

Representation Act, 1985

Wanapitei into the riding of Timiskaming, and yet the distance between the centre of the Timiskaming riding and Garson was over 150 miles.

I have no problem with southern Ontario getting more seats, but surely any Member from Toronto can stand on the tallest building there and literally see all his constituents. That cannot be done in northern Ontario. In just the same way as the Government is guaranteeing that provinces will not have fewer seats, I hope that it addresses the whole anomaly within regions which are clearly defined. Northern Ontario is clearly defined; it is all those parts of Ontario which are called "districts". The Government should ensure that those particular areas do not get any fewer seats than they already have.

The problems facing northern Ontario are very serious and grave ones. It is built upon a hinterland economy. It is in decline in mining and lumber. It does not need fewer voices in the House of Commons. It needs at least the same number to make arguments for the correction of its problems. God knows that electing more Tories in northern Ontario will not resolve the problem.

Mrs. McDougall: Yes, it will.

Mr. Rodriguez: No, it will not. It never has. It has never resolved any of the problems in the provinces, and it certainly will not resolve the problems in northern Ontario. I hope the Government and its House Leader will listen to the reasonable amendment in Motion No. 4, standing in my name. I hope it is allowed to go through and the Bill amended accordingly.

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay-Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in the debate on the redistribution Bill. I speak, as did the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), ultimately on behalf of constituents, as well as the Members who will be representing those constituents in northern Ontario. I echo the earlier comments of the Hon. member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) who appreciated the work of the committee and the motions the Minister brought forward which provided some recognition of regional factors and of the necessity of thinking about more than just the absolute number of people who are resident in an area.

My seat in Thunder Bay-Nipigon is one of several in northwestern Ontario. The Hon. Member for Nickel Belt speaks with close experience of the situation in northeastern Ontario. We in northwestern Ontario have our own experience of distance.

I should like to take a few moments to travel some of those roads with Hon. Members as a way of underscoring the importance of ensuring that it is possible for Hon. Members to be in touch with their constituents and, in an even more important way, for constituents to have ready access to their Members when the sizes of ridings grow. My riding includes small communities which can only be reached by road in any feasible or economic way. One could try flying into some of them, but if the Exchequer of the country had to pay for my chartered flights, all of us would be unhappy about the way in

which public funds were being spent. If, however, I make trips to small communities like Armstrong and Aroland by car, I have to spend hours on the road to do so. I will see very few people in relation to the amount of time I have spent on the road.

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The people who are resident in these communities have the same difficulties with travelling and even greater difficulties in financing trips to have direct access to me as their Members of Parliament. That is an indication of the kinds of costs that can be imposed even with the existing system of representation. If we face loss of seats in northern Ontario, and I hesitate even to say that, we are going to find ourselves with longer distances to travel, greater costs to be borne and still more limited access to our constituents.

More and more Members will be facing the kinds of difficulties faced by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Parry). He represents an enormous riding that has to be reached in good part by air. Only by getting around in that way can he hope to see his constituents. For that matter, on the provincial scene, the Member of the provincial legislature for Lake Nipigon presently faces such a situation. The motion, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing community of interest, community of identity and a manageable geographic size, Motion No. 6 in the name of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn), is of enormous importance in helping us to deal with those situations and in empowering boundaries commissions to recognize these things.

My provincial colleague who represents Lake Nipigon has a great deal of difficulty in getting around his riding, a riding which stretches from 150 miles west of the City of Thunder Bay through the city to communities on highways west of the City of Thunder Bay and up the Trans-Canada Highway. His riding includes all kinds of communities to the north of the City of Thunder Bay and of course the heartland of the riding is centred around Lake Nipigon itself and to the north and northeast of Manitouwadge. When contemplating the time he spends on the road and the thousands of kilometres he puts on his automobile yearly in order to get around his riding, I must admire his pluck in having run for the position and his success in winning it. I wish him well. I trust that he will do as well in representing his riding as did Jim Stokes, once Speaker of the provincial House and the present Member's predecessor in that riding. However, the last thing I would ever want to have to undertake is the kind of travelling that Jim Pouliot now has as his lot as Member of the provincial legislature for Lake Nipigon.

That kind of situation really underscores the necessity of recognizing community of interest, community of identity and manageable geographic area. In geographic area, northern Ontario encompasses 88 per cent of the province. If we maintain 11 seats in a province that will be allotted 99 seats in the Canadian Parliament, more than four-fifths of the geographic area of the province will be represented by only