

*The Address*

therefore has associated with it all the problems of a growing rural area located close to a thriving metropolis, Vancouver.

Employment in this area is spread among the primary industries of dairy farming, lumber and fishing as well as manufacturing, construction and the wholesale and retail trade required to serve the population.

At this time I would like to just take a few moments to address this House on two government initiatives that, depending on how they are implemented, may or may not be beneficial for my constituents. I understand the government is proceeding with its shared cost, two year, multimillion dollar infrastructure program to upgrade transportation and local services. I trust the moneys to be used for this plan are not new moneys but are already designated as government expenditures and we are dealing here with a simple reallocation of funds and priorities.

I also want to say that such a program would be of great benefit to my riding. Improved transportation and communication links are of vital importance to the industries of Mission—Coquitlam and to our residents, many of whom commute daily to Vancouver in a frustrating two hour, one way trip.

I am concerned that the outcome of the recent GATT discussions may have a detrimental effect on our nation's farming community and in Fraser Valley dairy farming in particular. The recently signed GATT agreement calls for the removal of border restrictions in article XI. This will, we hope, be replaced by a set of import tariffs which will be removed on a graduated scale until eventually completely phased out in approximately 15 years. I trust the government realizes that these tariffs and the long phase out period will be necessary to ease the transition of our supply managed farmers.

This being my first address to this House I would like to take a few moments to reflect upon why I believe so many of us from the Reform Party of Canada were elected on October 25, 1993.

During the past 10 to 15 years a feeling has developed among Canadians that government, the party in power, the opposition parties and the bureaucracy is not serving the needs of the people who are to be served and whose tax dollars pay for this government. The separation between government and the people grew in the last few years because the views of Canadians seem to be ignored by government or, alternatively, there was no means by which Canadians could see that their views were being expressed, especially in this House. This led, I believe, to an unprecedented feeling of frustration in Canadians.

I believe the electorate chose on October 25 a higher standard in political accountability and by their votes requested a role in the policy making process. The people of Canada want their views to be considered and they want to see how their views and interests are reconciled when policy is formed.

I believe the people of Canada are willing to give their trust once again to those of us who are willing to take up this challenge. They want to see politicians who are willing to exercise the courage necessary to state their views publicly, even though they may be contrary to party line. At the same time the public wants to see courage exercised by our leaders so that dissent may be publicly expressed without fear of retribution.

I am privileged to have been chosen as the chairperson of our caucus committee on parliamentary reform. In the short time I have been here I have had the opportunity to study this subject at some length.

● (1310)

I have come to the conclusion that the first fundamental change we must make in this place does not involve rule changes but lies in an attitudinal change that must be made by the party leadership of this House both on the government and opposition sides.

This change in attitude relates to allowing private members, back bench MPs, to exercise some measure of independence from the party line when voting on measures in this House.

Freer voting among members requires only attitudinal change. However such a change in attitude would send a signal to the people of Canada that we as politicians are listening and are reflecting their views in our decision making.

I want to make it clear at this point that I am speaking about freer voting which means a relaxation of the established informal rule that private members vote the party line on all legislative matters.

This is to be distinguished from free votes when the party leadership actually tells members that on a particular piece of legislation they are free to vote either for or against it.

The declaration of free votes by the leadership of this House does not solve the problem of exercising independence by the members. It is my understanding that in our Canadian political system the leadership of political parties have taken the confidence convention to extremes. It has been linked to a view whereby virtually all votes both in committee and in the House of Commons are matters of confidence so that any member who votes against the wishes of the leadership, whether that member is in government or opposition, is being disloyal and is subject to reprimand.

A simple review of the voting practices in Great Britain illustrates that this does not have to be the case. In recent times backbench independence has been asserted with members voting against the party line. In some cases this defeats government legislation. Once this independence was exercised it could not be stopped and has successfully resulted in allowing members to influence the public policy agenda. It is important to note that punishment by the party leadership did not materialize. A participatory attitude prevailed.