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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

Infrastructure

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this private member's motion today.

Communities across the country are looking for a clear, defined infrastructure plan from their federal government. Currently, there are many mixed messages coming from the government on infrastructure funding, and even more uncertainty as to when municipalities will actually see this funding. This motion from the member for Halifax does nothing but cast further uncertainty on the future of infrastructure in Canada.

Let me start by first addressing the beginning portion of this motion.

I would like to first say that we are all concerned with greenhouse gases. We are all looking forward to the plan from the minister on climate change. One of the things the former government did was implement, in 2009, the green infrastructure fund. We are all on the same page.

However, we have to drill down just a little further. As part of the phase one of the Liberal infrastructure spending, the Minister of Infrastructure's top priorities for the next three years were road repair, rehabilitation, and maintenance. With this motion, phase one of this plan will not be able to proceed. Placing mandatory GHG emission screens on municipalities will do nothing to speed up the infrastructure funding approvals nor the construction. That is something the Liberal government claims is a top priority for them, and it is certainly a top priority for many of us.

Instead, the motion will place an extra burden on small and rural communities across Canada. These communities will now have to find additional funds to go through this process. Furthermore, many Canadian municipalities already have their own environmental screens in place. The FCM released a report early in 2016. Over 90% of the surveyed Canadian

municipalities either already had or were developing policies and plans to mitigate climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The additional screening required by this motion will now mean that municipalities will have to spend more taxpayers' money on something they are already doing, before their projects are even approved. This does not take into consideration the administration costs that would potentially be burdened upon communities.

However, what is even more troubling about this specific motion is the second portion. This states that projects that mitigate climate change will be chosen over other infrastructure projects. This is contrary to the Liberals' own policy. It directly contradicts the Minister of Infrastructure's own priorities, as I stated, of road repairs, maintenance, and rehabilitation, which is the priority over the next three years.

This would mean that Canadian cities would not, and could not, build new roads, bridges, or upgrade any highways, roads like those spoken about earlier by a member, to get to isolated communities, like the east side road to connect those people in rural communities. These projects are vital to the Canadian economy, but they would not meet the definition of mitigating climate change.

Furthermore, I would be curious to find out how this motion fits in with the larger context of the Liberals' pan-Canadian national climate change framework, which we hope to see the details of. We do not know if this motion is a piece of that plan or not a piece of that plan.

This private member's motion is really counter to what is being put forward by the Minister of Infrastructure. Also, in supporting the vital trade corridors between provinces and, in fact, between Canada and the United States, we are talking about bridges. This motion jeopardizes those road repairs, buildings, and it will certainly impact, as I stated earlier, small and rural communities and their access to their share of infrastructure funding.

There is no doubt in anybody's mind that we need to be protecting our environment, and that is critical for this generation and for future generations. However, we also have to have the responsibility to ensure that we have a strong economy, we are creating jobs, and we are building those trade corridors. We also need to ensure that we have fiscal prudence, responsibility in spending, and really well-thought-out public policy.

With the massive amount of debt that is projected to be added to Canada's debt load, I feel that passing this motion would just add to that.

We need a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is no doubt about that. We are patiently awaiting the pan-Canadian national climate change plan from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I do believe that this would be within that context in some form, but again, I am not sure if it is isolated or part of it. That was unclear.

As it stands right now, I will not be supporting the bill.