

Government Orders

There are the social concerns. We in Parry Sound—Muskoka have developed into a unique community of communities, one that has a cohesiveness of interests, and again a stroke of a pen on a map is going to take that away.

The third area they were supposed to take into account was economics. We have a shared economy in Parry Sound—Muskoka. We have the major industry of tourism which we share. We share the same major transportation links of Highway 11 and Highway 69. We share the same character of rural Ontario. Again these social considerations under the current system will simply be thrown out the window as a result of the stroke of a pen on a map.

I do not believe the system serves the interest of Canadians. I know it does not serve the interest of northern Ontarians. I certainly know it does not serve the interest of my constituents from Parry Sound—Muskoka. I support the bill so that we can go back to take a look at the system and redesign it.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Chambly I represent has an area of 384 square kilometres. In the last election, it had 76,204 voters; today, that number is down to 76,203, since I spend most of my time here. It was and still is a mostly urban riding that straddles the Richelieu River from Beloeil—Saint-Hilaire to Chambly, including Saint-Bruno, a beautiful city we are proud of.

In my riding, the proposed electoral boundaries readjustment would add 14 small, rather rural municipalities and remove a large one, Saint-Bruno, that would be integrated into the riding of Saint-Hubert. The riding would gain 14 municipalities, and would extend almost as far as Granby in the Eastern Townships.

The problem is, first of all, there is no rush. We can take the time to debate these issues and to understand what is behind the changes proposed by the elections commission.

In my case, I go from 76,200 voters to a new riding with 110,000 voters. But my neighbour from whom I took 14 municipalities goes from a riding of 110,000 voters to one with about 76,000 voters. We merely exchange voters without gaining anything at the administrative level. On the contrary, I think we stand to lose.

What will it be like for the member representing that riding the day after the new electoral map comes into effect? In my riding, which has an area of only 384 square kilometres, all my predecessors had their offices in the middle of the riding to avoid long-distance charges. But after readjustment, the member for the new riding will need at least two offices and will be

practically unable to make calls without incurring high long-distance charges.

Some would reply, "The government pays for that". Yes, when the member initiates the call, but when it is the voters who call, they complain that they cannot reach their member. They can reach him but only if they pay charges that can be quite high depending on their complaints. If only for that reason, I think it is a bad idea.

Furthermore, what is proposed does not take into account, I think, the communities' desire to live together because they are used to living together. Over the years, places like Saint-Bruno, Saint-Hilaire, Beloeil, Chambly—the smallest communities have a population of 15,000 or 16,000, while the largest have between 30,000 and 35,000 residents—have developed trade links as well as cultural and other exchanges involving volunteers, regional county municipalities, etc. These municipalities have learned to live together and have become very good at it. And just for the sake of it, we are now going to change riding boundaries to no one's benefit.

As I said earlier, my constituency will increase to 110,000 voters but that of my neighbour will go down to 76,000. What did we gain from all this? I would have understood how, if my neighbour had encroached on someone else and so on, we would have fiddled with the ridings to distribute the population more or less equally among the ridings, but that is not the case.

• (1810)

So I have some trouble understanding why the electoral commission is so eager to impose on us new boundaries that do not reflect local realities and the desire of people to live together, as in the riding I represent; that said, of course, with respect for the people who will join our riding. Shifting riding boundaries around just for the fun of it was not the main purpose of the electoral commission.

As for Quebec, we cannot talk about redistribution without talking about Quebec and its future. This morning, a poll published in the Eastern Townships, on which the riding of Chambly abuts, reports that the idea of sovereignty is supported by a strong majority in the Eastern Townships; the survey says 53 per cent.

At the beginning of my speech, I told you that the house was not on fire and I think that the Liberal Party of Canada has understood that and said to itself: "Better not go ahead too quickly with those changes. Quebec will probably separate in a year or a year and a half, so we would have done all this boundary adjustment for nothing. Better soft-pedal it, if not stop it, and we will see later". I think that is wise on the part of the government. I commend it for that and I thank it for saving the taxpayers in my riding and all Canadians a fairly considerable amount of money.