

*Government Orders*

four as was recommended, annexing the four parcels to existing ridings, would simply mean that in most cases those ridings would double in size and 16,000 people would be added per riding.

In other ridings, namely the urban ridings, a member of Parliament can attend a function at either end of the riding in the same day, in many cases within the hour and in some cases within minutes. That is not to say that urban members of Parliament have it easy. We in northern Ontario recognize those ridings have a much larger population and those members therefore spend more time with constituents. A member of Parliament should be accessible to his or her constituents no matter what.

In large rural ridings many people feel isolated and that is why there is a need for the member of Parliament to meet with his or her constituents. Those people also have to be heard and counted, and they need to feel they are a part of this country, that not everything is being decided by the urban ridings. Handicapped people and the elderly, given the long distances which they have to travel in rural ridings, practically have no chance of meeting their member of Parliament unless he or she visits them. To further increase in size rural ridings would mean disaster for many Canadians living in those ridings, especially in isolated areas.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read to you a summary of an extremely interesting conversation I had with a public servant: "An electoral district is much more than a geographic division for electoral purposes. An electoral district represents an economic, social and cultural group of several thousand people. An electoral district is as much a tool for grouping common interests as it is a means of expressing the identity, lifestyle and shared values of its inhabitants. From this perspective, the electoral district should be given the same status as a town, a province or a country. Any substantial change in the boundaries of the electoral district could cause major economic and social changes in that area. The boundaries of existing electoral districts must be revised equitably and changes must not upset their economic and social equilibrium".

I have two concrete examples to illustrate my point. Let us consider first of all the selection of candidates. If my riding were split in four and annexed to the four neighbouring ridings, without fail, the chances of the party nominating a person from a rural region as a candidate would be about nil, if he or she were competing against a potential candidate from an urban region or larger town with many supporters and able to sell membership cards, etc. People from rural regions, in the true sense of the word, would have very little hope of ever being elected to the House of Commons.

• (1235)

The second example I want to mention concerns rural regions and their economic relationship with Canada. We are rich in natural resources. The viability and vitality of our economy depends on those natural resources, and the rest of Canada should appreciate our contribution.

I could also draw a comparison with New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Obviously, we cannot rewrite the Constitution Act, 1867 and the agreements concluded at the time, under which New Brunswick was guaranteed ten ridings and Prince Edward Island four ridings. However, together these two provinces have more or less the same area and population as northern Ontario.

At the present time we have eleven electoral districts, while New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have fourteen. This is an example of inequity. As I said before, it would be very difficult to change this without amending the Constitution Act, 1982. My point is that we should at least recognize the fact that, compared with other regions in this country, northern Ontario is under-represented and cannot not afford to lose another seat in Parliament.

[English]

Canada is a huge geographic misunderstanding. This misunderstanding will not be resolved for many years to come. The fact that rural Canadians represent a minimal part of the population of Canada is not a good enough reason them not to be justly and adequately represented in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the previous speaker from Cochrane—Superior for his remarks, not because I necessarily agree with them all but because they were on the topic of the bill which has been sadly lacking in this debate.

This is a debate about Bill C-69, an act to provide for the establishment of electoral boundaries commissions and the readjustment of electoral boundaries, specifically to scrap the process under way last year to redraw our boundaries based on the 1991 census and establish a whole new process.

We are now winding up a parliamentary debate on this that started over a year ago which in our view has yielded only minimal improvements to the electoral boundaries process.

The motion that had initiated this bill had asked the procedure and House affairs committee to examine methods of capping and reducing the size of the House of Commons, to improve the process by which boundaries commissions are selected, to consider how the boundaries commissions conduct their work and to consider the involvement of the public. In three of these areas there were some minor improvements. However, the bill fails to address the already excessive and growing numbers of