

I do not know what are the actual figures produced by the report. I do recall, however, that the government of Canada was impressed and encouraged by the findings. However, the government of Canada undertook a feasibility report on the highway. While emphasis was naturally pointed toward engineering, economics were also considered. The report appeared to substantiate that one third of the highway needed relocation, one third needed rebuilding, and one third was ready to pave.

The discouraging fact was that in order to complete an acceptable highway, it would cost \$210 million. I understand that considerable time and effort was devoted to a study of the return to Canadians in terms of usage. It is conceded that during the war, and for a period following the war, a tremendous number of trucks used the highway, carrying goods north from Seattle. The loads consisted of housing materials, portable housing for Alaska, and other items used in expediting United States army units there. However, information brought to our government during the past few years indicates that commercial traffic has considerably decreased, and in fact is lessening each year. This is largely due to heavily improved water transportation on

[Mr. Pringle.]

the west coast out of Seattle, and our own transport over the Canadian National Railways to Prince Rupert, and on to Alaska. This is taking a great deal of Alaskan business. Considering only the volume of traffic on the road, it is less important to Canada now than it has been.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Tourist travel, however, is still high and is growing. It is my opinion that it will continue to expand annually. There is little doubt that because of the dust factor, most tourists are unhappy about the highway as now constructed. It is also an uncomfortable highway on which to travel. Today's tourists with modern cars find distance less of a problem than in previous years, but they still require safe highways free from dust. In other words, tourists want comfort as well as safety on the highways.

It is my understanding that our government agreed recently, as a result of discussions with the United States government, that any further costs in connection with capital expenditures, required to improve the highway, should be shared by the United States on a 50-50 basis. I also understand that discussions along these lines are continuing.

It must be appreciated that at present the Alaska highway route is the only land corridor available to join two parts of the United States together. In fact, the discussions which have been held emphasize that for all practical purposes the Americans could find that the highway is of greater significance to the United States than it is to Canada. This is a matter of concern and continuing discussion between Canada's parliamentary group and the United States Senate group which meet annually. Canada has decided in the interim to maintain the highway and also to carry out some improvement.

There are approximately 82 bridges on the highway. Some 23 or 24 of them have already been replaced on a more or less permanent basis. Replacement requirements will probably accelerate, because the rest of the bridges are rotting and will not carry the weight of traffic. It is estimated that all of the 82 bridges will be replaced within the next three years. About \$2 million was spent in 1968.

I understand it is intended to pave another 10 miles at the end of mile 83 which will bring the pavement in that area to a total of about 93 miles out of Dawson Creek. This is rather important to our American friends, and shows evidence of good faith. We are also