

here in arguing against rural Canada. We need a system that works.

On that note, I would just say that this is not an issue of limiting debate. We want to give Canadians adequate time to consider new rules. The less time we take here the more time Canadians will have.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak today on this bill to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and to voice my support for the proposed legislation because, in my view, we are not prepared to make the changes that have been recommended by the electoral boundaries commissions.

Several years ago, following a recommendation from a provincial electoral boundaries commission to eliminate a riding in the eastern part of the province of Quebec, we launched a study to determine the criteria by which a riding is defined. Our study took into account not only the population of the riding, but a number of other factors such as the overall size of the riding, the number of municipalities and regional municipalities and so forth.

It is important that we endorse this bill today and that we reject the amendment moved by the Reform Party so that we can come to a clearer understanding of what the electoral map of the future should look like.

Let me describe to you, for example, the situation in eastern Quebec. At present there are five ridings in eastern Quebec: the riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine which is represented by a Liberal MP, Mr. Patrick Gagnon; the riding of Gaspé which is represented by Bloc MP Mr. Yvan Bernier; the riding of Matapédia—Matane held by Mr. René Canuel, the riding of Rimouski—Témiscouata held by Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay and lastly, my riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. Under the proposed electoral boundaries reform, one of these ridings is slated to disappear.

Some notable differences can be found as far as the four proposed ridings are concerned. For example, according to the new electoral map, in the riding of Gaspé, more than 330 kilometres would separate the towns of Amqui and Gaspé. Or should I say a distance of 330 kilometres in the summer, and 1,000 kilometres in the winter?

Moreover, each of the existing five ridings has developed its own unique culture. These cultures have been in place for many years. They did not emerge suddenly when the ridings were created. They existed long before then. There is a certain

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homogenous quality to the social fabric of each riding, based on its socioeconomic calling, its distinctive geographical features and its history. The proposed redrawing of the electoral map, a process based solely on making a demographic calculation and on dividing the number of people by the number of ridings, in no way satisfies the development requirements of a region like ours.

In my opinion, other factors must be taken into consideration or else we will remain locked in a vicious circle where each time a region's population declines, the number of elected representatives will be reduced. A region represented by fewer MPs has less influence in government. Therefore, our regions will continue their downward spiral. An electoral map drawn solely on the basis of population would be a virtual insult to rural areas.

Therefore, it is important that we take the time to review the situation and find other criteria for determining electoral boundaries. All I can say is that we would prefer the status quo to a new electoral map which would wipe out a riding in eastern Quebec. If a riding was eliminated, future elected representatives would find themselves with ridings that are far too large. They would have to deal with new municipalities.

For example, in my riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup which would take in the regional municipality of Témiscouata, there would be over 60 municipalities grouped together in four different regional municipalities: Basques, 11 municipalities; Rivière-du-Loup, 16 municipalities; Kamouraska, 18 municipalities; Témiscouata, 20 municipalities. Elected representatives might need longer parliamentary breaks just to travel to the various parts of their ridings.

• (1635)

For instance, the population of the riding would increase from 73,747 to more than 88,000 over a really vast area. But the disappearance of a riding like that one also has a negative economic impact because it would require additional financial resources. With the economic difficulties we are now facing, there is no guarantee that the four new ridings replacing the five old ones would get more money to pursue their economic development, which would in the end compromise representation for each municipality.

If more money were made available, we would have to determine if the increase is significant and adequately meets the demands of the municipalities. This reform of the electoral map would have all kinds of administrative repercussions. For example, in the areas covered by Canada Employment Centres, various such elements do not seem relevant to us at a time when the population is feeling insecure regarding the effects of reforms, as it does in Eastern Quebec with respect to unemployment insurance. The increase in the number of weeks of work required to qualify for benefits is already something the region