

The Address—Mr. Bevilacqua

Also kindly permit me to thank those people who have been very close to me throughout my life, my wife, Ellena, my son Jean-Paul, my parents, my sister, my brothers and my in-laws. Without their help, I would not have been able to sit in this House.

If would like to say a few words about the riding of York North. I guess it can be best described as a dynamic socially and economically diverse area just north of Metropolitan Toronto. It is Canada's most populated riding consisting of four large townships, Aurora, Richmond Hill, Vaughn and King with an estimated population of approximately 180,000. It is a very interesting community of urban and rural regions creating a unique environment.

As I mentioned earlier my journey to Ottawa was not an easy one, but I must say that I was very pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the Government will appoint a commission of inquiry to make recommendations for needed changes and reforms to the electoral laws. I endorse their initiative. However, I must make very clear that that endorsement is conditional on the reform and that changes to the legislation be effective before the next general election. I hope that the commission does not become merely another way to further delay the progress in this very important and fundamental area of legislation.

Last April 3 when I finally got to the House of Commons, I realized that many years ago when I chose the Liberal Party of Canada as my political home, I made the right choice because it was the Liberal Party of Canada that allowed the son of an immigrant worker to seek public office, the Party that chose inclusion over exclusion. I have always believed that participation in political life in our nation is a passion and a vocation, and that the true politician is one who exercises that passion by fighting for causes that reflect the progressive vision of Canada of moving this country ahead without leaving anyone behind. I chose the Liberal Party as my political home because my faith in this philosophy, our belief in liberalism, gives us the strength to confront the powerful, to challenge the status quo, to question and seek the truth. Our faith in our Party has given us the strength to fight against anything and anyone that attempts to prevent the fulfilment of our dreams as citizens of this country.

Our Party has traditionally been the Party of reconciliation reaching out to unfairly treated minorities, to the dissatisfied regions, to disadvantaged groups of all kind and responding to their needs without alienating other segments of Canadian society.

In this Parliament today we meet at a crossroads, not at a point of arrival, but a point of departure. Where do we go from here? We must act on an agenda that challenges this generation as previous problems challenged our forefathers.

I see that agenda in the face of the single mother, who, with her children, has to stand in front of the local food bank for their daily meal. I see it in the apprehension of the 45 year-old factory worker who understands the personal threat imposed by this Government's insensitive free trade deal. I see it in the inequity of this Government's budget which has unfairly burdened our middle class while rewarding the chosen few. I see it in a failure to crack down on our drug problem which is ruining many young lives. I see it in the hurt the people feel when they are denied rightful opportunities because of discrimination based on sex, race, religion or ethnic origin and the frustration that they feel knowing that their children will be unfairly carrying the baggage of this ugly reality.

I see it in the human sufferings in South Africa, in Ethiopia, in the Middle East which cry out for a politics of caring and humanity. I see it in a country as rich as ours where there are still people without shelter, food or proper medical care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bevilacqua: I see it in the sad eyes of the child sitting on the steps alone waiting for her parents to come home because our country fails to see the light when it comes to a national day care program.

While the Speech from the Throne used forceful language when talking about spending cuts, it was deliberately vague in reference to programs that might involve new money. If we are to plan for the future of Canada, we better start with the growing need for quality child care. The Government should recognize this and begin to plan for the future.

My concerns are obvious. We must decide what type of society we want to live in. Do we want a market-driven, profit comes first, people-last society or a compassionate, caring society that rewards people's efforts yet has the ability to help the weak and the disadvantaged.