

*Government Orders*

the far north like Hearst and Kapuskasing, Dubreuville, Chisleau and so on.

I would be pleased but I am not sure they would be best served by a member of Parliament who in a new proposed riding has to serve an area that stretches from Lake Huron all the way through to James Bay.

The changes proposed just for my riding alone are reason enough to quash the whole process. I am aware of many problems across this country. One only has to look at Algoma riding to see what, with all due respect to the commission—it did the best it could given the resources available to it—changes have been proposed and to see how frankly unrealistic and ridiculous they are.

It would not serve the people of my part of northern Ontario to continue this nor would it serve Canadians at large. I respect that there are urban centres that have seen their ridings bloom to great numbers. We have to do something about that.

It is just as difficult to serve a large geographic area as it is to serve a large population. I have in the neighbourhood of 40 communities right now in my riding with 40 Reeves, mayors or Indian chiefs. They need as much my personal attention in terms of my being available to visit with them and talk to them as the constituents in a large urban centre.

I argue that notwithstanding the importance of representation by population, representation by geographic area is equally important. If one has 100,000 or 200,000 citizens in a confined geographic area one needs a lot of staff, I argue, to support the needs of those people. The member of Parliament can travel within that confined area relatively easily.

If one has a riding such as in the case of the current Algoma riding, it is seven and a half hours drive from one end to the other. No amount of staff can take the place of the member of Parliament visiting the communities in that riding.

If one would increase rural ridings because one is devoted mindlessly to population only representation, one forgets that individual communities spread out by great distances will lose access to their member of Parliament. In a way that does not happen in urban centres. It is a different kind of representation. If we do not stop this process and revisit seriously the subject we will never have a recognition that there is a shift that is going on from rural areas to our urban centres and an inexorable shift because of the current rules.

● (1625)

In northern Ontario we currently have 12 ridings if we include the riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka. The proposal would reduce that to 10. We have lost seats in the past and if the trend continues next time it could be nine or eight. Where do the people who live in cities come from? Unless they are born there they come from the country. Why are they coming from the

country, in rural areas? It is because of the economy of this country. When there is no work in the rural areas people go to the city even if there is no work in the city.

We have seen a shift in the population from our rural areas to our urban centres partly because of the economy. Should we allow shifts in the economy to so gravely affect shifts in the way our ridings are distributed.

We could have good times again and we will under a Liberal government. In fact I think the red book should be called the well read book because clearly the opposition parties have read it. I am sure we have done more for literacy in this country with the red book than any other document published in recent history. I encourage everyone to read it again because our commitment is to rural Canada. If we allow this bill to go through then we are recognizing that rural Canada is important. We are allowing Canadians the opportunity to have a serious say on how our boundaries are drawn and to get away from this notion that we can only have representation by population.

Again with all due respect to the commission, I think it makes a lot more sense—and I will make this argument to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs—that not only do we have to revisit the subject of representation, but it makes more sense that the first draft of new maps be generated with some public consultation. At the very least, the representatives of the public at the federal level, the members of Parliament, should have some say. I have no problem with input not only coming from sitting members of Parliament but from candidates who fought the last campaign. It is not a partisan issue. Boundaries for ridings is not a partisan issue and should not be.

All of the parties that fought the campaign in Algoma understand the need to have fair representation for the rural areas of this country. There is no argument that the urban areas need full representation too. If we have a riding that all of a sudden because of economic reasons and so on has grown to 200,000 would it not make more sense simply just to carve a new boundary down the middle of that riding and make two ridings of 100,000? Rather than have a domino effect throughout an entire province why not simply look at the problems.

We may want to add seats to Parliament but that is something we can debate later on. We cannot cap the number of seats here forever, but we want to consider how quickly the number of seats rises. However, if we are going to make corrections it is much better to look at the problem areas and do some fine-tuned adjustments.

If we look at northern Ontario, the changes that have been proposed are so strange and so massive that it does not seem logical. I use the riding of Algoma and the proposed riding of Algoma—James Bay as classic examples of why this system does not work. I say to my Reform friends, and I have a lot of respect for my Reform friends, to consider what they are doing