

*Government Orders*

not overlook the fact that the system is in much more need of an overhaul than this bill provides.

There is talk about the need to reduce the number of members of Parliament. This is a matter I support and one which I think this Parliament should examine in greater detail. There has been much talk about building an electoral system around a couple of different concepts, like proportional representation, or perhaps a preferential ballot. This is another matter I support, the discussion of these different systems of elections. We would be doing ourselves an injustice if we did not pursue that debate as well.

• (1550)

The House of Commons is only one part of what we call Parliament. It is impossible and I think irresponsible to reform one part of this picture without addressing the other. I talked about the other place in my remarks on the concurrence motion.

I want to stress again that as long as we are hitching our horse to an electoral system based completely on representation by population, we must address the problems this creates in regional fairness. We can best address this by reforming the second chamber of Parliament. I support the idea of abolishing the currently unelected and unaccountable Senate and replacing it with a new elected, accountable and certainly more useful second chamber that can address more equitably the grievances of the regions.

These matters are all important to addressing the real economic and social issues facing all Canadians. The government should be prepared to take the next step in this matter as soon as the debate on this bill is complete.

In presenting his report to Parliament the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs which by and large drafted this bill, the member for Kingston and the Islands suggested that there were a number of problems with the process of looking at boundary changes. For the most part I agree with him. Those problems have to be addressed.

The member for Kingston and the Islands said there was a problem with the beginning of the process. Newly drafted boundaries maps often appeared to the general public as if by magic. For most ordinary Canadians the first they knew there was a boundary change in process was when they saw a redrawn map published in a local newspaper. The new boundaries appeared as if they were a fait accompli, a done deal. The work had been completed. Although public input was sought at this point, to many Canadians this seemed like a futile gesture. Most of the work had already been done.

Changes considered and brought forward in this bill now make the consultation process start earlier. The public will be notified before the boundaries commissions begin the process of redrawing the maps. Public input will be considered at that

stage. This is very important and I am pleased to see it included. So much of the work goes on in that early decision making that the role of the public must be considered.

At the same time we know today that the existing commissions are not required to justify their rationale for making the early decisions, those decisions which determine the basis for readjusting the boundaries. The new rules will require the commissions to justify themselves. This is also most supportable.

In our own case in Saskatchewan, the most recent commission made its early decision to give our two largest cities, Saskatoon and Regina, four instead of three seats each. That decision subsequently affected every other seat in the province since there were no additional seats to be had in Saskatchewan.

There were 14 seats before redistribution and there were 14 seats after redistribution. When the commission decided to move two additional seats into the urban environment it meant that two rural seats would basically disappear. On that point there was no public input prior to the decision being made. Subsequently the commission was not asked to justify why the two urban seats needed more MPs and the rural areas needed fewer.

In a historical aside, I think it is worth noting that I found in the history of federal representation in Saskatchewan a very interesting circumstance. If we look at the historical record we note that the first federal election in which the newly formed province of Saskatchewan participated was back in 1907. Ten federal constituencies were contested. In 1907 Saskatchewan had 10 seats out of a total of 221 in the House of Commons. That number fluctuated considerably over the years to a high of 21 seats in the elections of 1924 and 1933 when the House total was 245 seats. Today in a House of Commons of 295 members, Saskatchewan residents are represented by 14 MPs.

If the House of Commons expands to 301 seats, we will continue to have the 14 seats for a while but then we will begin to lose seats, eventually ending up with just 10 again sometime in the early part of the next century. After 100 years of history we will be right back to where we started: 10 seats in 1907, 10 seats in 2003.

• (1555)

I might add that according to Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, if the government ever addresses the question of a smaller Parliament, Saskatchewan will again lose more seats. It will likely end up with no more than eight members of Parliament representing every citizen within its provincial borders. This is more than enough reason for Saskatchewan residents to say that we should make sure that we look beyond representation by population in the second chamber and develop a system that will ensure there is fairness in regional representation.