

Government Orders

about changing the lives of so many citizens without starting with the involved people first.

I worry as well that by following through with electoral boundary reform the government will not be seen as acting on its primary agenda of job creation and economic development. I also think the government will find it difficult to convince Canadians that it is acting prudently in its acknowledged need to practise sound financial management.

I fear spending millions of dollars to redefine electoral boundaries is indefensible in the light of the economic trials faced by so many Canadians. The government is recognized as honest, hard working, concerned about citizens and known for practising sound fiscal management. We are not known for excessiveness. We are the ones with the plan to help Canadians through the difficult period in order to make this a strong, united and able country prepared to meet the 21st century.

• (1600)

We need to remind ourselves of our own priorities and in keeping with that, we should recognize our error without singling out anyone or pointing fingers in any direction. Simply put, we should cut our losses and move on from here. Canadians are tired of governments trying to justify their errors or failing to admit that a mistake has been made. We are bigger than that. We must move on.

I join others in this House who have spoken against boundary redistribution at this time and I support the call to suspend the act until such time as Canadians have a greater opportunity to be a part of the process from the front end.

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, it seemed important to participate in this debate on a legislation which would postpone for 24 months the process initiated by the federal electoral boundaries commission. It seemed important to do so since the redistribution of electoral boundaries is not an operation one does for statistical purposes; it is not an exercise for an apprentice geographer who would like to practice his trade and increase his skill and knowledge. Redistributing could change the habits of the citizens and of the decision-makers in a given living environment.

In my riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, if the proposed reform were to be implemented, it would have disastrous effects. That is why, before we proceed with such a redistribution of boundaries, we must determine the basic criteria for changes which might be necessary under certain circumstances.

In the present legislation, one of the main criteria is equal representation for each and every constituent. This is basically commendable since in a democracy, we must ensure that no

group of individuals has more power or better representation than others. But we must also consider other principles; I am thinking here more specifically of respect for the living environment, in other words communities of interests, as mentioned in the documents presented to us.

When one undertakes such an exercise, one has to take into account the sense of belonging of the people, instead of separating them and creating a situation where it will be many years before this feeling emerges again. That is why I would like to take the next few minutes to explain in graphic details the impact the proposed changes would have in my riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

I will first remind the members that, for the time being, as we speak, the Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead riding has a population of 75 000. It is nearly entirely located in administrative district No. 5, that is to say in the Eastern Townships, in Quebec. In this riding, there are two regional county municipalities, structures that were created about 20 years ago now with a view to planning the social and economic development of some communities. Presently, the riding is made up of two whole RCMs and part of four others. I am talking about the RCM of Granit, which includes the Lac-Mégantic area, of which nearly all of the municipalities are in the Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead riding.

• (1605)

There is also the RCM of Sherbrooke, two out of eight municipalities of which are in my riding, as well as the RCM of Memphrémagog, of which more than half the municipalities are now part of my riding, and some municipalities of which are part of the provincial riding of Beauce, next to Lac-Mégantic.

According to the proposed reform, the Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead riding would be split into two new ridings, one called Mégantic—Frontenac and the other one, Compton—Stanstead. As for the district of Mégantic—Frontenac, this new district would be primarily comprised of the municipalities of Lac-Mégantic and the vicinity as well as municipalities around Thetford Mines.

This would effectively jeopardize what I mentioned a minute ago, that is to say this sense of belonging developed over the years within the Lac-Mégantic area and the Eastern Townships as a whole.

Let me give you a very concrete example. Recently, two RCMs from my district, namely the RCM of Haut-Saint-François, which encompasses East Angus, Cookshire and La Patrie, and the RCM of Granit which, as I said earlier, includes the Lac-Mégantic area, have agreed on a major economic development plan based on tourist activities around Mount Mégantic which straddles the two regional municipalities.