

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we are now debating Bill C-69 for the last time in the House. The bill is consequential of Bill C-18 from some time ago and the perceived need to redraw the act which allowed the commissions to redistribute the ridings in various provinces.

The bill is a result of the Liberal fiasco of interrupting the boundary redistribution with Bill C-18. The fiasco was started because Liberal members did not like the new maps produced by the commissions. Making a show out of calling for a fundamental review of the redistribution process, the government ordered new boundary maps drawn under new rules, costing Canadian taxpayers more than \$5 million in wasted commission reports.

Although there have been some minor improvements to the process of selecting boundary commissioners and publicizing the process, no substantial change to the composition of the boundary readjustment commissions, no substantial change to their powers and no substantial change to the method of drawing boundaries are proposed by Bill C-69. All the changes made to the redistribution act could have been made without throwing out the maps produced at great cost.

This whole exercise was a crass political manoeuvre on the part of the Liberals hoping to have boundary lines redrawn closer to their liking. There was no requirement for the redistribution process to be suspended and for the expensive work to be thrown out in order to examine the process.

Notwithstanding the minor technical improvements made to the act, the bill should be defeated by the House for two major reasons. Bill C-69 fails to address the problem of a rapidly growing House of Commons and it lays suspect the concept of equality of vote as a guiding principle in the redistribution process. The bill does not move the House of Commons any closer to respecting the mandate of representation by population, the cornerstone principle for a lower House in a bicameral system.

What is interesting about these two failures is that the Liberal members of the procedure and House affairs committee were initially in favour of tighter variances and a capped or reduced number of seats in the House of Commons. Capping or reducing the number was a major part of the mandate the House gave to the procedure and House affairs committee.

• (1640)

Witnesses were brought in from all over the country to discuss this issue with us. Many of the Liberals on the committee agreed that the restrictions on the size of the House were a good idea.

Allow me to give members a few examples. Going back to our procedure and House affairs committee meetings of last summer, on July 7 the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, a

very active member during this entire process, said: "I have always been in favour of the view that the House should be taking control of its numbers. We ought to, by formula or in another way, be capping the size of the House of Commons. I am in favour of capping, whether it is 250, 300 or something over 300. It is not a big problem".

It seems pretty clear the member for Scarborough—Rouge River was in favour of dealing with the issue of the growth of the House. He was not alone on the Liberal side of the table. At the same meeting the member for Ontario said: "I too support any initiative that might have the effect of limiting or capping the number of seats".

The member for Vancouver Quadra, very experienced in matters of riding redistribution and constitutional considerations, added: "I have no problem at all with capping". He was clear we had to recognize some of the difficulties in doing it.

The Reform members on the committee were able to satisfactorily answer those concerns. The pattern of support for the idea of a smaller or capped House continued into the fall. In our meeting on October 20 the member for Scarborough—Rouge River again indicated his support for the concept: "I oppose further growth in the House without any restrictions. I tend to be in favour of a capping arrangement at some point and I very much want to see that issue addressed".

It is very strange the member has spoken in favour of and has supported the bill at all stages even though that issue is not addressed at all.

The chairman of the procedure and House affairs committee, the member for Kingston and the Islands, wanted to shirk all responsibility for capping the House and leave the problem to a future Parliament.

The Liberal dominated 51st report from the committee says: "Many members of the committee reluctantly came to the conclusion that a cap or reduction in the size of the House of Commons is not feasible at this time".

I got a very different impression from many of the Liberal members during the committee hearings. Reformers demonstrated that a House based on 265 members plus a few more to account for senatorial limitations is workable. We included this in our minority opinion, an opinion the Liberal brass ordered defeated.

On October 20 the member for Vancouver Quadra added: "I think many of us would like a more compact House. This House certainly architecturally has been stretched to the breaking point".

This is all very interesting but when faced with a vote on the issue in that very meeting, all Liberal members voted against a reduced House or a House frozen at 295 members. They all