

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

OBJECTION TO REPORT OF COMMISSION FOR PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): On June 14, 1973, notice of objection in the form of a motion was filed with Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, chapter E-2, RSC 1970, to the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I should like to comment for a few moments on the proposed boundaries for Alberta. I shall be followed by other members from the same province. I shall begin by talking about the distribution of the north end of the province. It has been traditional in the past in northern Alberta, as well as in the northern part of all provinces, to allocate almost the whole area to one member. The population in the northern portion of the province is sparse, with small settlements scattered many miles apart which are accessible, generally speaking, only by air and only on certain occasions by land or water; not unlike, I suppose, the situation in the Northwest Territories and in the Yukon.

In order that the people living in such areas have adequate representation, it is necessary for the member to visit these communities on a fairly frequent and regular basis. Having represented one of our northern ridings for the past five years, it is my experience that it is an almost impossible task to provide the type of service to these isolated communities to which the people in the south are accustomed and entitled. In my view, the people of the north are entitled to the same service in this regard as are the people of the southern area.

I suggest that the custom of designating the entire portion of the north end of a province be discontinued and that the northern portion be divided into several parts and allocated in such a way that it is served by several members. It would appear logical to me that if a member represented a smaller portion of such a territory he would be in a better position to serve the area through more frequent and regular visits.

The other objection I have to the proposed boundaries is in general terms. The rural areas have been deprived of representation equal to that of urban areas. Generally speaking, in the past the tradition has been that because of the increasing difficulty involved in representing a rural constituency, because of the distances a representative must travel, it is reasonable to expect a rural riding to have a smaller population than an urban riding which is much easier to service. The distance involved may be only one or two miles and the member can go out in the morning, walk across his riding with no difficulty and return home the same day. Because such a riding is very compact it is much easier to provide service to the constituents, therefore it is possible for the member to look after a larger number of people than could a member in a northern area during a similar period.

Redistribution

I think that is a sensible approach which has been used in the past. In this 1973 report, however, there has been a radical departure from that principle. The departure has been so radical that in fact the population in the proposed new rural area will be greater by a few thousand than the average population in the proposed new urban constituencies. I would be inclined to think the commission was expecting continuation of normal depopulation when it drew up these boundaries. I suppose if one looks at the agricultural policy of this government one could not be blamed for holding that view, but I do not think it is justified. While normal depopulation may continue, I do not think one can justify a situation in which greater areas and larger numbers of people are involved compared to the urban ridings. I therefore vigorously object to that principle.

Insufficient attention has been paid to community of interest and lines of communication in the province in setting out the proposed boundaries in the report of 1973. If we take the northern part of Alberta, for example, all highways lead to Edmonton. That seems to be the general situation in the province. If we take a constituency such as Athabasca as at present or as proposed, it becomes quite obvious that to get from one end to the other, and particularly from east to west, is difficult because there are no good highways or lines of communication by air or water. Most lines of communication are north and south.

In order to travel from east to west in my riding I have to leave the riding four times when going by car. The proposed changes will reduce that problem: I will have to leave my riding twice in order to cross from east to west, and that is an improvement. The point I want to make is that more attention must be paid to lines of communication, particularly highways, because it follows that if you pay attention to lines of communication you also pay attention to community of interest, because community of interest tends to develop along the lines of the highways.

● (1710)

I was a little disappointed with this report because after numerous representations by virtually all representatives of the constituencies the final report came out completely unchanged so far as boundaries are concerned. The only change was to two names. As a result, the hearings appear to have been exercises in futility because no attention was paid to the representations. I suggest that the representations made at that time be reviewed once again and that attention be paid to the matters which were discussed, particularly to the three general topics which I mentioned, namely, that the rural areas be made more uniform in size, that the northern areas be divided into more than one or two pieces, and that rural constituencies have a lower population figure than urban constituencies because of the increased difficulty in servicing these areas. Finally, greater attention must be paid to lines of communication and to community of interest of the population involved in order that better representation can be provided to these people.

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a brief contribution to this debate. My own constituency of Rocky Mountain, which it is proposed to be dissolved on the new map, is undoubtedly an awkward