

Mr. Sid Fraleigh (Lambton-Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the Throne Speech debate of the Thirty-third Parliament of Canada. I would first like to congratulate Mr. Speaker Bosley on his appointment to the Chair, and you as well, Sir, on your appointment.

I would also like to congratulate my colleagues, the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. James), who happens to be my neighbour, and the Hon. Member for Montreal-Mercier (Mrs. Jacques), for an excellent job in moving and seconding the Address to the Throne Speech.

Lambton-Middlesex has the dubious distinction of being the largest geographic riding in southern Ontario. It stretches from the edge of the City of Sarnia to the edge of the City of London and encompasses most of the counties of Lambton and Middlesex. It encompasses 6,500 square miles in total. As an added distinction, Lambton-Middlesex has three beautiful waterways which form the boundaries on three sides of the riding. Lake Huron is on one side, the St. Clair River is on the other, and the beautiful Thames on the third. This completes this unique aspect of our constituency.

As you may well have guessed from its geographic size, the agricultural industry dominates Lambton-Middlesex, and this industry is widely diversified. The Thedford Marsh located in the northwest corner of Lambton produces large volumes of vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, celery, beets, head lettuce and onions. Sweeping south from the Marsh is a large gravel ridge which supports orchards producing apples, cherries, peaches, pears and apricots as well as a multitude of tender fruits. On the opposite side of the riding there is another sandy gravel area running from the village of Mount Brydges to the village of Komoka which also produces tree fruits and tobacco.

Lambton-Middlesex is the largest soya bean producing area in the country, with corn running a close second. With the abundance of feed corn available, livestock is perhaps the most important aspect of our economy. The riding is home to a heavy concentration of beef feed lots and pork farms, with a significant number of dairy and poultry farms. Two of the larger turkey operations in the country are located in my riding, with Cuddy Farms, located in the Strathroy area, being the largest integrated operation in Canada and perhaps in North America.

This large and diverse agricultural sector is serviced by a multitude of small towns and villages which supply the infrastructure for the agricultural community. The town of Strathroy, with a population of 9,100, is the largest urban centre that I have in my riding.

As in most parts of southern Ontario, the native people were our first settlers. They were followed in the 1800s by a mixture of English, Irish and Scottish, who were followed by Slovaks in the 1930s, the Dutch in the 1950s and the Portuguese, who are the latest addition to the mosaic which makes up our riding.

In referring once again to the agricultural industry, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not point out what I perceive to be an impending crisis in that industry. On a

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personal note, I feel fortunate that I entered the agricultural field prior to the onset of the era of inflation and high interest rates. However, the young farmers of today are facing a financial crisis, and my concern is for them. I believe this crisis was caused by a variety of circumstances; mainly rapidly escalating production costs, falling commodity prices, and, most important of all, high interest rates. This, coupled with questionable financial advice from some government agencies and financial institutions, has placed agriculture in a position where this country stands to lose a whole generation of young farmers owing to bankruptcy.

I do not profess to have any simple answers to a very complex problem. However, we as Members should be extremely concerned about what has become not only a severe financial problem, but what could turn into a severe social problem.

At the meeting of Agriculture Ministers last week, this problem had high priority, and I urge Members to support this initiative with constructive input. I would also urge the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) to seek input from the private sector as well as from individual Members so that we can attack the problem with all the expertise available.

I would now like to move to another significant part of the economy of the riding of Lambton-Middlesex. Because of our proximity to the cities of London and Sarnia, a growing part of the population lives in small towns, villages and built-up areas along the beautiful waterways and commute to work. In the area closer to London these people are composed of professionals and tradespeople who work in a wide variety of industries. However, on the other side of the riding, the commuters work almost exclusively in the chemical valley in the Sarnia area. It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 people in Lambton county derive their living, either directly or indirectly, from the health of the valley.

It is for this reason that I fully support the pleas of the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton that we as the Government act quickly to remove the obstacles which now obstruct the petrochemical industry from becoming internationally competitive again.

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I will not attempt to duplicate the description of the valley given by the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton except to say that those industries are now extending into the riding of Lambton-Middlesex. CIL has the most modern nitrogen fertilizer plant in North America and it is located in Sombra Township in the riding of Lambton-Middlesex.

The provisions of the National Energy Program have crippled this industry. The refusal of the previous Government to address these problems has caused an industry with a proven track record for creating jobs to come to a standstill. The recommendations of the task force that was set up by the former Government would be a sound business proposition for Canada. In all probability, that is the reason why it did not act on those recommendations. Hopefully, we will not be that shortsighted.