

*Government Orders*

There has been no public consultation about the proposed boundary changes. Politicians should not arbitrarily decide to quash the changes before the public is consulted. Since there has been no public concern about the work of the commission, the only reason for dismissing the boundary changes at this point are very partisan and very political.

It is the role of Parliament to ensure that this process is conducted as fairly as possible. It is not our role to choose where or where not the lines are to be drawn. Therefore I support our amendments, first to shorten the suspension period of the current readjustment act from 24 months to 12 months; second, not to cease the work of the current commissioners but to leave them in place so that \$5 million worth of taxpayers' money will not be wasted should the procedure and House affairs committee not come up with a responsible act to replace the current act.

[Translation]

**Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs)):** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you as well as all hon. members in this House that, as we are debating this bill, the government wants to respect the non-partisan nature of the electoral boundaries readjustment process. We want it to remain that way and at no time have we made any proposal with a view to changing the non-partisan nature of this process.

I listened carefully to the member from the Reform Party who just spoke. He said that we were right to review the readjustment process, mentioning the fact that, at the present time, with each readjustment, the number of seats automatically increases according to a predetermined formula. He said that, under the present circumstances, it would be desirable for us to consider whether or not this number should keep on increasing, which of course leads to further government expenditures.

• (1025)

On the other hand, he also said that we want to limit the debate and that we want to proceed with great haste. Of course, we want to proceed with haste to stop the ongoing process for the simple reason that it costs a lot of money. It is true that a certain amount of work has already been done, but should the process be allowed to go on, even more money will be spent. This is why we tried to come to an agreement with the opposition parties to carry on the review of the process as quickly as possible. I was also surprised to hear the member mention that the government wanted to take advantage of its majority,

[English]

the heavy-handed way of the government to try to push this legislation through.

However, there is a contradiction here in that the member says that we want to push this through in a heavy-handed fashion. The member then turns around and argues that if the government were to be heavy-handed in saying that we would limit the number of members in this House at the present level, he would agree with that. I see a contradiction there. It is definitely not the intention of the government to be heavy-handed in that fashion.

We do not want to limit the debate. We want to make sure that every group, every organization and every person who has something to say on the revision of the process has the opportunity to make his presentation.

[Translation]

We have problems with the proposed amendments. There again I am surprised. When we drafted this bill and consulted the opposition parties, we proposed an 18 month period but the Reform Party, the very sponsor of the amendments we are debating today, wanted to make sure that the process would be longer; they said that 18 months was not long enough and all of a sudden they propose to reduce this period to 12 months.

We believe that 12 months is too short. We do not believe that this timeframe will cause problems for the committee in charge of reviewing the process, but rather that problems will arise once the committee's review is over. We will have problems in terms of the process which will have to be put in place to implement a new legislative framework based on the committee's recommendations.

We are convinced that the committee of the House in charge of studying this process will propose a solution which will meet and respect the desires of the people and the members who make presentations to the committee; such recommendations will imply changes which will have to be legislated. Therefore, we believe that a 12 month period will not allow the committee or the House to make an in-depth review of the recommendations which will be proposed.

• (1030)

That is it for the first amendment. Motions No. 2 and No. 3 are amendments that would maintain the existing commissions. We would have, on the one hand, a House committee which would study the process and propose changes if needed, and on the other hand, the commissions which would continue their studies and consultations, not in relation to the process, but in relation to the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

We believe that this would be a waste of money, and I am surprised that the hon. member who proposed these amendments would want to waste several million dollars. He said that the commissions are already in place, that they have done some