

The Address

I would like to describe to the House the make-up of Dauphin—Swan River. It is as unique as the country itself. Dauphin—Swan River is located in west central Manitoba, the second largest settled area riding. It is a land of lakes, mountains and prairies. It is multilingual and multicultural. The people speak English, French, Ukrainian and Saulteaux. Culturally it is predominantly English, Ukrainian, French and aboriginal. The people of Dauphin—Swan River celebrate this diversity with enthusiasm throughout the year. We are all proud of our ethnic heritage but we are prouder to be Canadian's first.

[Translation]

On a more personal note, I am a third generation Canadian. My Chinese grandfather came to Canada to help build the railway in the late 1800s. My wife Lynda, nee Burelle, is ninth generation. Her roots go back to 1660, to the arrival in Quebec of Étienne Burelle and Marie Tellier from the parish of Saint-Séverin in Paris. They settled near Varennes, in Quebec. The Quebec Burelles moved west to Manitoba only in the 1900s. We both still have relatives in Quebec.

I am sure that many Canadians are in the same position. Quebec is as important to us as any other province in which we have family members.

[English]

The people of Dauphin—Swan River sent me to the House to make sure their concerns are heard. They are not happy about the lack of jobs, the rising cost of post-secondary education, the dismantling of the health care system, the price of grain as announced recently by the Canadian Wheat Board, the cost of transporting farm products to market, the political manipulation of the grain transportation system over the last 40 years, an ineffective Young Offenders Act, and the lack of justice in that criminals appear to have more rights than law-abiding citizens.

• (1640)

In Dauphin—Swan River the issue of gun control implemented by the former justice minister is unacceptable to the people. This bill has been very divisive for Canada. It has put Canadians in two camps, those living in large urban centres and those living in rural settings. The gun control of the government will no doubt make criminals out of millions of otherwise law-abiding Canadians across the land.

As the deputy critic for national unity my role is to ensure that the grassroots at the municipal level are listened to and that they have a pivotal role to play in the future of Canada. I believe that we have failed over the last 40 years in the unity debate because we have used the wrong process.

Canada's vision was seen through the eyes of the Right Hon. Pierre Trudeau in the 1970s. In the 1980s the vision was through

the eyes of the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney. In the 1990s there has been a struggle between the old school and the new school. The old school wants to stick with a closed door, top down approach to solving Canada's challenges and problems on unity and on most other issues as well. The new school wants to throw open the windows and let in the fresh air, open the doors and let the people bring their ideas to the table and have a real part in making the decisions. Sadly the old school is so far barely letting the windows and doors crack open.

[Translation]

I believe that the next millennium belongs to the people of Canada, without a doubt. During the last forty years, the politicians have failed miserably with their top-down approach to unifying the country. Now is it the citizens' turn to address the issues of the day.

In my opinion, Canadians are interested in their day to day needs—jobs, health care, housing—and not in constitutional disputes between parties and governments. My constituents have indicated to me that we must start by solving problems, and must treat all citizens of this marvellous country on an equal footing.

[English]

In past weeks I wrote to the provincial premiers suggesting the process of consultation be open and transcend political loyalties and partisan politics. I also asked the premiers to encourage the municipal leaders to participate in holding town hall style meetings in each community open to the residents. The community meetings would be assisted by facilitators, information provided by provincial governments, input from experts and include the participation of local MLAs and MPPs. In short it would put the town back in the unity town halls.

In closing, the key to this process is open discussion. Only then would the people of Canada have an opportunity to discuss and debate the issues on the future of their country. The House belongs to the people as so does the future of the country.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be making my maiden speech before the House today. I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to make my debut appearance earlier last week during question period. I am a little overwhelmed at the idea of participating so directly in one of Canada's most important institution.

The transition from the old Strathcona coffee guru to parliamentarian is no small adjustment. I only hope that I am part of a parliament that will begin to reshape Canada and that I may in some modest capacity be a part on that process.

Before I become too involved in my speech I would like to congratulate you on your election to the Speaker's Chair. I am confident that you will uphold the integrity and the proud tradition of this position.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my constituents of Edmonton—Strathcona. It is a great honour to be entrusted with the responsibility of representing a constituency that includes the prestigious University of Alberta, an academic institution poised to become one of the finest in the world.

• (1645)

I am proud also to represent the area of Old Strathcona, a wonderfully unique Bohemian community of small business, artists and students. I represent a large number of senior citizens and am proud that now I may serve these people who have spent a lifetime building this great nation.

I want to thank all my constituents for having the courage to place their trust in a man of only 25 years of age who belongs to a party only 10 years old. I will take my election mandate to mean that it is a change that the people of Strathcona desire and I will work tirelessly to ensure that change occurs in this House.

I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional love and support. It has not been easy for them to take the sole responsibility of running our family owned business in my absence. While their eldest son is engrossed in the adventure of his life, they are carrying the burden of running the daily operations of our family owned coffee shop.

I think my parents were a little skeptical when I first threw my hat into the political arena, but despite their skepticism they supported and encouraged me over many long months of campaigning and are truly the unsung heroes of my political success. I would like to thank my parents also for teaching me the values I now bring to political life.

My family arrived in Canada in 1972. They were penniless refugees who fled Uganda and the brutal regime of Idi Amin. They came to Canada to rebuild their lives. They came to escape tyranny and embrace Liberty. They came to find a haven from racial prejudice in a country renowned for its tolerance and equality. With a belief in hard work and with a commitment to meritocracy, they began to rebuild their lives.

Like all children do, I learned from their words and their deeds. I saw that with hard work comes success. That was the opportunity Canada offered.

I saw that my parents were allowed to pursue business opportunities and were allowed to keep the fruits of their labour. There was no dictator who could confiscate our property because he did not like the colour of our skin. That was the freedom Canada offered.

I saw that my parents, even though they were small business owners, were treated with the same respect as other Canadians. That was the equality Canada offered.

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Opportunity, freedom and equality. These are the values I have come to cherish and these are the values I bring to this House. Canada is the best place in the world to live. We do not need the United Nations to tell us that, but we risk being complacent if we continue to pat ourselves on the back.

Canada does have problems. Canadian families and small business suffer under a heavy tax burden. Young people, normally full of hope, fear the future holds nothing but disappointment, chronic unemployment and debt.

Canadians every day face the uncertainty of whether or not their country will remain united. This uncertainty weighs heavy on all Canadians and is the cause of so many political problems. It is this issue that I would like to address today.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I have a message I would like to send through you to the very proud people of Quebec. Quebecers are justifiably proud of their history and culture. It is my belief that this culture will continue so long as there are people—sovereignists or federalists—wanting to keep it flowering.

I fear, however, that Quebecers will once again in the near future be asked to decide whether they wish to remain in Canada. Separatist leaders will ask them if they want to retain their cultural identity or be swallowed up by an all encompassing federal government. Given this choice, I too would vote sovereignist.

These, however, are not the only choices available to Quebecers. There is a third choice, that of a renewed Canadian federation. This choice will change totally and utterly the relationship between the federal and provincial governments. It will give the provinces the latitude they need to develop the cultural and economic institutions that best reflect their particular values.

[English]

The third choice is embodied in the political movement calling for renewed federalism. While it is a movement that began in the west with the Reform Party it is fueled by frustration shared by people all across this country.

• (1650)

Our first ministers are among those who share this frustration. They have given us the framework from which to begin a nationwide discussion on Canada's constitutional future. This should be an exciting time for the people of Quebec and all across Canada who are looking for fundamental changes to our federation. We should all look with hope at the possibilities that lie within the Calgary declaration. Our premiers have learned a lesson from both Meech Lake and Charlottetown and are going to the people of Canada to hear what they have to say about their country.

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I would ask that the people of Quebec insist that their voices be joined with the millions of other Canadians who will soon be discussing Canada's constitutional future.

[*Translation*]

I would also ask Quebecers, who are so proud of their culture, to look at this way of remaining within a renewed Canada, which will respect the cultural and economic diversity of its provincial partners.

Although the idea of a renewed federalism holds out promise and a future for Quebec, there are those who will oppose it because they do not believe that Quebec can or should be an equal partner in the Canadian federation. Some believe that, without inequalities enshrined in the Constitution, Quebec will never be an important component of Canada.

[*English*]

There are people who told me that I would never make it in the Reform Party, a party without official racial preferences for its candidates. There are people who told me that a young minority would never make it on his own in a political world dominated by the old boys club, and yet I stand here today, the proud representative of Edmonton—Strathcona.

I think that what my personal experience helps to illustrate is that in a truly free country merit is the only requirement for success. Equality is no threat to individuals of merit. Equality is no threat to the rich and unique culture of Quebec.

I hope the province of Quebec will demand to be an equal and vital member of the Canadian confederacy and will reject the false promises of separation.

It is said that Canada finds strength in diversity. If this is true, a renewed federalist system may bring this country together as a strong unified country as never before seen, a nation ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate the new member from the Reform Party on his maiden speech in this House.

I understand where the hon. member is coming from. He is a member of a federalist party, the Reform Party, and the Calgary meeting took place in his province. Fine, but the history of Quebec's plans for sovereignty goes back much further.

First, as we mentioned, the proposed Constitution was never signed by any Quebec government, whether federalist or sovereignist.

Robert Bourassa, a Liberal, was not a sovereignist but a federalist, yet he never agreed to sign the Constitution. Claude Ryan never

agreed to sign it either. More recently, a former Liberal provincial minister, Claude Ryan, recognized Quebec's special rights.

I represent a riding that once had a former Prime Minister as a member of Parliament. I am referring to Brian Mulroney, who was the member for Charlevoix and Prime Minister of Canada. He too made an attempt with the Meech Lake accord, the Charlottetown accord and other formulas. In the referendum on the Charlottetown accord, English Canada voted no because they felt it gave too much to Quebec, while Quebec voted no because we felt it was not enough.

I believe, as the hon. member will find out, that therein lies the constitutional problem and that, no matter what you offer, it will be too little, too late. Quebec sends \$28 billion to Ottawa and is not getting its money's worth in return. Quebec wants to manage its own services, eliminate overlap and duplication, take control of its destiny and become a country by the year 2000.

● (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, I too share the frustration of the hon. member who just commented. That is the whole point of what has been happening in this federation to date.

The premiers of the various provinces have said it is time to consult the rest of Canada in order to have real change in the federation. We have seen that frustration in every region of this country.

With the premiers making the effort to make the change, now is the time for us to come together and build for the future. We have come a long way as a united country. I hope there is still a long way to go. The only way we can do it is to come together as one people of one nation, through equality in order to make the changes required for the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by telling the member for Edmonton—Strathcona how much I, and I am sure, my colleagues appreciate his speaking French in this House and speaking it very well.

I would like to ask him whether the citizens of Edmonton—Strathcona, whom he represents, feel that Quebecers are a people and whether they feel that this people has the freedom to determine its future and to have its own country.

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, one of the things the people of Edmonton—Strathcona sent me here to try to accomplish is to recognize the view that, regardless of where people come from, regardless of their background, whether they are Quebecois or an Ismaili Muslim like myself, we are all equal. The way to build a strong country is not to recognize that each individual group makes

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a people, but to recognize that through our diversity we are equal. That will give us the base on which to build a strong country.

It does not matter what the people of Edmonton—Strathcona think in the sense of their recognizing any specific group as a people. They put equality first and that is what they have sent me here to do on their behalf. That is what they believe will build this country and lead us into the 21st century.

Mr. Carmen Provenzano (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Erie—Lincoln.

It is with great pleasure that I take part in the debate on the Speech from the Throne, a speech which confidently outlines our government's ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility and social fairness.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my congratulations to you on your appointment as acting speaker. I would also like to thank the residents of Sault Ste. Marie for giving me the honour of representing them in the House of Commons.

It is with a great deal of humility that I stand here as their member of Parliament. I sincerely hope that through hard work, honest conduct and devotion to constituency matters that I can repay Saultites for the confidence they have shown in me.

I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the previous member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie, Ron Irwin, who is now a special advisor to the prime minister. I have known Ron Irwin for a long time. He is a fair and honest man who, as an MP, served Sault Ste. Marie extremely well and as minister of Indian affairs also served Canadians extremely well.

Ron left some mighty big shoes for me to fill, workboots in fact. I thank him for his counsel, past and present, as I try to grow into those boots.

Returning to the matter at hand, I would like to focus my remarks on a few key issues raised in the throne speech, namely youth unemployment, the importance of exports to the Canadian economy and the need for a forward thinking approach to national unity.

• (1700)

Youth unemployment has become a serious problem in Canada and particularly in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Too many well educated young people are having a tough time finding that all-important first job. Still others are finding post-secondary education to be prohibitively expensive. It is for these reasons that the government is taking decisive action to help young people.

The Speech from the Throne reaffirms and in many cases expands the government's commitment to improved job creation, training and education for young people. The strengthening of federal internship programs will provide participants with real job experience, the lack of which too often prevents young people from finding meaningful work.

The establishment of the Millennium Scholarship Endowment Fund will help thousands of young Canadians access the education necessary to succeed in the knowledge-based society of the 21st century. I was especially pleased to hear that the millennium fund will be directed primarily at low and modest income students. This is welcome news indeed to a predominantly working class city like Sault Ste. Marie.

I have always believed that by investing in the future of our young people we invest in the future of Canada. Simply put, the Speech from the Throne is an example of this belief in action. Of course we will be in a position to do more in terms of social spending as our commitment to sound fiscal management yields larger and larger dividends. One particular area of interest to me is the creation of greater opportunities for physically and mentally challenged Canadians through wage subsidies and job creation initiatives.

The federal government now operates a \$30 million a year opportunities fund to this end, but it is my sincere hope that in the years to come more attention and more money will be directed at this often overlooked group of Canadians.

There are aspects of the speech that provide hope for unemployed Saultites. The emphasis on exports as a source of one in three Canadian jobs bodes well for residents in my riding. Sault Ste. Marie is a vibrant border city with a significant export economy. Sault Ste. Marie is a leading exporter of steel, wood and paper products. The city's exporting capabilities are second to none thanks in large part to its proximity to the United States and its strategic location along the St. Mary's River.

Tourism is another precious commodity in Sault Ste. Marie. Thousands of visitors come every year to enjoy the natural beauty of northern Ontario. They come to fish, hunt, ski and snowmobile. In Sault Ste. Marie they ride the Algoma Central Railway to the Agawa Canyon, tour the Sault locks and visit the magnificent displays at the Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre.

It is for those reasons that Saultites should be pleased with the throne speech's recognition of tourism and exports as key economic generators. This recognition is not simply based on rhetoric. The government was quick to condemn a new American entry law which would seriously inconvenience Canadians crossing into the United States. The government will continue to fight this insulting legislation and it is my belief that it will soon win Canadians a well deserved exemption.