

Private Members' Business

carriers with a single supplier could go directly from Montreal to Iqaluit, where I went, and I explained a bit earlier the living conditions that exist there. So, we would avoid all the go-betweens, those who make a profit along the way.

• (1820)

These people are simply proposing that big carriers be used to bring everything to Iqaluit and, from there, the food would be distributed by small planes to villages of this huge territory.

That proposal has the merit of reducing by about 10 to 20 per cent the cost of a shopping basket, as I explained. This is not insignificant. And there is also a series of other measures that would not only make this project viable, but also contribute to the Inuit really taking control of their lives in the Great North. This project would create 55 direct and indirect jobs in the Great North, particularly in Iqaluit, which is not insignificant, because in a context where 35 to 40 per cent of our people are without jobs, 55 jobs would be very welcomed in the Great North.

There is also the whole issue of the federal government that is already paying a lot. Canada Post—we are talking about the famous local transportation—is paying \$20 million a year for food distribution, while the study that we have here suggests that we may be able to do the equivalent for \$9.8 million. So, not only the cost of food products may decrease, but shorter transit times would allow for fresher products, while in the present system, when the food gets there—and I saw it myself—it is anything but fresh and barely acceptable. I think that we would not accept that in our shopping centres.

I do not want to talk too much about investment, but the federal government might be asked to invest in this area. However, considering we could save between seven and eight million dollars annually on the way food products are distributed, it seems to me that the initial funding requested is negligible.

Before I forget, I would like to say that Tikisaivik is 60 per cent Inuit-owned. Most of the shareholders are Inuit. Madam Speaker, I certainly do not want to be seen as playing favourites, but I took this company as an example because it had the best and most effective studies. Five students at the master's degree level did a market survey, and I have it here today.

I will try to be brief, because I see that my time is running out. The objective is lower food prices. I think that is essential. In fact, it is the focus of my speech today. It is important for the well-being of the Inuit in the North, whether they are in Quebec, on Baffin Island or even closer to the Arctic, to have a food distribution system that would not be a drain on the family budget. Reducing the price of food will enhance the quality of life of the Inuit in the North, and that is the most important factor.

Another point is improving food quality. Earlier, I talked about freshness. It will be possible to eat fresh vegetables at their peak and to improve the way they are handled, as opposed to what I saw in the shopping centres up there.

Job creation. This is also a very important factor, as I said before. Fifty-five Inuit jobs could be created.

Variety in the type of foods and creating a local economy. I think this is where the government could make a contribution so that the Inuit can escape the cycle of dependency in which they have been kept for too long. This plan for a modern economy will ensure that people can work in the food distribution sector in the North. In fact, this should be done by local people instead of companies from outside that do not know the local situation and operate on the premise that they have to give their shareholders a decent profit.

Local people have a stake in the quality of life of the Inuit, and I think that is important.

• (1825)

I will conclude with a few words in Inuktitut—I hope I pronounce them properly—"nakurmiik toma", which means we look to the future with confidence, and I hope that if the government takes a good look at how food distribution in the North can be made more economical, I think we can look forward to the future and ensure that the Inuit will have the quality of life they should have had many years ago.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in tonight's debate. First of all, I would like to say, however, that I am not an expert in this area. I have often travelled to northern regions of our country to do some canoeing which I enjoy. I have often noted the regular prices of goods in the North. I congratulate the hon. member for Saint-Jean for his interest in this question and for moving this motion in the House.

[English]

However I would like to stress that a reliable and affordable food distribution system is critical to the health and well-being of tens of thousands of Canadians living in northern isolated communities. This issue is one that must concern us as a national legislature in Canada.

Here in the south the issue of food distribution is not as significant for one or either of governments or residents. Nutritious food is broadly available at supermarkets or corner stores throughout the areas in southern Canada. Distribution of food