

*Government Orders*

Six have come from my part of the territory where aboriginal people are a majority, in the Northwest Territories. The selection came from Churchill with an aboriginal population of 42 per cent.

It is astounding to think only 11 out of 11,000 people have been aboriginal. This is the home of the first peoples along with all other Canadians.

It is an esteemed privilege as a member of Parliament to be able to speak on behalf of the people who put us here, to come forward with a conglomeration of their views, with their convictions, their passion, their vision, their beliefs about this country.

Only 13 people of aboriginal descent have been able to do that since Confederation. One of those people was Louis Riel and that is a whole other story. We will not get into that. It is quite an interesting set of circumstances to think about.

My reason for standing is to address Bill C-69 and encourage more aboriginal people, more women and more youth to get actively involved in the electoral process.

Aboriginal people make up to 16 of the 24 seats in the Northwest Territory legislature. Unfortunately the representation of people in the House of Commons is not nearly anywhere as representative. There are only three members, ironically. They are all in the Liberal Party.

That does not stop the other parties from including aboriginal people. Look at the membership of the opposition. It has huge aboriginal populations in the north of its province. In James Bay there are some of the most outstanding aboriginal leaders in the name of Billy Diamond, Matthew Coon-Come, Ted Moses and Chief Violet Pachanos.

A lot of aboriginal people in that area could stand with any other member of Parliament from that province and be proud. In other areas, northern B.C., we have predominant members from the Liberal Party as well as from the Reform Party. We have many New Democrats. We could easily elect in those areas, in the upper places where we have the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en and where we could have aboriginal people represent not just themselves and their people but non-aboriginal people.

There cannot be a false assumption that because one is of this race or this background one cannot represent fairly other people from other races as well. The doors are open. The opportunities are there.

I encourage the participation of youth, women, people from ethnic minorities, the disabled. There is in this House of democracy, in this community of communities, in this home for true democratic practices and vision a home and a seat for everyone who wants to put their name forward who is capable of being able to come here and speak on behalf of the people who elect them.

Women who make up 52 per cent of the population are not representative in either the territorial legislature or the House of Commons. In the Northwest Territories there are only three female members of the legislature, one of whom is the premier. What a premier, what an outstanding member of the government we have in the name of the premier of the Northwest Territories.

• (1545)

We in the Northwest Territories are proud of the premier when she goes around the world, when she goes to parliament or wherever she represents us. There is no gender barrier to the competence of an individual who thinks well, who speaks well, who presents her views and who has a passion to represent people.

There are only 53 women members of Parliament or 18 per cent of the MPs in Ottawa. The way to ensure greater representation of women and aboriginal people is to become involved in the process. I urge all aboriginal people, in particular the people of the four new communities that will be added to the western riding, to get involved in the political process to ensure that there are good people who will bring the issues that concern them to Ottawa or to Yellowknife, whatever level of government they want representation at.

The youth are an integral part of any political process. Youth have the energy and the enthusiasm to bring victory to any individual seeking office including one of their own. We can look at the list of young people elected to the House of Commons over the years. I believe Father Sean O'Sullivan was elected when he was 21 years of age. My baby is 21 years old, the youngest child in my family. It is wonderful someone like that could be elected to the House of Commons.

Richard Cashin was elected when he was 21 years old; the hon. member for Sherbrooke when he was 24 years old; Lorne Nystrom when he was 22 years old; the Hon. Perrin Beatty when he was 22 years old; the hon. member for York North when he was 28 years old; and the Prime Minister when he was 29 years old. They were all young people. They are people who have contributed. They have given the best years of their lives to this honourable process. It is quite possible. Young people out there who are listening should know that this can belong to them, that a seat in the House of Commons can be theirs.

We are here but for a short time. It can be for years or it can be for a lifetime but we are not here forever. Young people, women, disabled people, visible minorities and other capable and competent people have to be encouraged to get involved and participate. The north with its young population has an abundance of vital energy. I encourage Canadian youth to organize and participate in the electoral process to ensure that their concerns are heard.