

Government Orders

resources which they are able to provide for the operations of government, and to considerations of fairness and practicality.

Canadians would welcome a commitment on the part of this House to limit the number of representatives they must support and instead work more on increasing the quality of representation rather than the quantity of representation.

• (1145)

I urge members of the House to support the amendment that has been put forward and to instruct the committee of the House working on these issues on our behalf to factor into the proposals it brings back to us at the end of its deliberations a specific proposal to cap the number of members of Parliament and, if possible, to reduce it.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of the hon. member who just spoke were very sensible and well thought out. Her predecessor in the debate suggested that it might be worthwhile to say a word or two in support of the concept of reducing the number of politicians in the Canadian political system.

We have 295 members of Parliament in the House. Some years ago we had a total of 181. When I was last a member there were 265. With due respect to everybody in the House, I do not believe the efficiency of a political body increases with increases in numbers of members.

The member quite correctly, and with some precision, pointed out that we were overpoliticized compared to some other jurisdictions and that we had more politicians per capita than many others. As I heard her words I made a quick calculation on the back of an envelope and would like to suggest that the United States senate would need 1,500 members to have the same representation proportionate to population that we have in Canada with the House of Commons. I suggest the hon. lady is quite correct in saying that an attempt to increase the size of the House depending on a formula in relation to numbers of voters and representatives would ultimately destroy the efficiency and effectiveness of the political body.

I suggest the United States senate with its 100 members is a body that works quite effectively. To have 1,500 members would create a body which would not work effectively. Therefore within those two parameters we can all determine where the appropriate level should be. The comments made are well worthy of careful thought.

Canadians have legislatures with large numbers of people. Over 15 years the legislature of British Columbia increased from 55 seats to 75 seats. If we continue that rate of increase in the legislatures of the provinces, if we continue the rate of increase in the Parliament of Canada, the House of Commons of

Canada, we will wind up with quite ineffective chambers in terms of rational, logical debate. That is one point.

These chambers are designed for one person speaking at one time. The more people we squeeze into them, the more limits we need on what they can say and the more rules about time limits or their opportunity to represent their constituents. Those points must be taken into account as well.

For example, with no disrespect, we are not many here today. It was possible with an uncrowded House for us to listen to each of the speakers. That happens when we are in smaller groups. We listen to one another. We tend to go through the logic and say: "Gee, that makes sense" or "Boy, that is dead wrong". We tend to listen. How many people in the House today have not risen, made a speech and sat down afterward just a little irritated that everybody was doing something else, that it was simply a speech for *Hansard*, or that it was not part of the vital process of democracy?

We must remember that as we constantly increase the size of the House the effectiveness of the body is less and less, and more and more we are simply speaking for the record, speaking for the newspapers or speaking for some other purpose than a true debate among members of the House.

Again with no disrespect to this body I believe, looking at my experience in politics at both levels of government, that with 55 members in the British Columbia legislature we spent a lot more time in debate thinking about what the other person was saying, listening to what the other person was saying, and adjusting our ideas in accordance with what the other person was saying. Without suggesting that the House of Commons should have 55 seats, I simply say that smaller bodies tend to be more effective political organizations from that point of view. I was most struck by the words of the hon. member and the previous speaker from another party. I am quite willing to say that I am in complete agreement with much of what she said. The House is too big. My personal belief is that it would be more effective in the range between 220 and 260 seats rather than over 300. It will be over 300 if we do not adopt the process of cutting it back.

• (1150)

I supported the process of putting the whole business of the number of seats to a committee because I believed that the 300-member point was a tripwire. If we cannot keep the House below 300 members we can kiss goodbye any real effort to cut the costs of government in Canada at the political level. If we cannot do something to cut back on the cost of government and at the same time to increase efficiency, why bother asking other elements of government such as the civil service to try it? We as politicians should think very closely about the importance of cutbacks on numbers.