

Government Orders

A lot of people would agree with me if I said there are a lot of backbenchers in the House we probably could do without because there is not always enough meaningful work to go around. I mean no disrespect to any particular backbencher. However, in a private moment if they were true to their heart of hearts, many backbenchers would acknowledge we could probably get by with fewer members of Parliament and still do the essential work required to make the government run.

The article mentioned it costs somewhere in the order of \$770 million to run Parliament. If we could get the number of members of Parliament to about 265, as Reform suggested, it would still leave constituencies of a size allowing members to deal with the concerns.

If we could get the size of the Senate down, make it effective, elected and equal, it would have the confidence of the people and could serve a necessary purpose and perhaps go a long way to healing some of the wounds that divide the country.

Concerning boundary commissions being given a lot of power to make changes, I am concerned about that and Canadians should be concerned about it as well. It is conceivable that power could reside simply in the statutes for the government to administer.

The boundary commissions people are unelected and unaccountable. They have the power to set boundaries. I would not suggest they have this in mind but if they wished they could do a tremendous amount of mischief with the boundaries. It has been suggested by other members that has happened in the past, that boundaries were drawn somewhat arbitrarily because of political and other reasons that really do not have anything to do with the proper function and the proper way representatives and their areas should be chosen. That bothers me.

We need to move away from that to the greatest degree possible and enshrine in statutes more precisely how rules should work so there would be less latitude for unelected, unaccountable bodies to change the boundaries to suit either their own needs or perhaps the needs of their political masters.

In Bill C-69 we see the tremendous latitude boundaries commissions have to make exceptions to the 25 per cent variance rule by allowing them to exempt certain constituencies. In the past this has applied to very large constituencies. There is nothing in the rules preventing boundary commissions from making exemptions for constituencies that are not as large.

• (1620)

Reform would like to propose bigger changes which would require a different forum and a different debate. In the context of this bill we would like to see a rule that would put a limit on the minimum size of a constituency that could be exempted on the schedule. We are suggesting somewhere in the range of 200,000

or 250,000 kilometres. We are concerned that as long as it is left open, we will see MPs from various areas of the country coming forward, lobbying to have their boundaries exempted, not for any good reason, but because they want to keep their boundaries for very political reasons.

I point to the reason we are here discussing Bill C-69. There was a very unseemly scene not too long ago when the boundaries came out under the current bill. MPs from the government and the Bloc were running to the government saying: "Please do not change my boundaries. It will ruin my chances for re-election". It stopped a situation in which we already had a process underway to draw new boundaries.

Reform constituencies were very much affected by this. The member for Beaver River, the deputy leader of the Reform Party, was to lose her riding altogether. Nevertheless, Reform did not squawk about this. Members across the way and in the Bloc squawked, made a big deal about this, made sure their own interests were protected at the expense of Canadian taxpayers and at the expense of slowing the entire process down, forcing it back into the House under new legislation, tying up members' time to deal with this once again. That is entirely inappropriate.

The government has made a grave error. It has gone to great lengths to protect its own interests as it has done with other issues like MP pensions. For once it would be nice to see the government put the interests of its constituents and of the people of Canada ahead of its own interests. That is all Canadians want.

That whole unseemly situation gave birth to Bill C-69. It is why we are here today. What Canadians really want ultimately is a complete change to the underpinnings of the Canadian system. They want representation by population. They also want a triple-E Senate which would go a long way to giving the regions representation and in healing some of the wounds as a result of a faulty system today.

A fair and transparent democratic set of institutions is all Canadians want. The government and Bill C-69 have failed to give them that. For that reason I will not be supporting this legislation.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little curious as to something the member said. He referred to the schedules in the bill whereby members could apply to have their ridings exempted from redistribution because it would be included in the schedule.

Is he aware that in committee that section of the bill was removed?

Mr. Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak directly to what the hon. member has referred to, but my concern is that we will have members and their delegates arguing before boundary commissions for exemption and that will tie up the whole process.