

hallmark of all these endeavours was the determination to bring Canadians one step closer together.

This undertaking demonstrates that Canada has the ability to develop an imaginative approach to government industry co-operation in carrying out a major public initiative: partnership at its best.

I should like to think that the Prince Edward Island bridge project, in addition to its other merits, could serve as a global model for future joint projects of this type. Closer public and private sector collaboration is a major contemporary avenue through which we can stimulate investment and create badly needed jobs.

During the election campaign we heard from every political leader talking about a partnership between industry and government. There is no other better example than the fixed link between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick which demonstrates that point more accurately.

The Northumberland bridge is a very sound and a very important project. The present premier of Prince Edward Island, the Hon. Catherine Callbeck, said:

A tremendous economic boost—that will provide a stable, economic climate for business to survive in this province.

Jim Larkin of the Prince Edward Island Tourism Association remarked that it is “probably the key to the future of this province”. The premier of New Brunswick, the Hon. Frank McKenna, said:

I am absolutely confident that history will favourably judge the fixed crossing to Prince Edward Island—it's time to seize the moment and opt for progress in Atlantic Canada.

Clearly the vast majority of the people of Prince Edward Island sees this bridge as an important initiative which will give the people of the province renewed opportunity to participate in the country's economy, renewed opportunity to enhance their own lives and the lives of their families. The bridge is creating a renewed sense of optimism for Prince Edward Island and for the Atlantic region. A strong Atlantic economy is a vital part of a strong Canadian economy.

● (1035)

Atlantic Canadians know within their hearts and minds that the bridge is only one part of the solution, but as Sir Winston Churchill once said: “The chain of destiny can only be grasped one link at a time”.

In conclusion I urge members of Parliament from all political parties and those who are independents to support the amendment before us today. I urge members of the House to create the opportunity for Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island, and the rest of Atlantic Canada to become economically stronger. I urge members of the House to give a new generation of Canadians who happen to reside in Prince Edward Island an

opportunity to become full partners in the Canadian economy and an opportunity for a better future.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have here a situation that has its roots in the distant past. When Prince Edward Island entered Confederation in 1873, the island had set certain conditions which were agreed to by the federal government and the other members of Confederation at the time, conditions which concerned mainly establishing and maintaining a communications link between the Island and the continent, so that Prince Edward Island could in some way be part of the Canadian community.

At the time, this link was provided by a steam service, which is how it was described in the terms of the union. Over the years, the federal government has met the commitments made in the Constitution, which today represent a subsidy of \$28 million. That is, the original commitment today works out to \$28 million in constant dollars.

My point is that we are not starting from scratch. The province is not asking the federal government to build a bridge starting from zero funds. The government of P.E.I., from a normal desire to adjust to changing times, now asks that the link, formerly provided by a steam service and subsequently by more modern ships, be made more effective and more continuous by building a bridge.

My point is, and this may surprise my hon. friend the minister, who was furiously defending the government's position against the opposition he anticipated from the Bloc Québécois, my point is that the Bloc Québécois takes a very positive view of this project, and it is too bad the minister wasted precious ministerial time and energy which would have been better spent on other issues, since after due consideration, the Bloc Québécois, feels the economics are sound, the financial structures make sense and there is an element of fairness added to the Canadian federation as it exists today.

If we look at the economics, it is clear a bridge will increase economic activity on the Island, that tourism will increase, and by the way, I did not wait for the minister's cordial invitation to visit Prince Edward Island. I already visited the island as a minister at the time, and as a tourist last year. It is a magnificent island, and I know tourism will improve considerably once there is a bridge that provides for easy access at all times. We agree that on the economic side, there is a considerable advantage for the government and the people of Prince Edward Island.

The financial structure is something which the government should monitor very closely. It is true that the financing scheme is quite ingenious. There is no undue burden on the federal government since the subsidy, which it has to pay at any rate and will keep on paying, and which is now \$28 million, will upon completion, in 1997, be \$41.9 million in constant dollars. There