

quality of service to these people, because they too have rights and obligations, as do we, their elected representatives. We must not allow a mathematical formula to make a mockery of what we do.

In order to bring it into line, my riding would have to be enlarged by almost half the area of the entire province of Quebec. We would be looking at more than one House of Commons. No. I think that, out of respect for taxpayers, we should stick with figures that take geography and demography into account.

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib): Mr. Speaker, I want to address two items in connection with the amendment proposed by the Reform Party in relation to setting the variance from quota that would be used for the creation of new riding boundaries in the forthcoming redistribution.

• (1620)

I note, as my colleague from Kingston and the Islands has already noted, the 25 per cent maximum variance has already been found to be charter compliant. It is a measuring stick that fits within our charter. At the end of the day it is the charter which governs how our electoral redistributions will take place. That is the foundation on which our democratic rights and privileges are built.

In relation to the actual population numbers I draw to the attention of colleagues the possibility that during this debate some of us are focusing on existing population numbers when we look at the variance from quota that existed over 10 years ago when the boundaries were last redistributed around 1987.

When some members ask whether the current variance in a particular riding of close to 25 per cent is democratic, I point out that a lot of these statistics did not exist 15 years ago. When the boundaries were created 15 years ago many of these ridings were much closer to population quota. Subsequent growth has caused the populations to increase or decrease and depart from the quota. We have to be careful in discussing that because it is not fair to say that because a riding is 23 per cent above quota now that is what would be the case if the electoral boundaries commissions were to reshape the boundary now.

The electoral boundaries commissions will be expected to follow very close to quota when they do their work. That is how they operate. I have been through the process once back in the eighties.

The change to the statute at committee involving the deletion of what was called the schedule was done for some pretty calculated reasons. I know they were good reasons. I debated it at committee. By deleting the schedule we have not rid the ability of particular ridings to continue to exist outside the 25 per cent variance.

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However, we have circumscribed fairly precisely the basis on which they could be outside the 25 per cent variance. The circumstance must be extraordinary. I leave the definition of that to the electoral boundaries commissions. The riding must be geographically isolated or not readily accessible to the rest of the province. If the electoral boundaries commission is to permit a riding to exist, not just varying from the quota but outside the 25 per cent variance, they must give cogent reasons.

If some democrats from the Reform Party or the Liberal Party or the Bloc Québécois believe that being outside the variance does not comply with the charter there can always be access to judicial interpretation.

We have made a reasonable compromise. We have put in place a reasonable mechanism to address what is truly an incredible variety of electoral circumstances in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I already had a few opportunities to speak about the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

• (1625)

With regard to the amendments put forward by the Reform Party, I should explain to the people listening to us that this is not a complex technical matter. The Reform Party is simply asking us to make ridings larger and give greater importance to urban communities and less importance to the other criteria, including territorial settlement, thus affecting our whole vision of Canada's development.

Through seemingly very technical criteria, the amendments put forward by the Reform Party would lead to a very clear choice, namely ensuring that future development is based only on natural population migrations without considering that any region may experience a temporary decline in population and take steps to revitalize the community. The amendments proposed by the Reform Party would only speed up the community's decline and reduce its political representation. It is obvious at this point, I think, that we must make sure this amendment is rejected.

The second amendment, which is aimed at eliminating the possibility of deviating by more than 25 per cent, further increases the imbalance with constitutionally protected ridings. For instance, in Prince Edward Island and a number of other places, certain ridings are protected, and preventing any variance above 25 per cent will only increase the discrepancy between levels of representation.

What kind of an advantage is a riding under constitutional protection given over other ridings in terms of representation? Because this argument of representation is coming up and I think that the rural communities of Western Canada must be surprised indeed at the position the Reform Party is taking today, a position which would make ridings already covering