

Government Orders

\$7.8 million was allocated to the commission. Approximately \$5 million of that has already been spent, the benefit of which will be lost if this process is terminated at this time.

Members talk about the effects on their ridings. I must agree with my colleague from Calgary West that these are not our ridings. We tend to take ownership of these ridings as politicians. If anything the ridings own us, we do not own them. In that sense we have a duty to represent the interests and the wishes of those people in the riding we represent.

A number of questions arise for me on that note. Many of my constituents would wonder why we are effectively throwing \$5 million of taxpayers' hard earned money down the drain to suspend this process. There should be some good reasons for doing so.

I hear arguments about trying to cap the number of MPs in the House of Commons. That is a valid point and I agree with it. However there is nothing in this proposed legislation that would cap the number of seats. Getting away from some vague wording about reviewing the increasing number of seats, let us talk about capping the number of seats. If members opposite had included that in the proposed bill then I think they would have found support from the Reform Party, but they have not. They have only proposed to talk about it. I have a great deal of difficulty with that.

My background is in small business. When we say we are going to do something, we do it. We do not talk about doing it. We do not say we are going to review and study it. We say we are going to do it. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the government could not have included that in the bill.

The boundaries of my riding—I am talking as if I owned it but I do not—the boundaries of the riding I represent, Skeena, will be affected greatly if this current proposal by the electoral commission goes through. Right now my riding is probably one of the largest geographically in Canada and my boundaries are going to increase 20 per cent by my calculations.

It is very difficult for members of Parliament to effectively represent geographically large ridings. A lot of travel is involved. Many small communities are far apart. Many communities in my riding are only accessible by air or water, some of them only by air. I know full well the kinds of problems members have to face in dealing with these ridings. Therefore when the boundaries of my riding expand it sends a lot of warning signals to me and I have some difficulties with it.

I remind members that there is a process. My constituents and I can make representations to the commission when it holds public meetings in Prince Rupert. We can submit our objections or suggestions for changes to the proposals the commission has made. This is a matter of process and something I fully subscribe to.

● (1325)

I understand why many members may not like the proposals in front of them. I do not like the proposals that are in front of me. The ridings of several of my colleagues in the Reform Party will disappear altogether. Members in other parties are facing the same problem.

However there is a process and I have not heard anyone question the process in these debates. I have not heard anyone say that what we have here is the work of a partisan commission which is out to do political damage to one party or another. That is not the case.

What these commissions are doing by all accounts is non-partisan and unbiased. They are attempting to achieve the objectives they have been given under section 51 of the Constitution Act and the Boundaries Readjustment Act. If in fact that is what the commissions have been working toward, then I question why we want to suspend or get involved in the process. Why would we want to have political interference?

We are talking about political interference. A process has been established and it is functioning. Members of Parliament do not like it. Members of Parliament are going to suspend the process so they can change it to something they like. That is political interference. There is no other description for it. What matters in this debate as far as I am concerned is what Canadians want, not what politicians want.

As I said earlier, any of my constituents who do not like the proposals can make representations before the commission on May 31, 1994 in Prince Rupert. The real evidence of voter concern in my riding will become evident through this public forum.

The bill before us if adopted is political interference at best. It opens the door for partisan manoeuvring. Indeed one would have to ask if this is not the real intent of the bill. Why would the government introduce it if it did not intend to gerrymander or play with the boundaries to the way it wants them rather than the way the commissions have proposed them.

Every citizen of this country no matter what their occupation must play by the rules. That is the law of Canada. If you break the rules, you forfeit either your freedom or some of your hard earned money, or both. If you disagree with the validity of the rules or the laws of the land, if you do not like the processes that are in place, you are at liberty to work through lawful means to try to change them. That is a fundamental principle of democracy.

We as members of Parliament are legislators. We make laws, we change laws, we amend laws. Sometimes we even strike laws from the books when we think they no longer represent what Canadians want. However we are not above the law.