

Finally, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act provides that the commission may depart up to 25 per cent from the electoral quota for the province because of, and I quote:

... special geographic considerations, sparsity or density of population, accessibility of regions, size or shape of regions, or for special community or diversity of interests of the inhabitants of the various regions.

The electoral quota for Ontario is 81,000, and the minimum permitted as a 25 per cent departure is 60,814. The average population of the 11 ridings proposed is over 70,000, well above the minimum permitted. If 12 ridings are maintained, the average would be more than 64,000, which is within the terms of the act.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it was clearly the intent of parliament when it enacted the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act that every allowance be made for geographical consideration, and I urge the commission to make every use of this section of the act to ensure that northern Ontario retains 12 seats.

The constituencies proposed by the commission are huge geographical monstrosities which sprawl across the region unmindful of traditional historical ties. They ignore transportation and communication patterns, and neglect linguistic affinities.

● (2010)

Consider for a moment a single constituency which would include both Windsor and Ottawa. The riding which the commission calls Cochrane North is larger and more diverse than such a constituency would be. But it certainly lacks the sophisticated communications network of a constituency in Southern Ontario. While reference has been made to urban and to rural ridings, much of Northern Ontario is neither urban nor rural; a great deal of it is best described as wilderness. But it is a wilderness which contains people, and these people need to be represented.

We have assigned to the commission a difficult and important responsibility. But while the task is difficult, it is not impossible. It is possible, as I have pointed out, to maintain 12 seats in Northern Ontario under the act. My fellow Liberal members of parliament from Northwestern Ontario and I appeared and addressed the commission during the public hearings. We submitted our own map to the commission showing how 12 constituencies could be maintained within the guidelines and quotas laid down by the act. I believe the act was drafted with areas such as ours in mind. That is why the 25 per cent tolerance, plus or minus, was provided.

I urge most strenuously, in this last stage of revulsion at the decision, the last opportunity we shall likely have, that the quality of representation enjoyed by our part of Canada should not be sacrificed by reducing the number of representatives to a level below that which our residents deserve and demand.

I have said nothing so far about the question of privilege raised earlier today. I respect the decision of Mr. Speaker—his feeling that he could not be the legal judge. But added to our concern with regard to the boundaries defined by the commission is concern over the very basis upon which the decision has been reached—that it has jeopardized and weakened the legal foundation for redistribution. Mr. Speaker, I trust you will convey to the Electoral Bound-

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aries Commission of Ontario our strong feeling and our vigorous representation that a second look be taken at this situation, and that the Commission will, if I may say so, come to its senses and restore the representation we believe we are entitled to in my part of the country.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments as a member of parliament from Ontario. Let me assure my colleagues that I am not finding fault as far as my own riding is concerned. I represent a rural riding, the constituency of Parry Sound-Muskoka. It is a sparsely populated constituency, one with no large municipalities, but small ones scattered all through it. The commission added about 22 townships to my riding, which certainly represents a sizeable amount of land, but I doubt whether there would be more than 150 votes in the whole of those 22 townships unless the 8,000 or 10,000 wolves that eat the deer up there are allowed to vote, in which case it would be a different story.

I have listened with interest to my colleagues across the House speaking with regard to Northern Ontario, and as a Progressive Conservative representing a great party which has not had a member from Northern Ontario since 1935 I suppose I could sit back laughing about the proposal to reduce northern representation and say, "That's just wonderful". But with all due respect I do feel that the people of Northern Ontario are entitled to 12 members instead of 11, even though it would probably make no difference to us as a party in 1978.

I wish to make a few comments on that aspect and support the many fine members of parliament who feel that the decision of the commission was a retrograde step. I have the greatest sympathy for the Electoral Boundaries Commission which is pretty well hemmed in by the guidelines which have been set for it by way of minimum population figures and so on. However, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) who preceded me pointed out that the population of the region would warrant 12 seats, and I certainly hope the commission will consider his submissions on that basis.

In my own riding I am not far above the minimum of 60,000. The population of Parry Sound-Muskoka is around 62,900. The hon. member for Port Arthur mentioned talk of secession in Northern Ontario. I know there are certain people in Northern Ontario who feel that Northern Ontario should be an entirely different province. That feeling is brought about by the idea that they have been forgotten by higher levels of government to the south. I am hoping the commissioners will bear this in mind when considering the matter again.

I was interested to hear the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) speak today about the new boundaries to his riding. Looking at the map, it is certainly quite small in comparison to my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. He was complaining about difficulties of one kind and another, and in my view he has cause for complaint because certain communities in that area were selected to go to the new and enlarged constituency of Timiskaming.

The hon. member stated that the new riding of Timiskaming would be 900 miles in extent. I think he must have been talking about kilometres. I think he was stretching it