

*Government Orders*

proposals. In any event we have seen that the interventions of MPs did not have much of an impact on the commission's final reports. MPs will have the same rights as any other citizen to make representation in the course of public consultation.

This is consistent with the intent of conferring the boundaries readjustment process on independent commissions rather than Parliament and ensures that the boundaries readjustment process remains non-partisan and independent.

Bill C-69 sets out detailed criteria for commissions to consider in drawing constituency boundaries. The committee's bill establishes clear guidelines for commissions in terms of the criteria to be taken into account in drawing constituency boundaries including the community of interest, manageable geographic size and probability of future population growth. Hence the boundaries and finally the boundary commission.

The new boundaries would come into force in less time than under the current act. Under Bill C-69 it is estimated that the boundaries readjustment process will take a total of two and a half years, which is three months shorter than under the current process.

I hope aboriginal people would take advantage of the commission's requirements as would all other people. It is noted that the whole electoral exercise is quite costly. The administration of an election involves 450,000 people and costs approximately \$100 million. It is no small or pretty penny to get members of Parliament elected. It is a major undertaking and it should be noted that very few aboriginal people participate in the process.

This is particularly the case with senior positions such as returning officers who are responsible for administering the electoral machinery within the person's electoral district and for subdividing the district into polling divisions. Research was unable to identify any past or present returning officer of aboriginal descent.

The lack of experience is no viable or legitimate excuse. Elections Canada has noted in the impediment to electoral participation that 253 of the 295 returning officers appointed for the 34th general election had no previous experience managing elections. In a sense I am pleading for participation on the part of the government, individuals and communities to organize and get involved in the public process.

The commission is required to publish its plans and hear submissions from the public. This is one way to get involved in the electoral process but, more important, to ensure that electoral boundaries are drawn with more respect to the ties of neighbouring communities. It is my hope that in future aboriginal people will be able to elect members of Parliament from their areas where aboriginal people are the majority.

I congratulate the committee for the hard work it has done in reviewing the current process and in proposing improvements. It could not have been simple.

I also hope that aboriginal people, women and any other group, in particular the youth who are not adequately represented in the House of Commons, will take part in the public consultations on electoral boundaries to ensure that the boundaries are fair and respect the binding ties of neighbouring communities, in particular aboriginal communities but in fact all communities across the country.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the process the final stage of which is being undertaken today started yesterday, more than a year after the introduction in this House of Bill C-18, which suspended the electoral redistribution process then under way and provided for a 24 month waiting period before starting a new debate on redistribution.

Unfortunately, the Reform Party then opposed Bill C-18 and the 24 month delay initially provided under this bill. However, the House of Commons passed the bill suspending the whole electoral redistribution process for 24 months.

Later, in considering Bill C-18, the Senate did exactly what the Reform Party wanted to do in this House. It moved an amendment to Bill C-18 providing that a new bill had to be tabled by June 1995; otherwise, the old law would apply again, reviving the commissions suspended under Bill C-18.

When the bill came back from the Senate, the government should have stood up and affirmed the will of the people represented by the hon. members in this place by approving the bill as presented and with the relevant amendments adopted in this House.

Yet, the government then chose to go along with a Senate amendment that put us in a tight squeeze by reducing the amount of time available to do our work. It was, in my opinion, an unacceptable concession, which the Reform Party managed to secure through the Senate.

Following final passage and Royal Assent of Bill C-18, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was given the mandate to draft a bill to be submitted to the House. We worked on this for a very long time. I attended all the sessions, including those in the summer of 1994, in July 1994, in which we heard a great many witnesses, including political party representatives, hon. members of this House who came to testify, university experts and others. While working on this bill, we enjoyed the continuous collaboration of the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff.