

Government Orders

looks like disarmament but in fact is the laying down of all arms in this world for the next generation.

• (1745)

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca): Madam Speaker, as this is the first opportunity I have had to address this House I would like to congratulate the Speaker for his election to Speaker of this House as well as those designated as deputy and acting speakers. I am sure your jobs will be challenging and rewarding and I pledge my full co-operation with the House rules and proceedings.

My congratulations also to all members on their election or re-election to this Parliament. I look forward to meeting and debating with them on the important issues concerning Canada in a civil and productive manner.

Also I would like to thank the constituents of my riding of Athabasca for entrusting me with this most important job during this most important and changing time in Canadian political history. I truly feel honoured by the great responsibility with which they have entrusted me and they can be assured that I do not take this responsibility lightly. I will do my best to represent their needs and Canada's needs in this new Parliament.

I would like to send a special thank you to my wife, Evelyn, who has provided so much support and encouragement to me in meeting and accepting the challenges in this new role as member of Parliament.

I became involved in politics and became a member of Parliament because of a great concern I have for the future of our country, the greatest country in the world to live in. Also I have a great concern for this country because of the apparent out of control public spending and spiralling debt at a time of declining of natural resources and high unemployment.

Although this is my maiden speech, I wish to focus on the proposed cruise missile testing by the U.S. Although the Primrose Lake air weapons range, which will be the final destination for these exercises, is not in my riding, the flight corridor over which these missiles fly is in fact in my riding. Therefore these tests are of concern to my constituents and anything that could affect my constituents affects me as their representative in this House.

I would like to commend the government for allowing this debate on such an important topic. I hope that this government will have the same open forum in the future when this government reviews its defence policy as promised.

Before I speak to this issue let me tell a bit about my riding. The riding of Athabasca is in the northeastern part of Alberta and is approximately 196,000 square kilometres which makes it one of the largest ridings in Canada. To put this in perspective, if

one combines the area of the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island then the area of the riding of Athabasca would still be larger. These provinces have 25 representatives between them in this House compared to one for Athabasca. You can imagine the enormity of my task in representing the constituents of Athabasca, however, I am ready and eager to accept all the challenges that await me.

The principal industries of Athabasca are agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas and tourism. More specifically, the diversity of my riding includes ALPAC, the largest bleach kraft pulp mill in the world. It will soon include a paper mill. Also, some of the most productive conventional oil and gas fields in Canada are located through Slave Lake and High Prairie in the northern areas of my riding. The Fort McMurray tar sands projects are in the northeast corner of my riding. These companies add enormously to the economic viability of the country.

For example, the companies that work the tar sands make a huge contribution to both the federal and provincial governments. These companies employ thousands of people, all of whom pay taxes to support this government's programs. Syncrude, which is only one of the consortiums working the tar sands projects, employs 10,500 people directly or indirectly from which \$1.5 billion has been paid out in corporate and personal income taxes. These tar sands deposits are very significant to the energy needs of Canada. In fact, it is estimated that there are enough oil reserves in my riding to provide self-sufficiency for Canada's oil needs, given the current consumption of 1.5 million barrels per day, for centuries to come.

For example, the four known oil sands deposits are located in Alberta, two of which are in my riding. The total estimated bitumen contained in these four deposits is 1.7 trillion barrels. Of that, 307 billion barrels of bitumen recoverable with today's technology from the tar sands alone could supply Canada's energy needs for 475 years.

• (1750)

My riding of Athabasca also has a large aboriginal population with 12 bands, about 50 reserves and a number of Métis settlements. This large population has led to my interest in native self-government and it is why I sit on my party's aboriginal committee.

My riding also contains some of the most productive agricultural areas in Canada. The Westlock-Athabasca area has well known producers and exporters of high quality grain, oilseeds, pork and beef. I have been involved for many years in beef ranching and am proud to say that this is one of the least subsidized sectors in agriculture. It should be a model of free enterprise and free market operation for other areas of agriculture.