

*Government Orders*

Over the last while we have heard many concerns about post-secondary education, employment, and programs and services for young people. We have heard the concerns of disabled people. One way of advancing views is by participating, by being here. There is something to be said about being here; about having a voice, a true voice; and about standing in the highest court in the land to represent people. That is one way to advance views.

It is my hope that Bill C-69 will encourage more people to become involved in the electoral process and that in the future, when electoral maps are being drawn, greater care will be given to ensure that aboriginal communities like the Inuvialuit do not have to wait 10 years to be joined together in one federal electoral district.

I should like to take the time remaining to discuss the main components of Bill C-69 which will impact Canadians living south of 60. First, Bill C-69 eliminates unnecessary decennial redistributions in provinces where there has not been a significant population shift which leads to unacceptable deviations from the provincial quotient.

The committee's bill provides that boundary commissions will no longer be established in provinces where as a result of the decennial census the number of seats to which the province is entitled remains the same and where none of the ridings vary by more than 25 per cent from the provincial quotient. This will eliminate unnecessary redistributions and result in savings to the taxpayers.

• (1550)

Bill C-69 also provides for quinquennial readjustments in addition to the current decennial redistribution. Quinquennial redistributions would take place in provinces where following a quinquennial census more than 10 per cent of the constituencies varied by more than 25 per cent from the provincial quotient.

It would not affect the total number of seats, in layman's terms, in the House or the number of seats allotted to the provinces. It would only allow for the boundaries of ridings within the provinces to be redrawn. By allowing for the riding boundaries within a province to be redrawn more than every decade, the effects of major population shifts in certain provinces would be minimized.

The appointment of boundaries commissions will be more transparent. The chair of each commission will continue to be appointed by the chief justice of the province. In appointing the two other commissioners, the Speaker will have to publicize openings, solicit applications for positions, and consult widely before making appointments.

Another change is that the Speaker's appointments can be reviewed and voted down by the House. The new requirements

of public notice, solicitation of applications and consultations will make for a more open and transparent process.

The boundary adjustment process will be a more open and transparent process. Bill C-69 requires that at the beginning of the readjustment process commissions publish a notice of population figures and of their work plans and invite submissions from the public. I am certain it will encourage more public participation in the readjustment process.

Bill C-69 will ensure more informed public debate. The committee's bill requires commissions to prepare three alternate maps instead of only one, as is the current process, showing how riding boundaries could be divided within the province. Although commissions would still indicate their preference, they would have to justify their preferred option. The two additional maps would assist members of the public who wish to make submissions. I believe these new requirements will favour more informed public debate and encourage more public participation in the process.

Bill C-69 provides for the possibility of a second set of public hearings to be held where necessary. When in response to public comments a commission makes changes to the proposed boundaries of a riding that would affect 25 per cent of that riding's population, Bill C-69 provides that a second set of public hearings would have to be held. The change recognizes and reflects the importance of public participation in the process. After all, people are what the electoral process is all about.

Bill C-69 sets out the circumstances in which the boundary commission's current discretion to create exceptional ridings is to be exercised and requires the commission to justify the decision in its reports. This is very critical. Recognizing there may be some need for ridings to vary from the 25 per cent provincial quotient, the committee maintained the boundaries commission authority to create exceptional ridings. The country is diverse. There are exceptional circumstances such as the massive land track in my area that we have to cover; it is huge. It is a very cumbersome exercise for an elected member to traverse the huge land mass, for instance.

However, the committee's bill limits the exercise of that discretion to extraordinary circumstances where the population is more than 25 per cent under the provincial quotient and where the riding is isolated or not readily accessible from the rest of the province. In addition the bill requires the commission to indicate the reasons for this determination in its report. I believe it will favour a responsible and consistent exercise of the discretion.

The bill eliminates the current requirement that the commission's proposals be tabled in the House.

• (1555)

Considering that MPs should participate in public hearings like all other Canadians, the bill does away with added scrutiny by a parliamentary committee of the boundaries commission