

Electoral Boundaries

Therefore, clearly the intent of the statute is that this House should seek a combination between the independence of the commissioners and the opportunity of the House to pass judgment and make comment upon their recommendations. That is what has been provided. There was never any pretension that these debates or the comments that will be made in the next two days will have any legal or binding effect upon the commissioners. That being the case, I cannot understand what hon. members would consider the desirable effect to be of interrupting this process, since it has no legal effect. Therefore it would be my suggestion that we get on with the debate and maximize the time allowed. If hon. members wish to participate in the debate after those remarks, I will be happy to see them but I had hoped to shorten the process by making my intervention.

Some hon. Members: Amen.

Mr. Speaker: If there are no other hon. members who wish to participate in the discussion, we will go on to orders of the day.

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ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

OBJECTIONS TO REPORTS OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSIONS—NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

The House proceeded to the consideration of objections to reports of the Electoral Boundaries Commissions for various provinces.

Mr. Speaker: The first objection is to the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, when I and my colleagues sent a formal notice to Your Honour requesting that an objection be filed to the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Northwest Territories, we used the traditional language of such a notice. In the formal language of that notice we said that the commission had failed to do one thing and overlooked or ignored something else. So, first of all, I should like to say that we did not file the objection because we doubted in any way the thoroughness of the commission's proceedings or the ability of any of the commissioners, but such is the language of tradition.

We filed the objection because the commission filed both a majority and a minority report. As I understand it, this does not happen very often. By filing our objection we hope to give the commission the opportunity to take a second look at the problems, a second look that would include the views of any member of the House who may wish to give them the benefit of his or her experience.

I presented a brief to the Electoral Boundaries Commission of the Northwest Territories last December in Yellowknife. In that brief I indicated that I favoured what is commonly called a north-south dividing line. I also told the commissioners that my own suggestion for names for our two new constituencies was western Arctic and eastern Arctic. One of the reports from the commission agreed

with me about the boundaries, but neither of them agreed with my choice of names.

In the few months between now and the time that I gave that submission much has happened. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, or the Eskimo Brotherhood of Canada, presented its proposal for an Inuit land claim settlement in the Northwest Territories to the cabinet. When they were preparing this proposal, the ITC did a lot of work to make sure that the people in the communities were consulted. I have no doubt that their proposal represents a consensus on the matter of future political development in the Northwest Territories. Because of this I now feel that perhaps the boundary outlined in the majority report of the commission, commonly known as the tree line boundary, is the better choice, because the tree line boundary more accurately reflects the conditions which will exist if the ITC proposal is accepted by the cabinet, as I am sure it will be if the cabinet uses common sense.

● (1540)

Mr. Benjamin: Don't bet on it.

Mr. Firth: There are other factors which lead me to support the choice of boundaries of the majority report. The first is that the Indian people of Mackenzie valley—the Dene as we call ourselves—are in the process of defining their land claims. Although the proposal for a Dene claim has not yet been presented to the government, I have no doubt that the tree line boundary would be the best suited to the kind of claim these people will probably bring forward in about November of this year. The second point is that there are three northerners sitting on the commission. Of the three, two submitted the majority report.

However, there still remains the question of names for the two new constituencies. In my original submission to the commission I explained at some length some of the roles the member or parliament for Northwest Territories must play. I was speaking, of course, of any member of parliament for the Northwest Territories, no matter who it might be. I told the commission that in my view the person who does this job must, along with the other duties of a member of parliament, work to expand the knowledge of the people in the rest of the country about the particular problems we in the north face. Because I feel that this task is so important, we should name the new constituencies in such a manner that no one, no matter how little he or she knows about the north, would fail to recognize the part of the country to which reference was being made. This is the big job of the member of parliament for the north. He has to explain, as far as possible, the differences between that part of the world and down here.

Many constituencies have names which link them to their histories or to major landmarks. By using these names we are both able to preserve a little bit of that history and to instil pride in that heritage. In the case of the new riding which is to be formed in the eastern part of the Northwest Territories both the minority and the majority reports use the name Nunassiaq, an Inuit word which means something like beautiful land. There are very few Inuit words commonly used in the south, so there is little likelihood that this constituency name would cause any confusion for people in the rest of the country.