

Government Orders

In closing, capping the number of MPs in the House of Commons and achieving the concept of representation by population through the adjustment of the number of citizens each MP would represent and establishing electoral boundaries accordingly is the solution I favour.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I have a few thoughts to add to this motion to refer the matter of redistribution to a committee of this House and on the amendment of the member for Kootenay East to look at capping the number of members of the House of Commons. I have seven short points to make on that, the perfect number for those in the House who would like to have something to count.

First, we need to look at the cost considerations of increasing numbers of members in the House of Commons. The Canadian public is becoming increasingly critical of the cost of its government, the inefficiencies it perceives in the allocation of moneys that go to support government; the budgets, the support systems, the salary costs, the pension costs. All of the liabilities that we incur as a country because of increased representation should be a factor because they concern the taxpaying public.

Second, and this has been mentioned, the physical limitations of the House of Commons are a consideration for us and another reason to support the amendment that has been brought forward to this motion.

We have now a very full complement of seats in this House. Many members, especially those members considerably larger than I, have complained about the cramped space for the work of debates and participation in the House. It is very clear that adding more bodies and more physical demands on the space in the House is going to be very difficult to accommodate.

Third, particularly in the system we have had to date there is a very limited role for many of our members of Parliament, particularly backbench members of the government. The decisions generally are made and taken by cabinet and those who advise cabinet. The purpose of the backbenchers in the House seems to be to support those decisions. Simply having more people standing up and voting for decisions that are taken by a small group does not seem to be a very needed addition to the way our system works at this time.

• (1140)

Fourth, it is fair to say that most Canadians would not see an increase in the number of members of Parliament as being equal to better representation for them. I believe from talking to Canadians and from comments that many of us have heard across the country that most Canadians would argue that they are not as well represented today as they were 10 years ago, even though the number of seats has increased. It is not the number, the quantity of representation, it is the quality of representation that is important to Canadians. It is clear that it is the quality of

representation that Canadians want to see addressed, not the quantity.

Fifth, these points have been made and I think bear repeating. Canada is over represented as a population compared with other democracies. For example, in the United States members of Congress number about a hundred more than in Canada with 10 times the population. They have only about 30 per cent more representation with 10 times the population.

It is very clear that other democracies manage to give quality representation with far fewer representatives per component of the population. We need to look at that as well.

Sixth, it should be emphasized that Canadians want fewer politicians. We do hear this over and over and this is not disputed. All members of the House when we discussed these issues agreed that the feedback they get from their constituents and from other people in Canada is that they do not want to see more politicians, they do not want to see more representatives, they do not want to see more MPs. They want to see the ones who are here be more effective, they want the system to be changed so that decisions are more representative of the judgment of Canadians. There is no cry for increased numbers of representatives.

We should not forget who we are supposed to serve. Our decisions should be taken in a way that meets with the approval, that carries the judgment of the people who are paying the bill, the people who are asking for the service that we provide. It is very clear that Canadians do want fewer representatives rather than more.

Seventh, when we talk about capping the number of MPs, how do we address the problem of regional representation? In my view it would be unwise to make regional representation too strong a feature in how we structure the way our representatives are chosen and the proportions from particular provinces or areas. It is clear that we do have some anomalies like Prince Edward Island, which has been mentioned, which perhaps need special consideration.

In our view the principle of representation by population should be adhered to as closely as possible in the way we structure the choosing of our members of Parliament. Regional representation and the need for that element in our political system, in our law making bodies, should be addressed through changes to the Senate rather than through changes to the House of Commons to ensure that certain proportions are made and do not change for different regions or provinces.

We have put forward as the Reform Party specific proposals for the reform of the other place in order to achieve those objectives.

The bottom line today when we consider whether to support the amendments that have been proposed is whether we are responsive as members of Parliament to the clear wishes of our constituents and the citizens of this country, to the economic