

Government Orders

It took years of discussions to get these people to see their economic development as a common venture and come up with a joint action plan to develop this fabulous tourist site, thus contributing to economic growth in that area. If boundaries were to be readjusted as planned, Lac-Mégantic would end up in the same district as Thetford Mines and would be split between two administrative regions: on the one hand, the Quebec administrative region and, on the other hand, the Eastern Township administrative region, which includes Sherbrooke and Lac-Mégantic.

This would make the political channels that much more complicated, with more members having to meet to promote issues and more officials having to learn to work together, and that, as I said earlier, is very important and takes years.

This concrete example illustrates the effects a decision to make two new districts out of this one could have. Decisions made by electoral boundaries commissions do affect people in their everyday life.

This kind of decision should never be made without proper consideration and not by officials alone. Time should be allowed to consult the people involved, the general public, to ensure that the result of the readjustment will truly be in the interests of these people.

I spoke more specifically about the riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, but as chairman of the Bloc's Eastern Townships regional caucus, I must mention that the same exercise would considerably modify the ridings of Brome—Missisquoi, Richmond—Wolfe and Frontenac.

I come back to what I said at the beginning: what is the main reason for making this change? It is to ensure that the number of people represented in each riding is more nearly the same.

● (1610)

I would like to give you some eloquent figures in this regard. If you compare the present situation to the one proposed in the reform, the riding of Frontenac now has 61,000 people; the new riding of Mégantic—Frontenac would have a population of about 72,000, so a balance is being restored here.

In the riding of Brome—Missisquoi, the difference is barely 8,000 and in Richmond—Wolfe, it is 10,000 at most. In the riding I represent, the change would be scarcely 2,000, so this argument does not hold for ridings in the Eastern Townships.

That is why I will support Bill C-18, which would delay this process and provide for time to consult the people and involve the representatives and elected members of each of the ridings so that the change we finally come up with will benefit all the people we represent.

[English]

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in opposition to the closure or time allocation motion introduced today by the government.

This motion refers to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. It is not good to have the government move to cut off debate so that this bill can receive approval quickly.

I wonder if this is the tip of the iceberg, the arrogance and lack of respect for debate in Parliament. If it is this will be an all time record because even the previous Conservative government took longer than five months to reach these heights of disrespect for this institution.

I am speaking in opposition to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. I believe we should allow the process which began some time ago under the old legislation to continue until it is completed. I submit that there has been sufficient time, energy and money invested in the process to date to make it irresponsible on the part of the government to suggest that the process be halted.

I am aware of the criticisms of the present process which are contained in the report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing in relation to the boundary readjustment legislation. I am also aware that the present boundary readjustment process was delayed in the last Parliament with the idea that a new process could be put in place prior to the call of the general election in 1993.

What happened was that the special committee of the House of Commons on electoral reform ran out of time and was unable to deal with this subject. Therefore, the process which we are now involved in began and has run until we now have boundary proposals from the provincial commissions before us and public hearings are set to being shortly.

What will happen if Bill C-18 is passed? We know that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be charged with reviewing the whole process and making recommendations for change. However, can we be assured that the process which will result from this study will be put in place prior to the next general election? I do not think so.

We have a process in place now which if allowed to go to completion will bring into effect new boundaries before the next election. We are assured of that fact. Therefore, the next election will be fought under boundaries which are representative of the population distribution as presented in the last census. Doing anything to jeopardize this process does not make sense to me. At this time I want to endorse the position taken by the Brampton Board of Trade in a letter dated March 22, 1994 to the Prime Minister where it states: "It is not appropriate nor