

*Government Orders*

forbid? If this were going to happen it might amaze us all to discover that in fact there are Liberal mapmakers in Canada. What process is there in Bill C-18 that would exempt us from naming, heaven forbid, a Liberal mapmaker?

• (1100)

We can see how flawed the process is when somebody goes into crisis mode or when somebody decides we have to do it now. It makes me think of a homebuilding ad: why wait for spring; do it now.

**An hon. member:** Do it now.

**Miss Grey:** An hon. member says: "Do it now". He is concerned about doing it now. I would like to ask why now is so important if we have spent \$5 million on it. The reason now is so important is that the hearings have started. People are getting to view and voice their concerns publicly. I suspect it would seem very obvious across the country that the public is asking why the hurry. There have been the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords. I could go on and on. Why the hurry? Why the rush?

Something is underground that needs to surface, that needs to be discussed in the public hearings. Let us not do it now. Let the public hearings go on. Let people talk about it and make representations to the commissioners.

They laugh on the other side of the House. It is most unfortunate. There is no need to proceed with this in crisis mode, as crisis intervention. This is the process put in place. Let us follow that process. Let us see what comes of these public hearings. Then let us have the government make some wise and reasoned recommendations after the public hearings, certainly not before.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to report stage of Bill C-18, an act to suspend the electoral boundaries readjustment process. Specifically I will take a few minutes to speak on the amendments presented by my colleague from Kindersley—Lloydminster.

Those amendments fit into two categories. The first amendment would limit the suspension for 12 months. The second one would formally keep the commissions that are established and in existence pending the suspension so that they could restart their work in the event it was required.

Both these amendments are not really our preference. Our preference is that the bill not proceed. Let me make that absolutely clear. We have suggested these particular amendments to put the government to the test on a couple of its stated reasons for proceeding and some of its concerns.

The 12 month period is very clear. We have examined the bill and the issue. It seems that if we look at a 24 month suspension

as proposed in the bill we are looking at a possible constitutional problem.

Obviously there are different legal opinions on that. The government's own lawyers do not see it that way, but the argument is really quite straightforward. We would suspend the process for 24 months. The process that would then have to go into effect under the law would be the existing process which would restart from scratch. All the previous money spent would have been wasted.

Then we would have a process that would clearly not be completed until after the next election which means the results could not be implemented until the subsequent election. That subsequent election would be after the next decennial census.

Our Constitution requires that we redistribute seats in the Chamber once every 10 years. In effect the purpose of the bill is to violate the Constitution. It clearly violates the demand that the seats be readjusted every 10 years. If the bill were to go through in its current state that would be the legal state. The Constitution would not be obeyed as a consequence of the particular piece of legislation.

The government may argue that in the meantime it will have another process, that it will actually start sooner and all the other considerations, but that is not the legal state created by this piece of legislation.

It is a fairly innocuous amendment. Those who really want to pass the bill could accept this amendment. It would make no difference to their overall agenda here. It is very clear what that is, but they could pass this one in good faith.

• (1105)

Also in good faith they could pass the amendment to allow the existing commissions and commissioners to remain in place. The opposition to this particular amendment is even more bizarre. Some of the arguments we have heard privately and publicly are that we might have to pay these people, as if we could not suspend their pay during the period in question. One member told me they might die in the next 12 months. They might die even if the process continues. I am not sure what particular difficulty that would cause.

Of course we get into the whole argument that all this would save money. With this particular debate we are suspending the process, getting rid of the first \$5 million we spent so that we can save money. In the end we restart the process from scratch. We spend all the money we spent before; we spend it over again and then we spend some more.

This is an interesting way to save money, even if there were money to be saved. We could propose on the floor of the House that we suspend the next election altogether. After all elections cost money. Why do we not just sit here forever? I am a young