

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)

[English]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT SUSPENSION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as many of my colleagues have to raise some concerns about the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension Act that we are debating in Parliament.

My own riding like everyone else's has come up for boundary readjustment under the current proposals. I saw a couple of weekends ago in the newspaper the boundary proposals. The changes to my boundaries are not putting a big smile on my face. I have an extension of the boundaries, way up into the Merritt-Princeton area. I now have a riding that encompasses everything from urban commuters to Vancouver, loggers and farmers in the middle of my riding, right up into Merritt-Princeton which is into ranching and mining and interior towns that have very little to do with the current constituency of Fraser Valley East.

I have some problems. I have made presentations in writing to the electoral boundaries people to tell them that I will be making presentations to them when the opportunity arises to try and persuade them that perhaps those cities are better served in the Kamloops riding.

I am not willing to suspend the boundaries readjustment just because my own personal boundary is not to my liking. There are several important principles involved here that need to be addressed and that have been neglected by the government.

The first reason I object to the suspension act is that it thwarts the purpose of Parliament in the electoral process. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act requires the readjustment of federal electoral boundaries every 10 years. There is a commission made up of three people. Three people form this commission. The chief justice of each province appoints a chairperson and the Speaker of the House of Commons, someone who sits in your chair, appoints the other two.

Both authorities who make up these commissions, the chief justice and the Speaker, share the characteristic of total impartiality. The commission that we are considering suspending is a completely impartial commission. We have to be careful in whatever deliberations we make in this House that we do not take away from impartiality where impartiality is necessary. We

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must make sure that any commission is not politically motivated in any way.

My first concern is about this purpose of Parliament. What is the purpose of Parliament?

I would put to you, Mr. Speaker, that the purpose of Parliament is not to interfere in independent judicial type bodies just because we do not happen to agree with the outcome. There is ample opportunity to make presentation to these boundaries commissions and I plan to do that, as I encourage every member to do. However, to step in at this stage and say that because some of the members of the government do not like the boundaries they are willing to thwart the entire purpose of the act is unconscionable.

Nowhere in the red book is there any mention that this act needed to be amended. Nowhere in the speech from the throne is there any idea or thought that this needed to be adjusted. The first whisper of this that came out was when the boundary readjustments came to the members opposite. Suddenly a crisis of monumental importance hit this House. It must be changed, it must be suspended, the judicial process must be set aside. Members opposite for some reason feel that they have to step in and somehow make it right.

I believe the public is going to see this very cynically. Why was this not an issue before? The reason, of course, is obvious. There is going to be political meddling in a judicial process and this political meddling is unconscionable.

Second, this matter has already been thwarted once before. Already we have had suspensions on this. Every 10 years we are supposed to have new boundary proposals. It has already been suspended once before. Now again we are going to set aside a \$5 million commission, having already spent \$5 million, when section 14 of the act says that each commission shall prepare with all reasonable dispatch a report setting out its recommendations.

• (1510)

The last instance was in 1991. Here we are in 1994 and we are again not going to have a readjustment. The proposal seems to be to put it off for a couple of more years. We will likely go into the turn of the century running on a 1981 census. That is totally unacceptable, which brings me to my third point, the province of British Columbia.

B.C. is the fastest growing province. Some 40,000 people from within Canada have moved to B.C., mostly from Ontario. The shift in the population is going westward. Thirty-five thousand additional people came from all other countries of the world. We received 20 per cent of Canada's immigration population. B.C. is a thriving region of the country.