

*Government Orders*

comments from my hon. colleagues I was impelled to rise and add my two cents worth to the discussion.

• (1605)

I would like to correct the record concerning some comments attributed to the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. He mentioned that the Reformers were disappointed although we opposed Bill C-18 a year ago and I think the phrase he used was that we were weepy about some of the proposed changes. He implied that although we opposed the bill, we actually were not disappointed when it passed and the existing electoral boundaries commissions were subsequently disbanded.

I would like to say for the record that yes, we had some legitimate concerns about the proposed changes. However, we felt and still feel that those concerns could have been adequately addressed through the appropriate process that was in place at the time.

We saw no need to suspend the existing provincial electoral boundaries commissions. We felt that elected representatives in this House should not have any priority over the concerns of the average citizen and that we should make our case either orally in front of the commissions when they travelled around the various provinces or through an appropriate paper trail.

Speaking for myself, I took leave of that opportunity and presented myself to the electoral boundaries commission for British Columbia in Prince George on June 2. I made my case against the proposed changes that it had communicated.

I am pleased to represent one of the larger ridings in British Columbia. It encompasses about 212,000 square kilometres. As we have heard today from a number of members, some rural ridings are very difficult to represent. It is very difficult to get around to all the various areas in one's riding.

I certainly consider my riding one of the more difficult ones in the country to get around. It is the only riding that straddles the Rocky Mountains. Some 60 per cent of the population of my riding is on the Peace River side on the east side of the Rockies and 40 per cent is over on the other side. I had some concerns, as did some other Reform Party members and members from other parties.

I made my presentation at the hearing. Lo and behold, miraculously the commissioners did listen to my presentation. Subsequently, the commission was disbanded and submitted its final report. I was privy to that report when it came out in November. I found that the committee had listened and had responded appropriately concerning the changes it had previously proposed for the Prince George—Bulkley Valley and the Prince George—Peace River ridings. What had actually hap-

pened was that the committee had listened to the member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley and myself and left the ridings as they now exist.

It is also appropriate to mention that even with the existing population of British Columbia which is estimated at some 3.3 million, the number of ridings from the 1991 census will be 34 rather than 32. As I am aware, Elections Canada pegs the number at some 96,531 for the average riding size for a population the size of British Columbia.

The riding of Prince George—Peace River as it currently exists would fall under the 15 per cent variance as proposed in the amendment by my colleague. Therefore, even a large rural riding and one of the more difficult to travel around would still qualify under the reduced variance that Reform is proposing. That should be noted.

One other point I would like to make concerns some comments made by the hon. Bloc members. They seem to have some difficulty understanding how Reform on the one hand supports the concept of a triple E Senate and on the other hand speaks against this larger variance. It is very easy for us to understand. I do not know why it is so difficult for them to understand.

• (1610)

It gets back to what we believe is the fundamental principle of democracy in a two house system. The lower house should be represented as closely and as accurately as possible by representation by population, while the upper house should represent the regions in a geographical sense. I do not understand why the hon. members from Quebec find that so difficult to understand.

I note with real concern that amendments put forward by the Bloc suggest that Quebec should somehow always have some traditional right to 25 per cent of the seats in this House. It goes completely contrary to the defeat of the Charlottetown accord.

As Reformers travelled around the country and particularly in western Canada speaking out against the Charlottetown accord during the referendum campaign, one of the concerns we heard from Canadians was that no area should have a right to a set number of seats in this Chamber and that they should be set by population. Who knows what is going to happen in the future? That was the real reason a lot of people voted against the Charlottetown accord.

In closing, I make note of that for the hon. Bloc members. They should remember their history. Remember that one of the reasons people voted against the Charlottetown accord was that they completely discount this opinion by some Quebecers, not all, that somehow they have an inherent right to 25 per cent of the seats in this House.