

*Government Orders*

out a clear signal that they will not accept another top down, arbitrary decision by government.

Within my own constituency when a map appeared in a special insert in the local paper I heard a number of consistent messages from constituents. First, they were shocked to learn that the boundary changes were even being discussed. For most of them seeing the map in the paper was the first time they had ever heard of the exercise. Another common expression was one of disbelief. After we had all campaigned so vocally about the need to be more inclusive and since the government has practised this agenda so consistently since the election, people find it hard to believe that we would revert to the old style of top down governing.

As members we have all worked hard to gain the trust of our electorate. I know many of us do not wish to see that trust jeopardized when the potential not to do so is so easily avoided.

Another sentiment I have heard from my constituents is one of anger. People are angry, not only because the government had not bothered to consult with them but also because of the incredible amount of dollars invested in the exercise. People were shocked, wondering where was the need for this use of their hard earned tax dollars. Where did it come from? People were wondering why nobody had bothered to mention it to them earlier and why nobody had asked for their opinion.

• (1555)

As the member for the riding of Fredericton—York—Sunbury I can assure the House that I felt the sting of this action when people questioned my involvement in and my responsibility for the proposed changes. People were not happy, and that is essentially why I feel compelled to rise today and encourage the government to have this process stopped.

I want to acknowledge that riding boundary redistribution is in many respects necessary, but I take issue with the way the process for determining changes has occurred. I further question some of the present assumptions about how boundaries should be redefined. I addressed my concerns about the process earlier. I continue to believe that decisions should have been made based on consultation with the many people affected. I question how many Canadians know the criteria upon which decisions for change were even made.

We must realize that decisions of this nature have an enormous impact upon the political culture of our country. People tend to feel connected to the regions and communities of which they are a part. We all belong to many types of communities, each of which has boundaries in its own way. In many respects we are defined by our professional communities, our religious and social communities, and for many we find comfort in defining ourselves by our political communities.

My most recent witness of this assertion was during the last election. I watched and worked with people from all parties who travelled considerable distances many times over and who put parts of their own lives on hold because of their commitment to the electoral process. Last October became their focus.

We do people an injustice when we suddenly tell them that they no longer need to feel committed to the region they have always known and that now they must suddenly align themselves elsewhere. Making such a transition is not difficult. In fact it is embraced when those who must make the change participate in the decision making that moves them from one location to another.

If anything, commitment and investment are firmly entrenched from the start. It is this kind of stake in the social and political consciousness of our citizenry that we want to promote among Canadians. Imposing arbitrary political boundary changes upon people works counter to the fundamentals of inclusion and affiliation.

I accept that redistribution becomes necessary when there are major demographic shifts. Sometimes this may mean that the entire country must face reorganization, or it may simply mean that certain regions must change.

The changes proposed for New Brunswick in many respects fail to make any sense at all. With my own riding, for instance, all the rural areas have been disconnected from the constituency and given over to my colleagues' ridings. Were I selfishly motivated I would support the changes proposed since it would make my job much easier. I would not have to travel the considerable distances to reach the borders of my riding. I would only have to deal with concerns pertinent to an urban setting rather than worry about both rural and urban problems as the distribution now requires.

That is not what being an MP is about. I do not want to lose the rich blend of rural and urban that makes our riding a most unique and inviting place to live. It is obvious that my reasons for supporting the motion to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act are not personally or politically motivated. I know this to be true of my colleagues with a view similar to my own.

I know the people of my riding just as other members are familiar with the citizens in their ridings. We work hard to build communities with our constituents. The people of their respective ridings know the intricacies and peculiarities of their places as well. These are the people who should be deciding where boundaries should be drawn and on what basis changes should be determined.

I do not question the competence or intentions of the commissioners but outside experts do not know our political regions or the people who live there. They cannot make informed decisions