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(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 9, 1995

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 9, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

FINANCE

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a white paper entitled “Enhancing the Safety and Soundness of the Canadian Financial System”.

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[*Translation*]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table in the House today, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments made recently by the government.

Pursuant to Standing Order 110(1), these are deemed referred to the appropriate standing committees, a list of which is attached.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): While I am on my feet I am pleased to table, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), the government’s response to 12 petitions.

* * *

(1005)

BROADCASTING ACT

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-300, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act (broadcasting policy).

He said: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce this bill to amend the Broadcasting Act.

In recent weeks Canadians have made it clear that they dislike intensely the policy of the CRTC in allowing cable companies to demand payment for channels which they have not ordered or authorized. The CRTC in return has said that this is a necessary evil of introducing new channels.

The bill that I have introduced today will amend the broadcast policy section of the Broadcasting Act to ensure that the CRTC no longer has any discretion in terms of necessary evils such as negative option billing. This will limit the control of cable companies over their customers, something about which Canadians have expressed strong opinions.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed.)

* * *

PETITIONS

VIOLENT OFFENDERS

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise before this House on day four to present petition number four. These petitions are being presented on behalf of constituents who wish to halt the early release from prison of Robert Paul Thompson. April 11, 1995 is the date set for the parole hearing.

The petitioners I represent are concerned about making our streets safer for our citizens. They are opposed to the current practice of early release of violent offenders prior to serving the full extent of their sentences.

The petitioners pray that our streets will be made safer for our law-abiding citizens and the families of the victims of convicted murderers.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I have several petitions that I would like to present to the House.

The first petition asks that Parliament ensure that the present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced vigorously and that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the second petition requests that Parliament consider that a very vocal minority of citizens are requesting Parliament to institute a dual marketing system for wheat and barley for export.

Therefore, the petitioners request that Parliament continue to give the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly power in marketing wheat and barley for export.

The third petition is from a similarly small but very vocal group of citizens requesting Parliament to put in place a dual marketing system for the sale of wheat and barley. They also call on Parliament to continue to grant monopoly powers to the Canadian Wheat Board.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the last petition I have requests that Parliament support laws which will severely punish all violent criminals who use weapons in the commission of a crime and support new Criminal Code firearms control provisions which recognize and protect the right of law-abiding citizens to own and use recreational firearms, and support legislation which will repeal and modify existing gun control laws which have not improved public safety or have proven not to be cost effective or have proven to be overly complex so as to be ineffective and/or unenforceable. The number of names on this one is quite extensive.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Allan Kerpan (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am privileged to table in this House today four duly certified petitions on behalf of my constituents of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre.

(1010)

The first petition is signed by 70 people and asks this Parliament to enforce the present provisions of the Criminal Code respecting assisted suicides and that no changes in the law be contemplated by this Parliament.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Allan Kerpan (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like table the wishes of 30 people who humbly pray that this Parliament not amend the human rights code to include in the prohibited grounds of discrimination the undefined phrase sexual orientation.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Allan Kerpan (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I table the concerns of 30 people who ask that this Parliament immediately amend the Criminal Code to extend protection to the unborn child.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Allan Kerpan (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like to table the concerns of 28 people who support and request that Parliament continue to give the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly powers in marketing wheat and barley for export.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to present this morning.

The first is signed by over 100 citizens of Brownsburg, Arundel and Lachute, Quebec. They pray that Parliament not amend the Human Rights Act or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in any way which would tend to indicate societal approval of same sex relationships or of homosexuality, including amending the Human Rights Act to include in the prohibited grounds of discrimination the undefined phrase sexual orientation.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from the Etobicoke region of metropolitan Toronto, 110 citizens have asked that I present a petition praying that Parliament ensure that the present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced vigorously and that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, over 200 citizens have asked me to present a petition with respect to the Young Offenders Act, praying that Parliament recognize and address the concerns they have, in particular to amend the Criminal Code of Canada and the Young Offenders Act to provide for heavier penalties for those convicted of violent crimes.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have the duty and privilege today of presenting a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36, sent to me by Val Lozier of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, signed by residents of Meadow Lake, Green Lake, Loon Lake, Makwa, Dorintosh and Rapid View, all communities in the Battlefords—Meadow Lake constituency.

The petitioners note that the majority of Canadians believe that physicians in Canada should be working to save lives, not end them. Therefore, the petitioners pray that Parliament ensure that present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced and that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

YOUTH

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first has 830 signatures from constituents in my riding of Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the rights and authority of parents over their children have been eroded by legislation and other acts of the Government of Canada, as well as the interpretation of these laws by the courts and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Therefore the petitioners call upon Parliament to return to parents, teachers and people in authority the right to exercise judicious control over the actions of children and protect the rights of people in authority to use reasonable force to modify the behaviour of children as currently set out in the Criminal Code of Canada, section 43.

They are also calling for amendments to the Young Offenders Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other acts that may apply to reinstitute the authority of law enforcement officers in dealing with children or minors.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the second petition adds again to the growing number of people from Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt who are opposed to any additional gun legislation. With this petition there are 1,356 people who now call on Parliament to oppose any further legislation for firearms acquisition and possession and to provide strict guidelines and mandatory sentencing for use or possession of a firearm in the commission of a violent crime.

The people of Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt feel that we have a crime problem, not a gun problem. I agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I think it is time to remind members that when they are presenting petitions, adding to the prayer of the petition is considered debate. I would ask members to keep their interventions short. Even saying you agree with your petitioners is participating in debate.

(1015)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 36 I would like to present this petition from the residents of my constituency of Athabasca.

The petitioners request that Parliament not amend the Canadian Human Rights Act or the charter of rights and freedoms in any way which would tend to indicate societal approval of same sex relationships or of homosexuality, including amending the Canadian Human Rights Act to include in the prohibited

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grounds of discrimination the undefined phrase “sexual orientation”.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36. The petitioners call upon Parliament to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to protect individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Lee Morrison (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is my honour pursuant to Standing Order 36 to table three duly certified petitions from constituents of mine.

The first one is signed by 61 residents primarily of the Assiniboia and Rockglen districts. It calls upon Parliament not to enact any further firearms control legislation, regulations or orders in council.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Lee Morrison (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the second and third petitions are identical in content. One has 53 signatures from the Swift Current and Maple Creek districts, calling upon Parliament to ensure that the provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced vigorously and that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

The wording of the third petition is identical, also calling upon Parliament not to sanction assisted suicide. It has 32 signatures from the Coronach area.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Cliff Breitkreuz (Yellowhead, Ref.): Madam Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 36 I rise to present several petitions signed by constituents of my riding of Yellowhead.

The first petition asks that Parliament not amend the human rights code or the charter of rights and freedoms in any way which would indicate societal approval of same sex relationships.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Cliff Breitkreuz (Yellowhead, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the second petition prays that Parliament extend the same protection to the unborn child as that enjoyed by born human beings.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Cliff Breitkreuz (Yellowhead, Ref.): Madam Speaker, the third petition asks that Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia.

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I am pleased to present these petitions.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. David Anderson (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.) moved:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 68(4)(a), the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House on Friday, November 25, 1994 be concurred in.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to participate in what really is a historic debate. It is historic not because the idea of redistribution is something that is new or that there is anything particularly novel or revolutionary about the bill that is before the House, or will be before the House as a result of today's debate, but because this is the first time in the House we have used a new procedure established about a year ago for dealing with the business of the House in allowing committees to draft and bring in bills.

The 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs contains in it a draft bill to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. In fact it replaces the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. That bill was drafted by the members of the committee who have been working on this for some considerable period of time.

(1020)

As chairman of the committee I am particularly pleased to be able to speak on behalf of the government House leader to propose this motion for concurrence to the House.

Adoption of this motion will constitute an order to the government to bring in a bill based on the committee's report. I

am optimistic that the House will deal with this motion quickly today so that concurrence can be had. The government will then move rapidly to bring in a bill with some minor adjustments possibly in language which can then be referred to the committee once again for a detailed study and possible report to the House and action.

The purpose of this new procedure is to strengthen the role of members of Parliament in bringing their ideas to bear on policy decisions affecting legislation. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had ample opportunity to hear witnesses put forward views on the bill that has been put before the House as part of the committee's report.

In my view the committee members worked together very well and in a very non-partisan way to come up with what in terms of our best judgment would constitute a good new set of rules governing the redistribution of electoral boundaries in Canada.

I would like to thank the members of the legislative counsel branch of the House of Commons, Ms. Diane McMurray and Mr. Louis-Philippe Côté, for their assistance in the drafting of the bill.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, and his staff members, Jacques Girard and Carol Lesage, who assisted the committee in its work.

The committee was also assisted by witnesses from across Canada, who came to Ottawa in July when we spent three days discussing ideas and suggestions on redistribution. I would like to thank them because their help was invaluable.

I would like to thank more particularly the committee members who worked so hard in July and since then, reading the drafts of the report and making suggestions for improvements. My special thanks to the hon. members for Bellechasse, Calgary West and Kindersley—Lloydminster, who, together with government members, tried to find the most effective way to change this legislation.

On this side of the House, the hon. member for Ontario, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River also made a major contribution.

[English]

Our meetings were extremely productive. We worked well together and I think the report reflects that, notwithstanding the dissent of the Reform Party on two important points. I hope to deal with those in my remarks.

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How did we get to this point on this issue? People ask why we embarked on a change in the redistribution act. I suggest there were several problems with the old law and those are the problems we have tried to rectify.

First, the proposed maps which came out last year just shortly after Parliament first met came with no forewarning and no opportunity provided to members of the House for input into what those maps might contain. Members of the House and some members of the public were presented with what appeared to be a fait accompli. It was done at the very opening of a new Parliament immediately following an election based on those maps. The committee has addressed this problem. There will be consultation before the first map is produced the next time.

Second, the commissions were not required to provide any justification for their proposals, although some commissions did so in any case. It was accordingly difficult, if not impossible, for members of the public and for members of Parliament to understand the rationale for the changes that were suggested or for them to make constructive ideas as to how the maps might be improved. The committee has made it plain in its report that commissions must explain the rationale behind their decisions.

(1025)

Third, the criteria for drawing boundaries were very general. Therefore the commissions could take virtually any approach they wished and the approach could differ from one province to another.

We found it difficult as members of Parliament and as members of the public to criticize the proposals because it was almost impossible to have any standard by which those proposals could be measured. The draft bill attempts to clarify the criteria while maintaining the overall principle of effective representation.

Fourth, many members complained that the commissions made completely unnecessary changes to electoral districts just for the sake of doing a redistribution. The committee has also dealt with this matter.

Fifth, many members of the House expressed concern about the size of the House of Commons and its continuing growth. The committee studied the matter but did not recommend any particular change from the present law.

Finally, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing that reported some years ago made a number of recommendations concerning redistribution which were never considered in the last Parliament.

In fact, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act really has not been reviewed thoroughly in 30 years. Therefore the committee took the opportunity to look through every part of the act,

to look at the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing and make a series of recommendations to this House.

The first issue I want to talk about is the cap or reduction in the number of seats in the House of Commons. Members of all parties came to this issue hoping either to cap membership or to reduce the size of the House of Commons. After very careful consideration of the matter, after hearing witnesses on this point and after reviewing the report of the commission I referred to, the majority of the members realized that a cap or reduction was simply not feasible at this time.

Under the present formula, there will be a modest growth in the House from 295 members to 301 after the next election. The difficulty with a cap or a reduction is related to constitutional problems, particularly the guarantee that no province will have fewer seats in the House than there are in the other place.

The number of senators is not equal or related to population size. It is in no way tied in with population as is representation in the House. The cap in the number of seats here would perpetuate the current inequities in representation by ensuring that the provinces which have hit their senate floor cannot go below that and the provinces that are growing would not be able to get the additional seats to which they might otherwise be entitled.

I am aware that members of the Reform Party disagree with the committee's judgment in this matter. They believe that the House could be reduced to 265 members, a significant cut from the current membership of 295. In their view that cut would not significantly jeopardize the equality of votes in this country. That is not a view that is shared by the majority members of this committee, nor does the majority believe it is what Canadians want.

In the province of Ontario most members will represent a riding of approximately 100,000 people. That is a large number of people to represent. It entails a significant volume of work and transactions with the constituents. The Canadian public would not be well served were we to increase significantly the size of ridings.

The ridings in some provinces would get much larger than those in other provinces. Without pointing to any direct examples there are some ridings in Canada that have fewer than 20,000 people in them. That is a very small riding compared with one with 100,000 although obviously the geographic difference in size may be very dramatic and indeed often is.

The difficulties of representation in a country as vast and diverse as Canada obviously are significant ones. The committee tried to grapple with that, but given that the increase was only six members it concluded this was not the time to make any change or reduction.

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Many Canadians say they would like to reduce the size of the House of Commons. However when it comes to accessing a member of Parliament and finding the member available to deal with concerns or to meet with constituents, clearly the opportunities would decrease were we to increase the size of constituencies. My own view is that Canadians would find that they prefer the current set-up or something very similar to it.

In 1986 amendments were made to reduce the growth of the House of Commons. These changes reflected a balance between ensuring representation by population and the desire for a smaller House. Under the pre-1986 formula the House of Commons would have grown to almost 400 members. In comparison, the modest growth to 301 is acceptable and necessary to ensure that the growing places in Canada are well represented.

(1030)

Given the seriousness of the issue however and the genuine interest in dealing with it, the committee recommends this whole matter of the size of the House be revisited with a goal of overcoming the barriers to a cap before the 2001 census. We will have had the benefit of the quinquennial census in 1996. We will be able to see what the growth in the population is and where the shifts have occurred.

If members in the next Parliament feel they are able to make changes to cap the House at 301 or reduce the numbers, they would be free to make that decision based on the further analysis available to them in the 1996 census.

[Translation]

The second problem is the method by which commission members are selected. According to the committee, there was a problem with the selection process. We heard a number of witnesses on the subject, many of whom indicated that we had a good system but there were always certain considerations, political or otherwise, involved in the selection process.

The committee decided that the process could be made far more open and recommended several changes. First of all, applications for positions will be invited by public notice. The Speaker of the House will have to consult several people before proceeding with an appointment, notice of which is to be tabled here in the House.

If members of this House do not agree with the Speaker's decision regarding these appointments and if 20 members have signed a notice of motion, a member may present a motion requesting a vote in the House on one of the appointments. The vote will be crucial, because if the majority considers the appointment is unacceptable, the Speaker must submit another name.

[English]

One of the problems with the way redistribution is done is that after 10 years—redistributions occur after each decennial census, one occurred in 1991 with another occurring in 2001—population growth and shifts are often very significant, resulting in large and disruptive changes to electoral districts, which started out at a reasonable size and have grown into something either very large or very small.

The committee was of the view that if there were more frequent redistributions, this problem could be ameliorated considerably. Accordingly the committee has recommended that after a quinquennial census, that is the short and more simple census that occurs every five years in between the decennial ones, a redistribution would take place within a province. There would be no reallocation of seats among provinces as happens after a decennial census, but there would be within a province a redistribution where figures warrant. We put a minimum on that.

Constituencies would have to be significantly beyond the provincial quotient before such a quinquennial redistribution would take place. By doing this we are optimistic that we will avoid these massive shifts every 10 years. It would happen in certain provinces, probably not very many, after five years. Of course the question of whether or not one occurs depends on the population shifts within the province.

The committee proposes that redistribution will only take place in principle where it is necessary to ensure effective and equal representation.

The second matter is public input and the commissions. One of the major difficulties with the current act is the process for public consultation. Our draft bill proposes a number of improvements that strengthen the role of the public in providing advice to the boundaries commissions. The first is a requirement for the publishing of a public notice at the very beginning of the process. The notice must include the following information: first, the population figures for each electoral district currently on the map; second, the percentage of deviation for each riding from the provincial quotient; and, third, a statement of how the commission plans to proceed.

(1035)

Each commission, therefore, must issue its own policy statement announcing the principles on which it intends to act in performing its redistribution work.

[Translation]

The second change consists in asking the commissions to produce three maps and include their reasons for selecting these boundaries. In this way, the public will be informed of the options available. The public may take part in the commission hearings and suggest alternatives. It can indicate its preference

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for one map or another, without going to the trouble of preparing its own maps. Currently members and the public have a problem because they lack the resources to prepare alternative maps for submission to the commission.

[*English*]

The third change is with respect to the public hearings. The committee was of the view that there should be an additional round of public hearings if the commission makes dramatic changes to the electoral map after soliciting public input.

The final change relates to the process that currently exists whereby there is parliamentary review of the drafts of the commissions.

As members know, following the completion of the commission's second draft, the matter may be referred to a parliamentary committee which may then pass along to the commissions its recommendations. The commissions may accept or reject the recommendations but the process is available only to members of Parliament who make their representations to a parliamentary committee.

This special procedure is being abolished in the new act. All proceedings before the commissions will be in public and there will be no particular special parliamentary input opportunity provided. We think this will make the process more open. We believe it will allow the public to participate in the process and see that there are no back door deals being made between members of the House who may have been considered to be placed in a privileged position vis-à-vis the commissions.

Clearly members of Parliament have an important say in what riding boundaries should be. There are few Canadians more interested in electoral boundaries than the members of the House. However their opportunities to participate in this process should be played out in public in front of the members of the public. We believe that will be the result of this legislation.

The draft bill contains a number of changes to the current provisions that govern how the commissions decide to draw boundaries. We have adopted the principle of the least amount of change. Many members complained that commissions recommended changes for the sake of change rather than because change was necessary.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception made a presentation—it was sent to the committee and I thank him for it—to the commission in Newfoundland where there had been very minor shifts in population and yet boundaries had been altered in several of the ridings in that province when there was really no need to do so on the basis of population change. In his submission to the commission he suggested that the commission should have left the boundaries entirely alone.

We have dealt with that. In a province where there has not been significant change, where there is no increase or decrease

in the number of seats and where there is no particular deviation from the provincial quotient there will not be a commission appointed.

Many people expressed concern about the open-ended way that community of interest is defined in the current act. Commissions really have a carte blanche to interpret the act the way they see fit. Therefore, we have changed the definition of community of interest in an attempt to narrow it and focus it so that it will be a better standard against which to measure the work of commissions.

The committee also heard evidence from members in growing urban areas that commissions did not take into account the fact that their riding was experiencing or was about to experience tremendous growth. Often this is measurable. Plans of subdivisions are registered; the construction is ready to proceed; and it is obvious in some ridings, particularly in the large urban centres, that within a year or two there will be another 10,000 or 15,000 people living in a particular riding.

Commissions will now be able to consider evidence about future growth when they deliberate on the drawing of electoral boundaries and adjust the boundaries accordingly.

(1040)

The proposed bill would also remove the ability of commissions to draw electoral boundaries beyond the 25 per cent allowed variance from a provincial quotient. The current law allows a commission to draw boundaries so that a riding exceeds or is less than the provincial quotient. For example, if the provincial quotient is 100,000 people per riding, the boundaries under the current law could allow for a riding to contain less than 75,000 people or it could allow the constituency to contain more than 125,000.

This will be eliminated in the bill. We will require that if there is to be a riding created that is beyond the quotient I mentioned, the riding must be specified in the schedule to the act. In other words, the House will fix which ridings will be allowed to deviate beyond the parameters set out in the legislation. Those ridings will be named in a schedule and then the boundaries of that riding will not be touched by the commissions.

The committee was of the view that this was the fair way to deal with this issue rather than leave an extended discretion in the commissions.

There was an argument put before the committee and one on which the parties in the committee disagreed, that the 25 per cent deviation was too large. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing and some of the witnesses who appeared before the committee favoured reducing the variance to 15 per cent. The Reform Party has indicated its desire to limit the variance to 15 per cent.

There is considerable merit in the suggestion from the point of view of equity and fairness in the electoral system. I will

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concede that point, I respect members who have taken the view that it is the right way to go because they have strong arguments on their side. Nevertheless for large parts of rural Canada particularly a change to reduce the degree of variance from 25 to 15 per cent would result in a significant shift of seats from rural Canada to urban centres.

There is an argument made, and a very forceful argument by rural members, that the difficulties of representation in a large geographic riding with many communities that involve extensive travel between the parts of the community is more difficult than representation of a few blocks in a city core. Urban members sometimes dispute that.

I would not want to pass judgment on one side or the other. I represent a riding which is largely urban but which has a modest rural component, in the islands in particular.

Mr. Hermanson: Sitting on the fence, no slivers?

Mr. Milliken: No slivers, absolutely no slivers, to satisfy the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster. I do think that there are difficulties in rural representation but there are challenges to urban representation too, of which the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster is unaware. I think his riding is far more rural than many, but perhaps not all.

However I know that he will argue the other side. I want to point out that he is arguing from a position of particular strength because in the province of Saskatchewan the commissions have ignored the 25 per cent variance and have gone to a variance of something like 5 per cent. The 15 per cent would make no difference whatever in his province.

I commend the commission for Saskatchewan for having drawn boundaries this way. I remember in the last Parliament hearing a lot of complaints about the boundaries that were drawn. Those have dissipated this time because we have a new bunch of members from Saskatchewan. We got rid of the complainers and got in a new group that complain about different things. I recognize that some of them are on this side. They are not complaining at all. They are simply delighted. They are pleased with this draft bill and are going to support it. I hope that the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster will share his views with them in due course.

We have decided on the 25 per cent. It is what has been in the law for some time. I submit that it is a reasonable test and standard by which we could operate. To avoid difficulties, particularly a difficulty that would be felt very keenly by rural members and by rural populations in Ontario and Quebec in particular, there is no reason at this stage to advance a change. The committee has left this at 25 and recommends it to the House.

(1045)

In addition to the substantial changes I have outlined, the committee made a number of other changes that will make the system more efficient, including the suspension of the process should an election be called.

In the dissenting opinion of the Reform Party, members of that party argued that the changes in the act proposed by the committee did not justify the suspension of the process. That of course has already taken place and that will be complete if the bill is passed. New commissions will be appointed to operate under the new act. They will be appointed in the manner proposed in the act. They will make their proposals public in the manner proposed in the act and they will be present three maps to the public instead of one.

I do not agree with their position. The changes we have made here are substantive. They are valuable. They are a dramatic improvement of the current electoral system for the reasons I have outlined in my speech. Accordingly I disagree quite strongly with the rather negative view, in my opinion, expressed by members of the Reform Party in the dissenting report.

When they read the report in its entirety, as I know they already have and I am sure they will again, and as they hear the very reasonable remarks I am making today in encouraging them to support this matter, I know the member for Calgary West will recant his heresy and support this excellent proposal from the committee.

I am optimistic that the bill will be dealt with expeditiously. I am optimistic that we can have it in place before June 22, which is the day the old system kicks back in if we do not get a new law passed. This new law represents a good deal for Canadians. It represents a significant improvement over the existing requirements in respect of redistribution. I invite all hon. members to support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will not take the same amount of time as the member for Kingston and the Islands, since, in general, he summarized quite objectively the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Apart from the final part of his speech, which was more of an exchange with the Reform Party than a direct statement on the report tabled, the member for Kingston and the Islands provided a very accurate description of the situation and the proposed amendments.

I would point out that the official opposition participated fully in developing the proposal, which will eventually be submitted to the House, once the report is adopted, so that we will end up with the best possible legislation. We have demonstrated the seriousness of the parliamentary work that all members of this House are called on to perform, even though the aim of our

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political party is to ensure this act does not apply in Quebec and that we will not be covered by it in the next federal election. However, we took part in the committee's work and we took our job seriously.

I will come back in a few minutes, in order to complete the picture, to one or two items the member for Kingston and the Islands did not mention in his statement.

I too, of course, would like to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands, the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and the member for Calgary West, who contributed in a generally non-partisan way to the work that, while not without its flaws, produced excellent results.

I would also like to thank those who helped us, particularly people from the office of the chief electoral officer, namely Jean-Pierre Kingsley, himself, as well as Jacques Girard and Carol Lesage, who provided incredible and ongoing assistance whenever we sought their help and cooperation. I would also thank colleagues who came to Ottawa in June and July, in the height of summer, to make representations before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Where I have more of a problem with the bill that will eventually be tabled, the draft prepared by the committee, is that absolutely no discussion of minimum representation for Quebec was permitted. We ran headlong into the great wall of China in trying to discuss the question of a guarantee of 25 per cent of seats, raised by Senator Rivest when he appeared in June. The idea was that Quebec could never have fewer than 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons, because it would lose its power of influence over decisions being made.

(1050)

Needless to say Senator Rivest is not known as a sovereignist, at least not from the old guard. His point of view was to a large extent taken up by my colleague, the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, when he appeared before the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in July, stating that a constitutional guarantee was required to ensure that Quebec's current 25 per cent of seats be retained regardless of possible fluctuations in its population.

We would of course like to resolve the issue of Quebec's representation in this House in an altogether different manner. But, should Quebec continue to require representation in this House, this critical mass must be recognized, and it is in this sense that all of our colleagues in the House must recognize it, as must Quebec's population in general. While commissions are currently examining Quebec's future, we have not been able to convince our colleagues to subscribe to a proposal guaranteeing 25 per cent of seats to Quebec.

We have a better understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves, that is to say, we are at a juncture where a decision must be made in Quebec between attaining sovereignty, controlling our own laws, creating our own legislation, collecting taxes and signing our own treaties or, on the other hand, becoming a member like any other in the Canadian federation. This will be the true test in the next referendum in Quebec. And Quebecers must know what system will govern them if the outcome of the referendum in Quebec is negative. We can see it already, the slightest request such as this has been denied. The need to guarantee a minimum level of representation for Quebec in the House was not acknowledged. This had to be said at this stage.

Another point made in the report tabled by the member for Kingston and the Islands pertains to so-called special ridings. Under present legislation, provincial commissions may consider special circumstances and allow for greater fluctuations in a riding's population than provincially allowed. Thus if we take the classic example of a riding with 100,000 voters, the number of voters could currently vary from 75,000 to 125,000, given the 25 per cent deviation allowed. But, as it stands, the current legislation grants provincial commissions the discretion to take special circumstances into consideration, for example, the riding of Labrador, which does not meet the electoral quotient, and Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which, as it was mentioned several times in committee, may not meet it.

This will no longer be possible in the future, since a provision stipulates that special cases will have to be listed in a schedule to the bill. For reasons which are debatable, the committee chose to adopt such a schedule blindly, that is to say ridings to be listed in the schedule were not debated in committee. This could be a valid way of doing things; we will see as we go on.

However, what the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should be doing, in my opinion, is undertaking far-reaching consultations, not just reserved for parliamentarians. It is all well and good that the hon. member for Labrador make representations, for example, that his riding be included in the schedule or that the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine make representations that Îles-de-la-Madeleine recover the independent riding status it enjoyed before 1968.

(1055)

But in my opinion, the committee should open its consultation process up to the community and allow the local population and others to state their opinions. It seems obvious that the ridings of Labrador and Îles-de-la-Madeleine should be allowed to elect a member although their populations are lower than what the act stipulates, and it may well be that, for very special reasons, people elsewhere in Canada may reasonably argue that their ridings should be listed in the schedule. For the schedule to truly reflect the wishes of the people and for the members of this

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House to truly understand those wishes, the consultation process must be opened up.

If it turns out that it is impossible to hold open hearings for all members of the public to air their views—and then we would have to find some other suitable means—I suggest that we revert to the current procedure whereby provincial commissions are granted the discretion to take special circumstances into consideration. And in cases like Labrador, Îles-de-la-Madeleine, maybe Manicouagan and the Gaspé Peninsula, they should be able to allow a deviation of more than the proposed 25 per cent which has been the generally accepted criterion since 1964, when the independent commissions were created and the House stopped drawing up the electoral maps.

At any rate, we will have the opportunity to discuss this issue again before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and to find the best possible solution.

It was mentioned earlier that the population would be consulted more. Yes, there will be more public consultation, and that is normal because the electoral map is designed first and foremost for the people and not for the elected members of Parliament. Everyone agrees with this principle, including myself. Just as electoral laws are designed for the voters and not for the elected parliamentarians. We are the ones who must meet these criteria.

The process for designating provincial commission members was greatly improved. The process now taking place behind closed doors will be replaced with a much more open process in which the members will be appointed jointly by the Speaker of the House and the province's chief justice. There may even be a parliamentary debate if at least 20 members of this House request it. We think that opening up the process is an excellent thing.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs discussed for several months the issue of limiting or reducing the number of members in this House. This proposal was particularly favoured by our colleagues from the Reform Party.

Basically, we agree with the proposal to reduce the number of members in this House. However, we do not look at the issue in the same way. Of course, we in the Bloc Québécois want to cut the number of members in this House from 295 to 220, simply by removing the 75 members from Quebec who will leave this House after the referendum.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Langlois: As you can see, this will free a number of seats amounting to about half of those reserved for the opposition from all parties.

There is no need to renovate the House, tear down walls or push back everything to my left or in front of you, Madam Speaker. The House will see a major change after the Quebec referendum, since half our side of the House can be used to make room for bigger desks for the other members, as they see fit. The right to self-determination also applies to Canada. Our Canadian friends will be free to refurbish this House as they see fit.

(1100)

Quinquennial censuses will, of course, produce data allowing us to make timely changes to the electoral map much more quickly and avoid the major changes required after decennial censuses, which confuse the population. This is also a desirable improvement which was brought by the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Someone said earlier that members would no longer have a say in this. I entirely agree with the fact that members—contrary to what has been the case for the past 30 years—should no longer have the last word on electoral boundaries redistribution, but until now they did have some input—and they still do since the legislation has not been amended—so that commissions were able to consider problems that might be raised by members.

I am not sure whether it is such a good idea to eliminate the right of members to comment, since they may want to make recommendations, which the commissions may or may not consider. I agree that members should not have the last say on electoral boundaries, but I would question the wisdom of not letting them intervene at all.

Of course, members can go before the provincial commissions. But would it not be a good idea to let members intervene specifically as a group, as parliamentarians, either directly or through a committee like the one on procedure and House affairs?

That being said, I simply want to remind the House that the non-partisan approach that was apparent throughout the proceedings of the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is an indication that working through a committee like the one that tabled its report this morning can be very effective. As far as the other committees are concerned, we will have to wait and see. However, I hope we will soon see other standing committees take the same non-partisan approach we have seen in the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Motion No. 20.

On April 19 of last year this House gave a mandate to the procedure and House affairs committee to investigate the process of adjusting boundaries of electoral districts and to bring forward a bill for this House to consider. The committee was specifically mandated to formulate a cap or to reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons, to look at the

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adequacy of the present method of selecting the members of the electoral boundaries commissions, to look at the rules and criteria used by the commissions to alter the boundary lines, and to review the involvement of the public and the House of Commons in the work of the boundary commissions.

Bill C-18 which received royal assent on June 15, 1994 was a serious interruption of the non-partisan electoral process. It suspended the existing Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. Such a move on the part of the government could only be justified, and I stress this, if it makes significant improvements or modifications to the boundary readjustment process.

There are no significant modifications proposed in this bill. That is not to say there are no improvements being proposed. Many of the smaller issues were dealt with in a very satisfactory manner. Where the government proposal falls short is on the larger issues. There are three: the size of the House, the size of population variance of the individual ridings, and the rules governing the adjustment of boundaries.

(1105)

The positive aspects of the bill are easier to deal with in smaller numbers so I will mention them first.

First, the process of instructing a standing committee to prepare the bill has been a positive and productive exercise. Unfortunately there is a majority of Liberal members on the committee. In the final outcome they have their say. Some very good proposals were set aside because the majority was not willing to listen to other members and participants on the committee.

Particularly I would like to commend the staff of Elections Canada, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley in particular, whose assistance in drafting the bill was invaluable. I would encourage this House to continue using the committee procedure that we used in the future.

It was also a pleasure to work specifically with the chair of the committee that was very fair in hearing all sides of the presentations with regard to this matter. We appreciated the involvement of the Official Opposition, although it seemed to be a bit of an academic exercise when, as my colleague for Bellechasse mentioned, its motive is to extricate itself entirely from this House. I was rather surprised to see a member of the government, the Liberal side, applauding it. I think it was the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore applauding that. Perhaps there is a separatist on the Liberal side as well. I am not sure.

There was invaluable input by the member for Calgary West who is a constitutional expert and is very knowledgeable about the Elections Act. I appreciated his input on the committee. It was a pleasure to serve with him.

Another improvement is the redistribution of ridings within each province to occur following each quinquennial census. These mini adjustments every five years will lessen the dramatic and highly disruptive changes that have occurred in the past. The Canadian population can change drastically over 10 years. Smaller changes brought about more often are preferable to the current practice.

The government's refusal to accept the last redistribution is evidence that smaller changes are easier for people to accept. An additional bonus of a five-year distribution is a much shorter time frame for the redistribution process.

The boundary commissions will be encouraged to make the public better informed of their work and to provide alternatives to each distribution proposed. While the role and involvement of the public is increased, the influence of members of Parliament is reduced. I applaud that. If MPs have an intervention they wish to make, they are encouraged to take part in the existing public meetings. I see this change as a positive step in ensuring the boundary and readjustment process remains as politically neutral as possible.

I do not believe boundaries should be changed and preserved solely for the ease of the campaigning of the sitting member. Granted all members would like to run in an area where they have already won an election because they have developed many contacts and made many friendships during the years they represented that area. However, deliberately altering the redistribution procedure to give an incumbent MP an advantage would be a very serious breach of political ethics.

The irony of the suspension of the redistribution process is the process that was already in existence worked when MPs or members of the public were dissatisfied with the boundary commission proposal. There was already a procedure in place to have changes made to electoral maps. If the members took the time to make presentations at boundary commission hearings, they could do so.

The member for Prince George—Peace River and a number of his constituents made a presentation to the British Columbia boundaries commission. The commission considered their proposal and made alterations to the proposed constituency lines. Some of the Liberals of Ontario have done the same thing. There may not have been the need for the undemocratic Bill C-18. The Liberals panicked. That was unfortunate.

As for the process of selecting and reviewing the appointment of boundary commissioners, minor but sensible changes were made to the role and authority of the chief electoral officer, and the manner of redistribution has been clarified.

These aspects of the bill are positive. That being said, all those improvements and changes could have been made without interrupting the redistribution process and without throwing out

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the \$5 million worth of reports produced by the boundary commissions.

The report of the procedure and House affairs committee fails on every major issue on which it was mandated to act, namely the number of seats in the House of Commons, the population variance of the electoral districts and the priority of criteria used to determine new boundary lines.

Most Canadians want less government. Most Canadians believe there are already too many MPs. Even when presented with a workable solution that reduced the number of seats in the House, the Liberals refused to take any action as to its size. They refused to reduce the number of seats, to cap the number of seats both at the current membership of 295 and 301, as is proposed.

(1110)

They even refused to reduce the growth of the House in the future. It seems like the Liberals were willing to put self-interest ahead of the national interest. That is truly regrettable. Their reasons for refusing to act are pretty flimsy. They claim that such a cap or reduction in the size of the House of Commons is not feasible at this time. They lack the political courage to act because they say the number of seats that would be taken away would be insignificant and could be regarded as highly disruptive.

The Liberals also quote constitutional problems in limiting the size of the House of Commons. These problems arise because of the way Senate seats are allocated. Using the House of Commons to make up for the inadequacies of the other place is unacceptable.

It is the refusal of this government like the Tories before it to reform the upper chamber so that it actually represents the provinces and regions of this country effectively that is creating the problem of uneven representation in this House. The House of Commons is supposed to be the chamber where all Canadians are represented equally.

Representation by population is the principle upon which this House is built. The upper chamber is completely ineffective in representing provincial and regional interests as a result of being unelected and unequal.

Just because the modern Senate is increasingly incompatible with the confederation of today, that is no reason to prevent this House from representing Canadians as well as it could. It would seem that the government's resistance to an improved Senate is hampering the effectiveness of this House.

It is in the best interests of all Canadians to have the House of Commons organized as efficiently as possible. If this arrangement has the additional benefit of creating pressure for a reformed

Senate, that would be a bonus. We should not weaken the House of Commons by binding it to its present form, nor should we allow it to grow out of control for the sole purpose of avoiding making changes to an out of date Senate.

There is no excuse for refusing to establish a smaller House of Commons. In my own province of Saskatchewan, people would be willing to accept having fewer MPs as long as the reductions were equitable with reductions to other provinces as well.

As a matter of fact, in the province of Saskatchewan the number of provincial seats has been reduced and the public has accepted it and embraced it. Perhaps it is something that the federal government should have a look at.

If as a result of the reduction of MPs Canadians got a triple-E Senate, elected by them, accountable to them and working in their best interests instead of being partisan rubber stamps, it would make the opportunity to save taxpayers money by electing fewer MPs even more attractive to them.

I have heard that many Liberals from rural ridings in Ontario complain about the problems associated with geographically large ridings. However, I have a riding that stretches more than a four and a half hour car ride in some directions. I can say that if members are resourceful and committed to serving their constituents it is more than possible to adequately serve the needs of a large riding.

For instance, I have set up a mobile constituency office that travels around the riding to get to people who cannot get to me. We already allow extra travel allowances to members with large ridings. If as a result of a reduced House some ridings become bigger, the cost of the extra travel will hardly make a dent in the savings from having fewer members.

Modern communications technology makes more constituent contact possible. Increased use of available technology makes this possible without extended travel. I want to tell members of the House who represent urban ridings that no matter how concentrated and compact their riding is, I can fax across mine faster than they can drive across theirs.

Fewer ridings will mean that each MP will serve more constituents. Again I would argue that the modest increases in resources of a member's office either in staff or equipment is a more cost effective way of dealing with the needs of Canadians than having more members. Not only do Canadians want fewer federal politicians, but it makes good fiscal sense as well.

The Liberals are refusing to do anything about the size of the House. They took the political easy way out. They recommended that somebody else, possibly a future Parliament, do something about the growth of the House.

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The time to take action is now because the problem is now. This bill is an excellent opportunity to deal with the issue. No time in the future will be any better than the opportunity we have right now. I would imagine that the Liberals in the future, if there are any, will be no more willing to deal with the problem than those in this government are now. They are simply unwilling to entertain any solution which varies from status quo thinking. Liberals simply never want to take action on anything.

Another major flaw in this legislation is that it does nothing to solve the problem of some ridings, even the ones in the same province, with varied levels of population.

(1115)

A plus or minus 25 per cent variance means that even within the same province one constituency can have a population approximately twice as large as another. This is an unacceptable variance in voting power. I urge all members to remember that this variance is not between ridings which have suffered recent population changes that are about to be corrected. Rather, this is a starting point. This is how the commissions are allowed to set things up in the first place.

Ridings may start off with this large variance and then go through five years of population change before anything is done about it. As unequal as that may seem, this large variance will be exceeded by those ridings that will be placed into a special schedule.

The schedule ridings are exempt from the allowable quotient. If there is already a huge allowable variance available to the commissions, surely there is no need for a special schedule. Conversely, if a schedule of special cases is to be created, such a large variance is not required.

One member of Parliament can represent anywhere from fewer than 20,000 constituents to over 120,000 constituents. That is incredible and that is the starting point, if we include a schedule plus a huge variance of 25 per cent.

The reasoning behind including both is beyond the wildest dreams of the gerrymanders. If the House determines which seat should go on a schedule, it provides tremendous opportunity for biases along party lines, for biases among rural versus urban members, for the opportunity for infighting and horrible conduct on the part of MPs. The encouragement of horrible conduct on the part of members and parties is not something that I would want to see. It did not have to be there. They could have corrected this problem.

I urge all members of the House to vote against the report until this gross inequity is resolved. Having these two flaws in the bill at the same time makes a mockery of the principle of equality of voting power even within the same province. The situation is further exacerbated by the constitutional requirement to start out with unequal provincial representation.

As it is plain to see, the legislation the report recommends does nothing to guarantee or even encourage the electoral equality of Canadians. This alone is reason enough to warrant the defeat of the bill unless corrected by amendment.

The third area of weakness in the bill is the primacy it gives to community of interest over voter equity. While not stated as such, boundary commissioners are instructed to consider sociological considerations ahead of making constituencies reasonably numerically equal. That is an automatic consequence of having such a high population variant quotient.

This is a social engineer's dream. These considerations combined with overly generous variances will result in a system that represents Canadians by characteristic rather than as citizens of a specific geographic area. It is this manifestation of special interest politics that we wish to avoid.

Some of the considerations found within the definition of community of interest can and should be used to break the tie between alternative proposals with comparable voter equity. They should not be used as a primary factor in determining electoral boundaries.

As I stated in the beginning of my remarks, the minor improvements made to the redistribution process do not save the bill from its vast omissions, flaws and missed opportunities. The legislation proposed by the report in no way justifies the action taken by the government to interrupt the pre-existing process.

The actions of government members in producing the report confirm that the original motive behind Bill C-18 was crass partisan manipulation of the electoral process. Ontario Liberal backbenchers and a few from Atlantic Canada were not happy that their ridings were changed. They appeared before committee and told us that was the problem. When a party wins almost all the ridings in a province, why would it not try every trick in the book to play again on the same field?

The government motive here was to redo the last redistribution simply because the new lines were not put on the map where it wanted them to be. Some of them went down Sixth Avenue rather than Tenth Avenue.

Bill C-18 was brought in as an attempt to cover the whole operation in the guise of opening the process to improve and modernize it. This report and the lack of meaningful change it contains prove there never was a sincere intention of significant improvement or modernization.

(1120)

Let us talk about the real crux of the matter. The problem is that the country needs reform in many areas. One of the lesser priorities is electoral reform. It is an important area, I agree, and I know my colleagues would accept that. However we need social program reform. We need reforms to the way we expend funds from this place. We need reform of our justice system. The Liberal tradition is to talk about reform but in the end to do nothing about reform. It is becoming very clear that the only

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people who will really reform the country are those who bear the name Reform in their party title.

Canada has a very proud democratic tradition. Canadians deserve the best electoral system that can be provided. I assure the House that I will work for positive and constructive electoral reform. I will work for reform of the Senate. I will continue to work for a capping and a reduction of the seats in the House of Commons, not because it helps me out but because it is what Canadians want. They want action. They want real reform.

The motion the government has presented to enact the bill, a new boundary readjustment act, is not real reform. It is a matter of tinkering around the edges, a bit of cosmetics to try to cover up the fact that it did not approve of where the boundaries were drawn in the last readjustment process.

Mr. Milliken: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I regret to interrupt, but I wonder if I could seek unanimous consent of the House to revert to tabling of documents. A document that should have been tabled this morning was not and I am seeking unanimous consent to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I am pleased to table a special report on suicide among aboriginal people entitled "Choosing Life", prepared by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, in both official languages.

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[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question

of the hon. member who just spoke. I begin by saying that one thing Reformers do not have is a sense of humour. Oftentimes in discussion we need a sense of humour.

I thought the hon. member across the way was alluding to the fact that they were making way for 75 Liberals on the other side of the room. That was really what my applause was: the fact that we would have 75 Liberals across the room looking directly to the rest of us on this side of the House. They would be replacing the ones who are presently there.

Somehow I seem to be confused by the convoluted discussions around what is, what is not, and what Reformers are and are not for. What are the positive aspects of the bill that he supports? They seem to have been lost in the argument.

Mr. Hermanson: Madam Speaker, I assure the hon. member that the Reform caucus has a wonderful sense of humour. We are very amused at the Liberal polka represented in this bill and in many others: one step forward, two steps backward and side-step the issue.

There are some positives in the bill or the motion that may become a bill if the government so chooses. One of the more positive aspects to which I am sure other colleagues will also refer is the selection of commissioners. There are some minor improvements in the selection of boundary commissioners. There is more consultation with members of the House. It could become less the sole jurisdiction of the Speaker to choose the two commissioners selected from the federal level. Of course the provincial selection remains unchanged.

Another positive aspect is the alternatives that will be presented to constituents. Rather than presenting one map, there is the potential of three: one preferred and two alternative maps. These are minor improvements that certainly did not justify a suspension of the process.

Other than those minor details there are more flaws and omissions. What really concerns me is the omissions and the lack of change in the bill. Had we wanted to make these minor improvements we could have done that in the form of an amendment to the bill that could have taken place while the existing process was under way.

(1125)

What has happened is that the initial adjustment process started some time ago was interrupted by elections. In fact we have some terrible discrepancies. We now have members representing huge populations while others are representing very few Canadians. The bill does not correct that problem. It just tinkers around the edges and makes a few cosmetic changes and few minor improvements.

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Mr. Harold Culbert (Carleton—Charlotte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of points to make and perhaps a question I would like to address to the hon. member across the way.

I listened very carefully to the comments he made. They were somewhat in depth. Being from the province of New Brunswick, one thing we found with the presentation to us shortly after coming to the House was that there was a unilateral change. There were no additional seats. There was no need for additional seats. There would still be 10 seats in the province of New Brunswick, the same as before. Yet every riding in the province of New Brunswick, according to the new proposed mapping, was to be changed.

From my perspective politically the changes in my riding would have been great. I represent my constituents. The message they brought forward to me was about why we were making changes and spending millions of dollars for the sake of change. I had to admit that in that light it made absolutely no sense to me.

I particularly wanted constituents with concerns to appear before the committee to make comments. I intentionally did not appear at that committee hearing because of the exact reasons the hon. member suggested. I did not want it to be perceived in any way that there was a political reason for making those suggestions.

The comment to me was why change for the sake of change. Because a couple of urban areas slightly increased in population, they were going to change 10 ridings in the province of New Brunswick and spend millions of dollars. This makes absolutely no sense.

I would like to address this type of issue. It occurred not only in New Brunswick but in several other provinces as well. Addressed in the bill is the criterion that we can look at it and make some sense of it from the perspective of the Canadian taxpayers who ultimately will be paying for the changes in redistributions or riding maps.

I would ask the hon. member to comment, relative to the concerns he had previously made.

Mr. Hermanson: Madam Speaker, the member for Carleton—Charlotte makes a very good point. It was raised by many MPs who appeared before the committee. If any readjustment is required in a province it creates a domino effect.

Certainly my province of Saskatchewan is very similar to New Brunswick. Many constituencies have not seen significant population change. However the fact that one or two areas have seen population change—and it is usually an urban area that grows—it means the boundaries somewhere in that province have to be redrawn. As soon as boundaries are redrawn they affect neighbouring constituencies that would have less people as a result of boundaries around the city being tightened. It affects the next one and the next one.

Once we pass our accepted variance limits and begin to draw the first boundary, in most instances the boundaries within the entire province are redrawn. It is an unavoidable problem even though maybe three-quarters of the land mass is not significantly affected by the population change. The new process will not significantly change that.

In response to the member from Etobicoke, another improvement is that readjustment will take place every five years, which may mean that changes will be a little smaller; they will not be as massive as they were in the past.

(1130)

As soon as we begin to draw a boundary, for example if we draw a boundary around Carleton—Charlotte, it will affect neighbouring ridings and there is no avoiding that. No matter if it is every five years or every ten years we have to redraw all the boundaries in the entire province. The key then is to make those boundaries in the best possible places. That is the job of the commissioners with public input which they had in the previous legislation and which they will have in this legislation.

Again, there are some minor improvements in this legislation which allows for a little more public input and some alternatives.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot resist asking a question of the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster who I thought really scraped the bottom of the barrel to find complaints about the committee report.

However, I congratulate him on his speech where at least he vigorously defended the Reform Party position in respect of the two principal issues on which we disagree. I think he is picking up and harping on a subject that I know the hon. member for Calgary West will harp on when he gets on his feet. That is the bill to suspend the current redistribution system which in his heart of hearts he knows is flawed.

He realizes that many of his own members found the proposals of the commission quite unacceptable when they came out. It just so happens that he did not in his case. He knows that some of his colleagues did. I know the hon. member for Calgary West was not very happy with the proposals when they first appeared. I know that the members from British Columbia were quite unhappy with the proposals when they appeared. That was true across this House in every party where there were members from British Columbia.

I think the hon. member realizes that while he can denounce to his heart's content and look for difficulties, really he knows that the previous process was flawed and needed some repair. He must acknowledge, and I invite him to do so, that the proposals put forward in this bill are not tiddly-winks as he suggests. In fact they are significant improvements on what was there

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before, particularly the appointment process for members of the commissions and particularly the requirement on the part of the commissions that they publish their proposed way of doing things in advance before they embark on map drawing. Then when they have done their map drawing they present three maps instead of one.

Surely that is a very significant improvement which cannot be ignored. It is not some minor adjustment as the hon. member is trying to suggest in his speech which I think unfairly represents the very diligent work the committee has done.

Mr. Hermanson: Madam Speaker, I suggest to the member for Kingston and the Islands that the improvement is certainly valid but certainly is not worth the \$5 million of taxpayers money that was spent to suspend the process and start over again.

I would indicate to the member that I might be willing to bet my MPs trading card that his members will probably not be entirely pleased with the new boundaries as they will be drawn up next time. We will never please all the members of this House when we redraw the boundaries. It is absolutely impossible.

In closing, with regard to the other point the hon. member made, yes, members of our party were unhappy with the way the boundaries were readjusted. However we respect and are prepared to play by the rules, including the member for Calgary West.

The people from the city of Calgary who appeared before the commission and made their representations in fact saw some amendments to the electoral map that made some improvements. They used the system, made it work. It was an impartial commission that heard it. They corrected the problem. They played by the rules. The Liberals were not prepared to play by the rules. They wanted to make their own.

Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to speak in favour of the government motion for concurrence in the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the electoral boundaries adjustment process.

The issue of governance is one that affects every member. As the member for Mississauga West with the second largest and possibly the most diverse riding in the country I have a keen interest in the bill before the House today which can affect my riding profoundly. It is definitely not tiddly-winks in this one.

Canada has a long tradition of fairness and compromise in dealing with the allocation of ridings in our nation. Since Confederation this House has taken extraordinary steps to ensure that such diverse areas of Canada as Prince Edward Island, Quebec and the Northwest Territories each receive special consideration. While Canada is a federation of many different cultures, ways of life and ethnic backgrounds, the ties

that bind this country have from time to time been rather tenuous.

One of the most important ties we do have is a strong federal government represented by members of Parliament who are seated in this House. In order to build harmony and foster a sense of balance and fairness, we must occasionally examine and adjust the way we are governed and the method by which we choose those representatives who are seated here today. Our prime concern should be one of fairness and equity.

(1135)

In 1900 over 80 per cent of Canada was rural and largely English or French background but we have changed rather dramatically. In 1995 we are largely urban with a huge influx of new Canadians, each with different points of view and a strong desire to participate in the new land they now call home. Yet representing this diverse population in a fair and equitable way through the redistribution of ridings remains a highly controversial issue.

In the riding of Mississauga West over 250,000 residents struggle each day to pay bills, become familiar with new customs and pursue their piece of the Canadian dream. This riding is at least the size of three average Ontario constituencies and double the entire population of Prince Edward Island, which by the way sends four excellent members to this House.

Clearly the time has come to address the challenges presented by a rapidly growing, highly urbanized area such as Mississauga West. Over 40 per cent of this riding speaks neither official language. With many of the 131 languages spoken, schools have fewer than 10 per cent English or French speaking students. This is an amazing transition in only 10 years.

As background I point to the growth patterns of the city of Mississauga in the region of Peel. Since its incorporation in 1974 Mississauga has tripled in size. Growth projections provided by city staff show a steady, planned, accurate and predictable growth pattern.

In 1974 the population was 165,000. It currently is just over 500,000. Only the recessions of 1982-83 and 1993-94 slowed a very steady and dramatic pattern of growth. This year Mississauga is Canada's ninth largest and again fastest growing city. I represent half of it.

With more than \$850 million in new development we have exceeded the predictions for this year by more than \$250 million, a figure which matches the pre-recession levels of growth for 1988-89. Industrial growth in 1994 was also 30 per cent ahead of the previous year.

I remind the House that these growth rates are equally common throughout the entire greater Toronto area. In the areas like Markham, Brampton and Oakville the story is very similar. New urban areas attract thousands of people annually along with new businesses and an appetite for government services, not to

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mention a vocal and persistent desire for direct access to their member of Parliament.

We all know how much work it is to build new cities. Each of us knows of the struggles to fund schools, roads, parks and other aspects of infrastructure. These are the urgent and visible needs of all new communities. What are the less visible needs? Many new Canadians require a great deal of help from their federal member and his or her riding office. There is no longer a tradition of volunteer community help to fall back on, as is more common in rural areas. Urban areas tend to be more threatening, less welcoming and frankly, tougher places to fit into.

My own riding office routinely deals with over 100 phone calls per day. The majority of those involve relatively complicated questions dealing with immigration and unemployment, not to mention pertinent advice and instant solutions to all our budgetary problems.

The cultural and language problems are immense. Imagine trying to deal with at least 40 different major ethnic groups, each with special needs and problems. By now members of my staff have learned bits of language from all around the world as they try to offer friendly and efficient assistance to the best of their abilities. I actually have one staff member who is in hospital.

These are just some of the problems with monster ridings like Mississauga West. I know that as I speak each of us is thinking about our own home riding, its problems, its challenges and its special situations. In that respect we are all alike in this House, men and women trying to do the best we can in the situations we are faced with each day.

However rapidly growing areas such as York North, Ontario riding, Scarborough and Mississauga West need special consideration in dealing with redistribution. This report goes an immense distance toward meeting the needs of such high growth communities.

I draw attention to the size variable of plus or minus 25 per cent which has been discussed in this House. This provision will allow high growth areas more flexibility in establishing realistic long term boundaries. Such growth predictions and subsequent planning efforts are relatively accurate. Growth areas can be easily identified and subsequent adjustments made. There is very little risk of error, judging from past predictions and actual growth patterns.

The new electoral boundaries process will include the direction that a commission be established following each five-year mini census if more than 10 per cent of the province's constitu-

encies vary by more than 25 per cent from the provincial average.

(1140)

These five-year mini census adjustments further serve as a method to ensure fairness in riding sizes without changing the actual number of seats for each province. Thus an area like Mississauga West or Mississauga generally could be divided into four or five ridings, each with 25 per cent room for growth.

In effect for the first time ever we would be exhibiting good planning and a recognition of the special circumstances in which cities like Mississauga find themselves. After all, politicians serve people, not geography. Politicians work for people, not hills, mountains and fields.

In the past, growth has overwhelmed ridings such as Mississauga West which expanded from 140,000 to 250,000 people in 10 years and from 80,000 to 163,000 eligible registered voters. Ten-year adjustments are inadequate. We need to recognize that the urban residents in new communities create tremendous work while their area is expanding and establishing its roots.

Federal services do not keep pace, further adding to the burden on an MP's office. Unemployment insurance offices, Canada Post, passport centres and district tax offices cannot keep up. The flight of city dwellers to suburban areas is much quicker than the corresponding addition of new federal services to meet their demands. We know that many immigrants who currently land at Pearson airport will settle in the outskirts of urban centres where taxes, rents and services are less expensive.

The 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding electoral boundaries also recognizes an often overlooked aspect to riding boundaries: communities of interest and existing municipal boundaries. In the past the gremlins of redistribution often cobbled together some fairly innovative, if convoluted, riding boundaries. Many were more representative of a pretzel than a riding. I can only speculate on the motive behind the more innovative electoral creations.

Suffice it to say the best interest of communities and of people will only be served if the riding boundaries are sensitive to communities of interest. They must recognize the cohesiveness and shared concerns of certain geographic or municipal areas.

Some proposals in the recent past had Brampton and part of Mississauga in the same riding. This may not be troubling to some people, since we know Mississauga is the gateway to Brampton, possibly the centre of the new universe as I know it, but it does create problems of a practical nature.

Think of the extra unnecessary work created in a riding that is geographically split or extremely diverse in interests, economics or lifestyle. It becomes a delicate and largely futile effort to

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keep many very different areas in balance. My colleague for Bramalea—Gore—Malton knows exactly of what I speak.

The report we are debating today addresses these sensitive situations. The new guidelines also provide a greater opportunity to enhance our relationships with area municipalities, not unlike the very co-operative process under which the government's infrastructure program was developed and implemented.

Local planning staff, area residents and municipal leaders will have a far greater role and responsibility in ensuring the needs of their communities are taken into consideration long before final boundaries are decided on. MPs will not be required to make the decisions of King Solomon, with very diverse interests forcing a member to choose between one community of interest and another quite opposite one.

There is another innovation. This report specifies, as has been mentioned, that three different alternatives for each riding redistribution be presented by the electoral commission with a detailed rationale for the one they have chosen. The commission will collect and justify its preferred option, but the alternatives will be available to those who wish to raise objections for the first time ever.

This new procedure alone adds immeasurably to the empowerment of local citizens and civic officials. The hearings will then allow citizens to select another option with equal population distribution based on alternative communities of interest or geographic characteristics.

Until now the boundary setting process has been at very best something of a mystical, partisan federal rite occurring once within each decade. Now the process will be viewed as clear cut, straightforward and inclusive. The five-year review is a further refinement, reflecting the belief that expanding areas change dramatically in a short period of time and therefore need more than the current ten-year review.

Last, the report attempts to bring fairness and balance into riding redistribution. We must be fair to Canadians regardless of where they live. Each Canadian is equal in voting power to the next. Each vote should, as close as is constitutionally possible, carry the same weight as the next.

While the urban areas are growing rapidly, it is a matter of political fairness that new ridings continue to be established where the people live. This shift seems inevitable and needs to be recognized. My 250,000 constituents deserve full representation, full enfranchisement and full democratic powers.

(1145)

The population of Mississauga West will soon reach 300,000 people yet we have only one voice in Parliament, as strong as it is. We need to approach this challenge with an open mind and a

commitment to equity. It is not likely that we will ever please all Canadians regardless of our best efforts.

Some will always cling to old notions in a process that is long out of date. I understand how difficult it is to serve areas that are losing population with vast geographic areas between pockets of small populations.

The report also addresses the concerns of low population areas and rural establishments. Some ridings have tremendous historical roots dating back to Confederation. They find the idea of redistribution or expansion suspect. I am also keenly aware of the arguments in favour of certain special status cases such as Prince Edward Island. My favourite line, to the member who sits in front of me from P.E.I., is it takes eight of him to make one of me.

These exceptions to the general rule of representation by population have long served Canada's best interests. I understand that certain compromises may be necessary to ensure harmony and equity.

The time has come for all MPs to recognize that rapid growth also creates special circumstances of equal importance. The government motion for the very first time comes to grips with the growing problems in urban Canada. For the first time, it introduces five-year census adjustment rather than ten. It allows rapidly growing ridings to be set at limits 25 per cent below the provincial average to allow for expansion which will probably occur within those five years.

It stresses communities of interest as a prime criteria for drawing riding boundaries. It requires the presentation of three different options for intelligent community input on riding redistribution.

I invite all hon. members of the House, regardless of political persuasion, to consider these proposals carefully and to wholeheartedly endorse the government motion.

In conclusion, I would like to very humbly thank the committee for allowing me to join it halfway through its deliberations. I feel as though I rode in on a white charger just in time to save the large ridings from once again being subjected to the very cavalier attitude that has been prominent in the past.

The chairman has been a marvellous chairman and I really consider it a great privilege to have served on this committee.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a comment on this bill on electoral changes. It centres more around the size of the House of Commons.

I cannot believe that the chairman of the committee in his speech said that to introduce a cap or to reduce the size of the House is not feasible because of constitutional problems. The logic that the member for Kingston and the Islands uses is that we should not address the size of the House of Commons and its

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growth. He is defending the status quo and it is just an excuse for lack of leadership.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry to interrupt. Your questions and comments should be directed to the previous speaker from Mississauga West.

Mr. Silye: Madam Speaker, the member for Mississauga West also defends this bill. One of the criteria that I cannot understand as a member of the committee she defends is the size of the House of Commons growing to 301 members.

The greatest classical liberal of all, Thomas Jefferson, said that government governs best that governs least. That principle has been lost.

Let us compare the state of California to Canada. The population in California is 29 million. It has 52 congressmen and two senators. It has one president and a governor. Fifty-six people run 29 million people.

Canada has 27 million people. With the Senate and the House of Commons, we have 399 people. Perhaps the member could address this. We are worried here about representing 30,000 people or 85,000 people when in the States, one congressman represents 571,000 people. Perhaps a few more staff to help with the immigration and unemployment problems would be the solution and not to increase the size of this House.

This House should be reduced to 265 members at a max. The city of Calgary does not need six or seven MPs in the next federal election. It needs only four. More members should think like that in order to represent the city.

(1150)

An hon. member: They might need eight Liberals but only four Reformers.

Mr. Silye: Yes, four Reformers could do the job of seven Liberals, that is right.

If we use the same proportion of representation in the United States of 85,000 to 90,000 on average, it would have 2,900 congressmen. That is how disproportionate we are. We are 10 times worse off than that country because we will not stick to the principle that a government governs best that governs least.

The Liberal Party pretends to be fiscally conscious but the very first opportunity it has—the very first bill that came up was this electoral boundaries item—to show leadership, an opportunity to lower the overhead and the cost of running government and running the country, it chooses to increase government and to cop out on constitutional reform.

I would like to know if the member could address why she favours increasing the size of the House of Commons when I

know from a personal point of view, working with her on other committees, that she believes in fiscal restraint?

Mrs. Parrish: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the compliment. He noted that I was the only Liberal he ever met who has tried to save money. Of course that is not true but it shows he has a certain bias and that is why he likes to get into exchanges with me on subjects like this one.

In the United States there is quite a difference in concentration of population. If we look at the numbers in the United States and the way its population is concentrated, its congressmen tend to be able to serve people in a more compact area. Canada, by nature, is very spread out and very diverse except for areas like Mississauga West. Generally it becomes a logistical problem.

The other thing, in my opinion, that happens in the United States is that it requires millions of dollars to get elected so only the wealthy run. Therefore, I do not know if the member would be here but I for sure would not. To suggest that many people require a prolonged campaign and require enormous election expenses ensures that only the very wealthy become elected to its representative houses.

Obviously I would like to see a cap at some point on this House. The member and I have both agree on this. However, in the democratic process that went on in the committee we talked about it, looked at it and decided it required much more study than we were able to give it at this time. I hope I have sufficiently answered the member's question.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the hon. member's speech. I know she was fairly instrumental in one clause being included in the act and that was clause 19(2)(b)(iii). I think the member knows which one it is. It reads:

—the probability that there will be a substantial increase in the population of an electoral district in the province in the next five years.

It is the anticipation clause which describes fast growth in a particular constituency, shrinking the boundaries around that riding to allow for growth so that we do not get these inequities in the population between ridings. It is probably a fairly good principle but it is in conflict with the principle of a number of the rural MPs who want to see their ridings remain smaller and who argue against that principle.

I wonder which principle the hon. member thinks should have precedence. Should it be the principle that we shrink the urban ridings so that there is room for growth, or should it be the principle of the urban members who would like to see the population kept closer to a variant or perhaps even see a smaller population in a rural riding so that they do not become so large geographically? These principles are in direct conflict with one

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another. One or the other has to have precedence. Which one does the hon. member think should have precedence?

Mrs. Parrish: Madam Speaker, I must thank the member for pointing out something I had hoped would sneak by the rural members. He knows I was hoping it would sneak by.

I have to represent the area I live in. I also believe in representation by population wherever possible. I would be absolutely adamant in hoping, as is the Liberal way, we will come up with some sort of amicable solution wherever those boundaries touch each other. My first principle has always been representation by population, wherever it is possible. I will be defending my little clause in the bill to the death.

(1155)

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise today also to discuss the motion of the government concerning electoral redistribution and to oppose that motion. In so doing I would like to make some complimentary comments with respect to what has transpired.

First of all, as was mentioned earlier, we had excellent support in committee and out in the field from Elections Canada. Mr. Kingsley, Mr. Girard and Mr. Lesage were very helpful to the committee. It is also necessary to mention that the electoral redistribution commissions have transacted their work quite faithfully under quite difficult circumstances during all of this and should be complimented.

I would also like to compliment the work of the chairman of the procedure and House affairs committee. This is the first time that a committee has successfully drafted a bill that we anticipate will be tabled. In spite of the fact that there were significant differences on major issues of principle, we nevertheless were able to work fairly and efficiently in the drafting of a bill and in resolution of those issues on which we were able to reach consensus.

[*Translation*]

We do not support this motion by the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for a new electoral redistribution system, and I would like to explain why. There are several improvements in the committee's report, but there are also two major problems. First of all, the five million dollars it will cost to redo the electoral redistribution process for this census, the 1991 census, and second, the fact that the government, supported by the BQ, failed to reduce the number of members and thus the cost of maintaining the current number of seats in the House.

[*English*]

The principal reason for my opposition to this report is its failure to address correctly the issue of reducing or capping the number of seats in the House of Commons. All attempts by the Reform Party to make this an issue and to effect some change

now, rather than some mythical change that supposedly will be made some time in the next century were turned down by the committee.

In addressing the question of the capping or reduction of the seats of the House of Commons, let me spend a bit of time outlining exactly what the history has been of this issue. We are all told that the House of Commons has grown from the time of Confederation. Let me review how that has occurred, the reasons for it and why it has become somewhat of a critical issue.

In 1867 there were 181 members of Parliament. Even from the beginning there were elements which encouraged growth and protected smaller provinces, either in the number of seats they had or in cases where they would lose those seats. The original formula that was in the Constitution for distribution of seats in the House of Commons was based on Quebec having a number fixed at 65 and other provinces going up or down, depending on their relationship to that number.

In addition there were changes made to that formula in 1915 to protect the seats of the very small provinces, which is senatorial clause 51(a) that we have heard some mention of earlier today.

(1200)

Later on the formula was shifted. Quebec no longer was fixed at 65 and instead there were a fixed number of seats in the Chamber and the numbers would fluctuate depending on the relationship to the total number, although once again there were protections against loss of seats. Those amending formulae were introduced in 1943 and 1952.

All through that period, from 1867 through the various changes in 1915, 1943 and 1952 there was really only marginal growth in the House of Commons. It was a 30 per cent growth in total over that period. The primary reason for that growth was the addition of new provinces and the populating of western Canada.

Beyond that the growth of the House of Commons was actually quite marginal. Finally in 1949 there was the addition of Newfoundland.

It was really only with the formulae that came in under the Trudeau government that we began to have excessive growth in the number of seats in the House of Commons. In 1974 the Trudeau government enacted a formula which was unprecedented and which would have gone back to making Quebec a base for fixing the number of seats in the House of Commons. Instead at this time of fixing a number of seats for Quebec, Quebec was fixed at an ever increasing rate around which everything else would grow. Quebec is a province that has tended to have a stable or even a somewhat falling share of the seats. This led very quickly to a situation in which the House of Commons

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would have expanded by hundreds of members within a period of only a few decades.

We grew from 264 seats in 1979 to the 295 we have today. There were additional amendments brought in, in 1985, to control this situation. Once again they still contain substantial growth elements. In particular no province is now allowed to fall below the number of seats it had in the 1970s. The only way to preserve the principle of representation by population is for the representation of large provinces to continually grow.

To review what I have said, if we look at the history we had both here and in the Senate of the growth of the number of seats over the first almost 100 years of Confederation, about 30 per cent were determined almost entirely by the growth of the country. After that period the Senate has ceased to grow and the House of Commons has expanded by 30 or 40 seats. It will expand by six in this redistribution and it will expand at that rate into the future.

What do we propose to do about this? Obviously we propose some kind of formula which would cap or reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons. The particular formula we introduced or we proposed as the Reform caucus was as follows. This was a proposal that had originally been made by the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and was supported by the member for Calgary Centre and me.

We proposed that we establish a permanent number of seats in the House at 265. This was the number of seats that had been the case here for a long period of time, through most of the fifties, the sixties and the seventies. On top of that we proposed that there be some provision for small growth in representation.

The reason for that was very simple. The senatorial clause, section 51(a) of the Constitution, requires that no province can have fewer seats than its number of senators. That clause is distortive. It is distortive at any level of representation, whether small or large. Obviously at the number 265 it is not highly distortive and allowing for slight growth minimizes that distortion. I am talking about very slight growth.

We would have had a House under our formula of 273 seats for the next Parliament, growing at perhaps two or three seats every 10 years. We were talking about a very minimal objective.

This was opposed by the other parties for a number of reasons. I will quote a couple of them. One mentioned in the report is a reduction or freeze in the number of seats in the House of Commons would perpetuate and in some cases exacerbate inequities in representation between provinces and would further erode the principle of representation by population. Then it

goes on to talk about the effect it would have on provinces losing seats.

(1205)

Our formula would have caused virtually every province to lose seats, which was one of the reasons it was equitable. Also the statement as contained in the report is factually simply false. The formula we proposed that would give us 273 seats, a modest reduction of 10 per cent for the next Parliament, would have provided an approximation closer to representation by population than under the current formula. The reason is we removed the distortion of the grandfather clause which is far more distortive than the senatorial clause, which this House has imposed and which this House is in a position to remove.

The position that this would distort representation by population is not true. Our proposal would have improved the percentage share of seats that Ontario and British Columbia now have, the two provinces most unfairly affected by the current formula.

There were a number of other reasons given by government and Bloc members for opposing this particular formula but they were really of an entirely different nature. They were not really concerned about the mechanics of the formula or the growth of the House. They were the self-interest issues: "Canadians will miss me as their member of Parliament if I lose my seat"; these kinds of rationales.

Interestingly, very few of these rationales appeared when this motion was introduced. The principal reason we were told publicly by the government that we were suspending the commission and that we were undertaking this committee study was the concern of members of the House about the size of the House and the terrible cost that would entail.

I want to refresh the memory of the House. I could spend a good part of the time I have to refresh the memory of the House about some of the interventions that were made by various members in emphasizing that this report should cap or reduce the size of the House of Commons. I want to remind these members because we expect that when there is a vote they will have an opportunity to get up to oppose this particular motion and to stick to their principles.

The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka had mentioned when we had the debate on Bill C-18 that it is not something he has heard from his constituents, that they want to expand government and have more government spending. I agree. That is why we must oppose this motion.

The hon. member for Halton—Peel said if one looks at Australia there are twice as many voters per member in that country. We are at the point where we have to make some changes. Either that or we are going to have to knock out one of

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these walls. I agree. I would be interested to hear from the hon. member for Halton—Peel.

The hon. member for Nepean said: “They are talking about increasing by six the numbers of representation in the House of Commons. We know it costs at least a million dollars a year for every member of the House. I have great difficulty with how they rationalize that”. I agree with that. This is once again why this report should not go through unless there are changes to cap or reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons, precisely so that we can keep those costs down.

All these problems about representation, as the hon. member for Nepean well understood, can be addressed through use of modern technology, through more efficient use of staff resources. It does not require a House of Commons that will grow to 350 seats over the next 20 or 30 years.

The hon. member for Ontario said: “Why do we need new seats? It seems that the addition of new seats flies in the face of the hard earned tax money that Canadians tell us is so hard to come by”.

The Liberal member for Victoria—Haliburton proclaimed: “The cost of adding six members of Parliament is something I think the Reform Party and myself included should look very hard at. Why would we want to add that kind of money? Why would we even think in these tough economic times of adding millions of dollars to taxpayers’ expenses?”

(1210)

The Reform Party has looked at this issue, has proposed the alternative. We are looking forward to seeing what the hon. member for Victoria—Haliburton has done as he studied this issue.

The hon. member for La Prairie: “One principle is particularly important. We should not increase the number of electoral districts in Canada. Two hundred and ninety-five electoral districts for 27 million people is already too much”. I agree.

The hon. member for St. Boniface, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of public works said: “Would this not be a wonderful opportunity to see whether we could do with one-quarter or perhaps one-third fewer MPs? I think Canadians would applaud such a move. It would mean significant savings”. I agree with that also.

Our Reform proposal to reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons is comparatively modest. We are talking about a reduction of about 10 per cent. We could go further. If we go further there are some significant problems with the senatorial clause. It begins to become fairly distortive. That does not mean we should not do it. We should be looking at Senate reform. We should be reforming that institution. That would allow us to change the senatorial clause.

I understand the government is not prepared to do that and I understand why. It is very difficult to reduce to the kind of number the hon. member for St. Boniface proposed, but a reduction of 10 per cent is certainly achievable.

The Solicitor General said: “Since Confederation the number of seats in the House of Commons has increased steadily” as I mentioned, the number of members by now would have shot up already to more than some 340. That is something we should be considering.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River spoke quite eloquently in the committee when he said: “Three hundred and one members is not what Canadians want. They want a Parliament that works. They want to see it work with 295 members, not 301 or 310 or 320 as time goes on”.

The hon. member for Waterloo said: “If we continue with the process in the longer term we are going to keep adding members to the House of Commons. Therefore time is of the essence. We have to deal with this issue very quickly. However, I will be fighting very strongly to maintain the number of members of Parliament at 295, not of course the 301 it is scheduled to go up to”.

The parliamentary secretary to the minister of citizenship, the hon. Liberal member for Halifax said: “In these days when restraint is being urged on us by all fronts, should we really be considering increasing the number of members of Parliament?” I think the question indicates its own answer.

The hon. Liberal member for Hillsborough said: “All kinds of institutions are looking at holding the line, reducing numbers or not going ahead with other plans. I notice new electoral reform has just come forward in my own province. It is not the best time for us to go forward and increase seats in the House with the added costs”.

The hon. Liberal member for Perth—Wellington—Waterloo said: “If we approach the population of our neighbours to the south, we will need 3,000 seats in the House of Commons”.

This is another reason, as the hon. member for Calgary Centre mentioned, that we should tackle this capping issue. We do not need those numbers. We do not need to have a number of politicians which by an exponential factor exceeds the number of politicians in a state like California.

The hon. member for Algoma said: “We cannot cap the number of seats here forever, but we want to consider how quickly the number of seats rises”.

Even that suggestion was not solved by the committee. Even reducing the future growth was not solved by the committee’s report. It said it is an issue that should be addressed and studied, that Parliament should be seized with the issue. That was the purpose of the committee and it failed to do that.

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The hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton said: “Perhaps this House would operate more efficiently and effectively if there were dramatically fewer members of Parliament than at present and there were a fixed number”.

The hon. Liberal member, the secretary of state for parliamentary affairs, stated his own view: “Finally, based on the existing formula, the number of seats in the House of Commons will increase from 295 to 301 as a result of the 1991 census, and that concerns me in light of current fiscal restraints”.

(1215)

I have a couple more I could mention. The hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester, a Liberal member, said:

At this rate there will come a point in 2050 or 2090 where the Chamber will no longer be large enough to hold all the new members. It will have to be torn down and rebuilt further to make room for the extra seats that will have to be made. If you look south, they have only 100 senators for a total population of about 250 million people.

Literally dozens of Liberal members spoke in favour of what the Reform Party is proposing. We look forward to their support when the vote on this issue comes about.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his speech. I have never heard such a good speech from a Reform member in this Parliament. The principal reason was that he kept quoting Liberal members. If he keeps doing that, he will soon replace his leader who does not quote Liberal members often enough. If he did I am sure he would go up in the polls instead of down.

I want to ask the hon. member a serious question. He went on at some length in his speech about the benefits of a smaller House and suggested the figure of 265. He also suggested that the way we could get away with it was by getting rid of the grandfather clause that protects certain provinces.

I wonder if he and the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster, in the course of their considerations of this matter, consulted with the people of Saskatchewan. I wonder if they levelled with them and told them that if the grandfather clause were taken away that province would lose four seats and in the event of a redistribution based on population once it was done Saskatchewan would lose five seats.

Did he in his consideration of this matter advise the people of Saskatchewan through householders, other materials or public announcements that if the Reform policy were adopted that province would lose five seats? Did he advise the people of Manitoba how many seats they would lose? Did he advise the people of Newfoundland and of Nova Scotia how many seats they would lose? Did he review with members opposite in the Bloc and with other members how many seats in Quebec would be lost?

Those are the issues that have to be faced. If we are to cut the number of seats to 265, we have to face the fact that over half the provinces will lose representation in the House. Frankly I do not think the provinces are prepared to accept that, particularly the province of Saskatchewan whose numbers would be decimated in this place.

I know the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster wishes he could answer, but the hon. member for Calgary West says that Calgary does not need more MPs. I agree it does not need any more Reform MPs; it has more than enough. However Calgary-ans would be well served if it got some Liberal representation. Getting extra seats increases the possibility of that and he knows it.

Alberta is not getting extra seats, but I remember the outcry from British Columbia when there was talk of delaying the work of redistribution commissions. The Minister of National Revenue is from that province. There was a strong outcry against not getting the two additional seats to which it was entitled under the current arrangement to go to 301 seats.

There was an outcry from the minister. The hon. member knows that. There was an outcry from the population. There were editorials. There were telephone call-ins. There was a huge hue and cry at the thought of losing two seats.

If that is the case in British Columbia, how is it possible that the citizens of Saskatchewan would clamour for a reduction in their representation in the House by five seats? That is what members of the Reform Party are proposing in the House. If that happened and there were an election called on the basis of that kind of redistribution, I submit every Reform member in Saskatchewan would be out the window, including the very capable member for Kindersley—Lloydminster.

Can the member comment on that?

Mr. Harper (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, the whole purpose of my speech was to illustrate what citizens across the country are saying about representation in Parliament. They do not need more MPs. They do not need, in particular, as we will probably see in the bill, more MPs who say one thing when it does not matter and vote another way when the party tells them to do so.

Whether there are 14 seats in Saskatchewan or 20 or 28 is not going to make any difference if they do not represent their constituents in the House of Commons when it matters at voting time.

(1220)

The other point is that they play little word games. People are not as stupid as some of these comments imply. People understand that under our Constitution—and some people have dif-

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faculty with this—we have representation by population in the House of Commons and that the voice of Saskatchewan, whether it has 14 seats out of 301 or 12 seats out of 280 or 10 seats out of 250, is in fact the same voice. The only issue is whether it is going to cost more or cost less to have exactly the same voice.

The fact of the matter is that people realize that if no province can ever lose seats and we have rep by pop, the only way to sustain rep by pop is with a House of Commons that will expand forever. The people understand that. I do not think the histrionics in this debate will change people's understanding of that. It is unfortunate we have not tackled that issue.

If the Liberal government adopted our suggestion it would get considerable credit from the electorate in making this kind of move. We hear that from Saskatchewan, I am assured by the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster, as we hear it in Alberta and as we read it in the mail we receive from across the country.

Mr. Andy Mitchell (Parry Sound—Muskoka, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about the issue of redistribution and specifically the motion that was tabled today.

I would like to begin by congratulating the procedures and House affairs committee for the work it has done. It has done an excellent job. I am also very pleased to see the first use of a new procedure where the committee is coming forth and recommending the bill. It is a good system. It worked well in this particular case. We should see more of it in the future.

I am rising today because the issue of redistribution has a very important impact on my riding. It has a very important impact on all of northern Ontario and a very important impact on all of rural Canada. Rural Canada has challenges in terms of representation and distribution that are not necessarily faced in the same way as they are in urban Canada.

We face the issue of declining populations. We have the difficulty of large geographic areas we have to try to represent. We have the issue of how we communicate with our constituents. If we are in very small urban areas it is not difficult, but if it takes four or five hours to travel from one part of a riding to another part of a riding the issue of communication becomes very important.

We have the issue of diversity within our large northern ridings. We have the diversity of the people who live there, the diversity of the industries that exist there and the diversity of the geography, as I have mentioned. These are special challenges that people in rural Canada, people in northern Ontario, people in my riding have to face on the issue of redistribution.

There are three specific areas I would like to address. The first is the issue of capping the number of members in the House of Commons and the 25 per cent variance rule. The second is the whole idea of the public consultation process that is being introduced with this proposal. The final and very important area is the issue regarding the definition of community of interest. That is a very important concept about which I would like to talk very briefly.

On the idea of capping and the variance of 25 per cent, I believe the committee's report offers a good balance between what essentially used to exist, which was unrestricted growth of the number of seats here, and a plan that is going to allow for moderate growth.

I have been encouraged by the committee report because we have avoided a whole constitutional wrangle that could occur if we proceeded with recommendations such as those presented by the party opposite. It is not a time to be arguing about constitutional niceties; it is a time to be dealing with our economic problems. I am glad the committee has seen fit to ensure we do not have to go down that road.

When we study the ideas in this plan we should remember it is important for individual MPs to be able to provide effective representation to their constituents. All of us in the House work very closely with a large number of constituents. In my case we receive around 900 phone calls a month. We get almost 100 letters a day. We have a large number of town hall meetings and have to travel over large areas.

(1225)

All members of the House face the challenges of representing large numbers of people. An important part of what we do is to listen to our constituents, to hear their points of view and to bring them forward to the House. If we go down a road where few of us are representing an ever increasing population the basis of being able to represent constituents will be placed in jeopardy.

I am glad the report has found the balance between keeping the numbers down, which we have to do in terms of economics, and ensuring there are sufficient members to provide proper representation to individual constituents. I believe this proposal will do that.

I was also pleased to see the 25 per cent rule maintained. That is absolutely necessary for a number of reasons, the first one being geographic. There must be a geographic limit to how large a riding can get. If as members we have to travel six, eight or ten hours to go from one end of our ridings to another—and there are some ridings like that in the north—it becomes very difficult to provide proper representation. The maintenance of the 25 per cent rule will give the flexibility to take that particular issue into account.

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I also believe there is an issue of needing to provide representation a bit differently in rural Canada than it is provided in urban Canada. Those challenges I pointed out previously that exist in rural Canada need to be addressed. I believe the flexibility the 25 per cent rule provides will allow that to happen.

Most important, at least as far as I am concerned, is that the 25 per cent rule and the flexibility it will allow will give us the opportunity to adhere to the community of interest guidelines in the legislation. I will talk about them in a couple of minutes.

I want to congratulate very heartily the committee on the public consultation process it has recommended in the proposed legislation. When it is implemented we will find that we have a far more effective public consultation process, certainly a far more transparent process and a more efficient process. I will touch on those three points just briefly.

First I will deal with the effective aspect. The idea that we are to have the ability to go into individual ridings or individual provinces and adjust ridings where they have gone beyond the 25 per cent rule at five-year intervals will mean we can be much more effective and much more efficient in ensuring that we have proportional representation.

It is also important the committee suggested that when the commissions go out to consult with Canadians and come back with a recommendation they are not just going to come back with an all or leave it plan. They will come forward with three specific options. The individuals who are to examine them and provide input will have a number of options before them and some basis upon which to provide their input, to have discussion and to have debate about what would be the best route to go. They are certainly recommending a transparent process.

Under this plan the positions of the two members of the commission appointed by the Speaker will have to be advertised. The Speaker will go about obtaining staff for these commissions in a very public process. Additionally Parliament will have the opportunity to examine who is chosen for those commissions and if seen fit a motion can be brought before the House to reject those individuals. We see a very transparent process being put in place.

Also in terms of transparency, under the legislation the commissions will have to tell Canadians up front the exact parameters they are to use in examining redistribution. One difficulty we found with the previous process was that the only time individual constituents became involved was after the work had all been done and it was plopped on the table.

The fact that the guidelines will be set out before the procedure is important. It will allow Canadians to have the necessary input. It is very important that the process for MPs to examine the legislation will be the same as that for the general public.

(1230)

When there are public consultation meetings individual members of Parliament who feel a need to give representation will do so as part of the public process, not as some separate process that takes place only in this House. I am happy to see that the MPs will be participating in the same way that all other constituents will be.

I believe we are going to see some efficiencies put in place with this process. One of the most important is the fact that it says if the parameters have not been breached, if there has not been sufficient changes in population, if the variance has not gone beyond the 25 per cent rule, a commission will not be struck nor will it have to examine it.

That is a major and significant change from the way it is done right now where it is necessary to review it even if a change has not occurred. This is going to save substantial dollars for the federal government and it is going to save substantial dollars for the Canadian taxpayer. I very much support that.

I believe as well that Canadians will be very pleased with the fact that government in this instance is going to stop doing something it does not need to do. I very much support that.

The third area has to do with the issue of community interest and the fact that it is being defined very clearly in the legislation. It is absolutely critical that it be done. In Ontario, the area I am familiar with and in particular in my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka, the lack of attention to community interest concept created a lot of difficulties with the recommendations that had been brought forward.

I would like to cite a couple of examples of how that has happened, using my own riding as a basis. One stipulation on community of interest is the local economy. My particular riding is made up of the Parry Sound district and the Muskoka district. They share in common the industry of tourism with a common market. Under the proposal that was originally tabled those two areas were going to be completely divided and the fact that they had a common industry, a common tourism market, was going to be totally ignored.

Also in terms of tradition, under community of interest it is defined that we must take into account traditional representation. In the case of my riding at the time of the next election it will have existed for half a century. That was totally disregarded in the process when the maps were struck the first time and the riding was going to be totally ripped apart and divided into three different parts. It was not in keeping with the traditions. This bill states very clearly under the community of interest clause that tradition is an important ingredient.

It also talks about the need to delineate between rural and urban Canada. In my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka they were going to take an essentially rural area and add into it about

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20,000 individuals from a metropolitan centre. We would have a riding that was no longer uniquely rural and would no longer be uniquely urban, but would be a mismatch of the two and would make things very difficult in terms of representation.

As well under community of interest they talk about natural boundaries. That is important. In northern Ontario we have many natural boundaries that need to be adhered to when we are trying to draw up a reasonable constituency, a reasonable riding.

Again in the case of Parry Sound—Muskoka it is bounded by a river on the south, a river on the north, Georgian Bay on the west and Algonquin Park on the east. Those were natural boundaries that established my riding. They did the redistribution and did not pay attention to the issue of community of interest and it was all put asunder.

I am very encouraged about the fact that we do have a very much strengthened community of interest clause in this legislation and I support that.

In conclusion, I do support this legislation because I think it finds the correct balance between trying to keep the numbers in this House down, but ensuring that there are sufficient members to provide effective representation. I support it because it provides a better public consultation process that is going to allow Canadians to have a meaningful input into the process.

Finally, I support this because the community of interest clause has been strengthened and will lead to the creation of better ridings.

(1235)

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam, Ref.): Madam Speaker, in listening to the member from Parry Sound, I am sure he spoke with great sincerity. He seems to be very sincere. However, I am concerned about perhaps tossing off Reform comments as constitutional niceties. He recognizes the economic need for the changes that are happening.

I am concerned that he does not appear to be recognizing the financial needs. Our country is in the worst situation it has been in ever and we have to recognize that this is one way, as Reform suggests, to reduce the number of members in this House.

We all know it costs approximately \$1 million per member. I have just returned from Washington. I have met with American parliamentarians in the last week and constituents. We did speak about this. They feel that they are very adequately represented. As members know, they have over 400 representatives and 270 million people. We are looking at 10 per cent that we have.

Maybe the hon. member can perhaps explain why we would not be very concerned about the financial counterpart of this problem.

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her comments. The economic concerns that the country faces are ones that we have to consider when we are taking a look at this package.

I believe that the package does that for a number of reasons. First of all, the process that it has developed is going to be a far more efficient process. It is going to save money. By simply saying that if a change has not occurred in a province, if the population has not changed or there are not the variances that are occurring in individual ridings, we will not go through the process.

That is going to save substantial dollars. That recommendation is in this bill and that is one of the reasons I support it. Second, I support it because I would be very concerned. One of the suggestions in 265. Why not go to 220? Why not go to 210? Why not go to 150?

There is an important concept here. As parliamentarians one of our roles is to represent our constituencies. If we lessen the number of members in this House to a point at which we are not able to do that, this government will become captured by the bureaucracy.

We need government controlled from this House, not from all the office buildings that surround this city. In order for this House to control this government, to control the process of government, we need sufficient members in here to be able to do that.

That is why the balance struck with this bill between keeping very minimal growth but ensuring that there are enough representatives to control government is important and in the long run will save some dollars.

Finally, if we entertain a proposal that is going to require constitutional change, that is going to require unanimous approval from all 10 provinces, that is going to be a cost that we certainly do not want to have to incur.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's speech today. As usual he clearly and succinctly put forth excellent arguments in support of not only this legislation but of the needs of rural Canada, particularly rural northern Ontario.

I want to ask him to speak for a moment or two more about the 25 per cent variance rule. I believe he recognizes along with me that at the best of times it is difficult to balance the needs of rural and urban Canada. We see that debate raging on the issue of gun control, the balance between urban and rural Canada.

In a perfect world rural residents would not pay more for gasoline. In a perfect world rural residents would have equal access to our city neighbours to health care and so on.

To take a strict definition that all Canadians regardless of where they live have one vote and only one vote in relation to their member of Parliament does not make sense when one considers that we need to balance rural and urban Canada. It has

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worked very well so far, even though there are some problems. I would ask my hon. colleague, in his support for northern Ontario and other parts of rural Canada, to speak a bit more to emphasize and clarify the importance of that variance rule.

(1240)

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Algoma for bringing up those particular points and to emphasize the 25 per cent rule.

Like I do, the hon. member represents a riding that is in northern Ontario. We share many of the concerns that come from representing a rural part of the country and that come from representing a large geographic area.

He is absolutely right. We need the flexibility of the 25 per cent rule. It is particularly important in rural Canada. We need the flexibility that it gives. We need it in terms of geography. There are suggestions in the proposal that came forward which would make his riding—and the hon. member can correct me if I am wrong—stretch from Hudson Bay to Lake Huron with a big strip right in between. We can all picture a map of Ontario and picture what that riding would be like.

That kind of thing cannot be allowed to happen. It becomes impossible to represent a riding that would have that kind of breadth of geography. If you know the terrain and if you know how far the communities are dispersed in that area, you can see the importance of that 25 per cent rule.

One of the things that this report has considered, which the hon. member alluded to, is the whole issue of balance. We have to balance the needs of rural and urban Canada. It is not an all or nothing situation in which we do it strictly by the book and strictly by numbers and we draw lines on the map. That is not the way to do it. We have to take into account some of the special challenges which we have in rural Canada. We have to take into account some of the special needs of geography, diversity of industry and many of those things I talked about.

The hon. member is quite right in pointing out the importance of that 25 per cent variance to those of us who represent northern Ontario and for those who represent all of rural Canada.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my rural colleague give his speech. I am also from a rural riding.

The motion that has been drafted by the procedures and House affairs committee in clause 19(2) says that the criteria for selecting boundaries should consider a manageable geographic size. That is what the hon. member has just argued. The very next clause talks of the probability that there will be substantial increase in the population of an electoral district in the province

in the next five years. In other words, in the province of Ontario, I believe the hon. member would argue because of the size of his riding that his riding should be quite a bit less, maybe close to 25 per cent less. The problem is that his colleague from Mississauga will also suggest that her riding should be about 25 per cent less in population because she is going to experience strong growth.

They cannot have it either way. One has to take precedence over the other. I would like to know whether the hon. member thinks geographic size is the important criterion and the rural riding should be kept smaller or whether he should bow to his urban colleagues who suggest that their ridings should be shrunk to allow for expanding growth and that they should be on the low side of the variable quotient.

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, I would simply say that we in the Liberal Party balance our approach. It is not an either/or proposition. The urban member has a particular need and that will be taken into account. The rural member will have a particular need and that will be taken into account. Between those two needs we will find a balance. We will come to a solution that has components which help the one member from urban Canada and the one member from rural Canada. It is not an either/or situation.

One of the problems with members of the party opposite, and I will say this quite clearly, is they never realize that things are not black and white. There are greys out there. You can compromise. You can find a balance.

(1245)

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I hope I will not be ruled out of order if I begin my speech by discussing principles. We do not hear much about them in this place. Sometimes we seem to forget that they are important. They are a road map for us. As Yogi Berra once said, if you do not know where you are going, you may end up someplace else.

As the Auditor General recently said somewhat less famously but no less accurately, if you do not have a clear idea what a program, law or policy is for and a clear set of criteria for evaluating it, you will not know if it has worked. Of course the Auditor General had in mind primarily the bonfire of the taxpayers, known as the federal budget. I see no less reason to apply his thoughts to the subject before us, Bill C-18.

Electoral boundaries, boy, there is a riveting topic. Bill C-18, electoral boundary reform, clause 19(2)(b)(i), there is a topic to put the manufacturers of sleeping pills into a panic. It may also seem like a topic that leaves no room for principle. It may seem like a topic to be settled in a smokefree backroom.

I take Mr. Berra's observations very seriously. I think that someone who claims not to have a political philosophy to be a

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pragmatist is either a socialist trying to cover his tracks or is simply unaware of the ideas that motivate him or her.

Let us consider if electoral boundaries and in particular the provision of this act which says that in drawing those boundaries the various electoral boundary commissions shall consider "a community of interest". That is clause 19(2)(b)(i) as noted above.

Why is it in here? It is in here because of the implicit or explicit assumptions of my colleagues on the opposite bench about government. It is in here because of their assumptions about democracy. It is in here because of their assumptions about politics. It all comes down to the idea that the purpose of electoral politics is precisely to hold H.L. Mencken's famous advance auction on stolen property.

The purpose of creating ridings with a community of interest is to put people together who would have a natural tendency to combine together, to take from their fellow citizens through the political process. It is to create so to speak a level playing field for political plunder.

While this bill was being prepared I know that the members on this side of the House fought hard to get the government to change its formal definition of a community of interest. If we look at clause 19(4), we will find that the enumerated list of the elements of a community of interest is reasonably harmless by contemporary standards. Gone are the references to race and ethnicity.

By the way I certainly hope that the idea of gender segregated Senate elections is dead and buried for all time. I am not as sure as I would like to be that these ideas are gone. They may have taken out the words about ethnically or racially segregated ridings without abandoning the idea. It certainly concerns me that what we find in clause 19(4) is not exhaustive list. The commissions will consider these but they may also consider others.

There is a real danger that commissions will in practice try to create districts that are for instance overwhelmingly Indo-Canadian or overwhelmingly Chinese Canadian or whatever. I really hope they will not. I am really horrified by the idea that people can only be represented by people who look like them. I hope that no one believes that any of my colleagues are either more or less suited to represent their constituents because of the ancestry either of the members or of the constituents.

The idea that Sikhs, Indians, Chinese or Anglo-Saxons should all be segregated into one riding so as better to seize property for Sikhs, Indians, Chinese or Anglo-Saxons perhaps by electing a Sikh, Indian, Chinese or Anglo-Saxon as a member of Parliament is the most offensive particular manifestation of the notion that parliamentary ridings in principle ought to be united by

people with a common interest so that they can elect someone like themselves. This suggests that people should be united in groups with people like themselves so that they can act to elect someone like themselves and really dive into the pork barrel. That is not what I think democracy is all about. That is not what I think politics is all about. And it is not how I think electoral boundaries should be drawn.

(1250)

In my view the purpose of government is to protect the lives, liberties and property of its citizens. If we do not have a government that can fend off Atilla, we have nothing. The problem is, any government strong enough to protect our life, liberty and property from others is also strong enough to threaten them itself. This is the paradox of government and it is the solution of that paradox that has preoccupied serious political philosophers throughout time.

One of the devices that has evolved in British practice and in the Anglo-American political philosophy is voting for public officers. This is the vital point. Voting is a device for preventing government from getting too big, not a way of legitimizing what it does. The reason this is its purpose is that all citizens have the same fundamental interest: a government that respects their rights.

Canadians do not, or at least they should not step into the ballot box to commit an act of larceny against their fellow citizens. They step into the ballot box to render judgment on how well the government has protected their rights.

Back in 1964 in an apparently quixotic campaign for the U.S. presidency, Senator Barry Goldwater spoke to this issue. He would not, he said, engage in the politics of plunder. "If I am attacked for neglecting the interests of my constituents" he said, "I will reply that I understood their interests to be liberty, and in that cause I am doing all that I can".

I regard the interest of my constituents, whoever they are, as being fundamentally the same as the interests of all Canadians: a government that protects them from force and fraud and otherwise leaves them free to conduct their business as they see fit. For that, we need not communities of interest but ridings that treat all citizens as equals. That is why on behalf of my constituents and liberty I will be voting against this bill.

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in opening my own intervention I would like to record my own appreciation and those of my colleagues of the collegiality in the committee whose report is being studied here today. I value the exchange of views with the Bloc members and the Reform Party members in the committee. It was a good dialectical process and an excellent interchange of ideas. It is in that spirit that I now speak in the debate.

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I was impressed by the comments by the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and the member for Calgary West and their suggestions that the bill had failed to address what they considered the key problem, the size of the House. You will find many on this side of the House in agreement that this whole principle needs radical re-examination and change.

However we must consider the amount of constitutional amendment that may be necessary to restructure the size of the House to correspond to present sociological realities in Canada. When you consider the amount of effort involved in that and the fact that some years would be exhausted in the process, I would question whether it is right to consider this as an omnibus bill that must solve every problem of the contemporary legislature in one fell swoop. I view it rather as a single problem oriented bill addressed with a very specific purpose. In the light of present realities it has to go to another House for approval before it can be adopted.

I think it is in this sense correct to say that the matter of the size of the House is better left for another day and perhaps another committee. I see no reason why this could not be addressed within the lifetime of the present Parliament. But on this particular issue, it seems to me we have a full house of problems in terms of electoral representation.

(1255)

I noticed in particular in the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster's address not merely reference to the size of the House but also to other principles, the issue of population variance between ridings and also what he referred to as the necessity for establishing priority of criteria in riding boundaries.

He used a term that I will return to a little later. He spoke of social engineering and this is an interesting concept. It is a Pandora's box of problems but I will return to it in a moment because it is the key of the present problem that many of us have had with the existing reports of the electoral boundaries commissions.

What troubled me when I read this latest series of 11 reports was a certain element of intellectual anarchy in those reports. There were in essence 11 different reports but there were no common criteria available.

In fact we discussed this matter with the chief electoral commissioner, an extraordinarily capable man who paid us the tribute of being very direct and forthright in his response to our questions. It was established that the commissions had not consulted with the chief electoral commissioner in terms of guidance as to past practice or as to criteria that should govern the exercise of the discretionary role conferred upon them by the existing law.

This is, in a certain sense, rather strange. It illustrates the wide variance, if not dissidence, in what we might call the operational

philosophy governing the members of these individual commissions. When I look at the commissions I see a certain limited functional efficacy in the members of the commissions in terms of their training.

I would hate to say this in terms of a profession that I have also shared in, but there are too many people from one profession. There are far too many professors. It may be argued that the professors already have an honourable role in our society. They are the source of the ideas, but should they be making the choices? Would it not have been better to have had the professors retained as advisors on technical points but the actual decision making role conferred on commissions representing a broader spectrum of society?

This is one of the issues discussed in the present bill reported by the committee. The present bill attempts to address this problem by establishing a new process of appointment that should ensure wider representation of the larger community, a wider spread if you wish of experience among them.

The second thing that troubled me when I looked at these 11 reports was the lack of reasons. Here we have officials not elected in any way, non-elected officials appointed by prerogative power but exercising enormous discretionary powers.

That, as very well known to students of administrative law, is the real problem in modern government. It is the use or abuse of discretionary power by non-elected officials. There are ways of tethering discretion and making it operationally useful.

One of these is to require bodies when they exercise a power to spell out the reasons for doing it. When I look at these reports I find absence of reasons. Why did they do this? Why did they do that? One has to guess and that is where one comes back to the point that the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster made, social engineering.

It is very easy to go on an ego trip of one's own in exercising discretionary power of this sort. It is also very easy for the wrong reasons to attribute illicit motives and to say that is a politically colourable choice that has been made.

The correction of this is to state the reasons. The extra advantage in that is where the criteria are spelled out in the individual reports. They are then subject very easily to judicial review and judicial correction.

(1300)

One of the problems in Canada is that we do not entrust to our Constitution the spelling out of the basic principles of what is constituent power. Constituent power is prior to constitutional power. It is the fundamental starting point of a democratic society; constituent power, how the government is created, how its members are elected.

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Modern constitutions, ours is a 19th century constitution, write these elements directly into the constitutional charter. More than that, they spell out the principles and more than that they have actively functioning courts, constitutional courts of a specialized nature or general supreme courts with a massive jurisprudence in which these principles are ensured not only in their respect in the letter but also in their creative adaptation to problems of modern society.

The transformation of the United States from a privileged society in which the franchise was severely restricted, not simply on racial grounds but on social grounds, has been massively assisted by the role of the United States Supreme Court and judicial interpretation. This is something basically absent in Canadian society. It is something that we must have established in the future.

Therefore, I think it is a legitimate objection. One of the things that concerned me most in reading these reports was that there were discretionary powers but no clear criteria spelled out as to how the discretion was exercised. There was obviously an enormous variation when one studied the empirical material from one provincial commission to another. It recalls what was said of Lord Chancellor Eldon in another context, that equity, which he was charged with administering, was as long as the chancellor's foot. It is this element that the present bill, as reported by the committee to the House, aims to correct.

I could be more specific in terms of referring particularly to the report of the commission as it affects my home province of British Columbia. It troubles me, with the obvious population increases in the Fraser River Valley, that there is no extra seat there. It is obtained by rearranging crowded inner city boundaries where there is very little population change. They are simply accumulating them and producing an extra seat. What is the reason for this?

This is what leads to interesting speculation. I think the answer is that it is probably somebody's particular concept of social engineering which they have not spelled out, which I could guess at, but which I think properly in the constitutional processes courts should be able to examine and to correct.

I come back to some of these issues because the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster very correctly in his address to the House this morning spoke of the need to establish priority of criteria. We would have to say that the criteria themselves have to be spelled out. It is difficult to establish them in any hierarchical order. Most countries with statutes or constitutional principles touching this area recognize that there is a certain element of antinomy or contradiction between some of the principles. There is a creative choice that commissioners or a judge exercising judicial review must make. The key element we demand of the person exercising the discretion is to say which criteria they prefer to others and why that criteria. Is it a

rational choice or is it something, as I have said, as long as the chancellor's foot?

We have not gone as far as the United States Supreme Court. One would wonder if we have reached the stage where Mr. Justice Brennan referred with approval to a concept of benign discrimination when asked if the notion of benign discrimination permissible because it is cast in a remedial context with respect to a disadvantaged class rather than in a setting that aims to demean or insult any racial group.

(1305)

It is an interesting concept. It is certainly part of American social history and in the context of the United States Supreme Court no doubt a justifiable decision.

In terms of what we are doing one of the things we would have to stress in a country that stresses the parliamentary system as distinct from the American congressional system and the division of powers is the special relationship of a member of Parliament to his or her constituents.

There is a relationship of confidence that is built up in going door to door in an election campaign, a very moving experience, but a relationship of continuing trust in handling the problems of constituents as they arise over a period of time. What struck me again in the reports of these commissions was a certain cavalier disregard for the principle of continuity of representation. It is a constitutional value. It is closest of all to that philosopher whom the opposition parties are fond of quoting, Edmund Burke. I do not want to go into Edmund Burke's special features but at least the notion of the closeness, the responsibility of a member to the electorate.

The starting point of any electoral commission in Canada under the parliamentary system must be respect for the principle of continuity. Where we displace that it must be for reasons that we are prepared to spell out, population shifts to be sure. The criteria that the committee has offered in its report give us guidelines that were not there before in any adequate measure. I would have wished them to go further and I will note simply that I have made suggestions in the committee for further tightening up this area, rendering the criteria more precise.

I was supported I believe by the Reform Party and the Bloc but I was not able to persuade a majority. I go along happily with a majority decision. In this area the criteria must be spelled out.

One of the things we have tried to do is recognize this concept of community of interest. Canada is the society of the 21st century, as somebody said quite recently. I think it is true. We have established a special notion of Canadian culture, a community of communities in a phrase which a former Prime Minister of another political party used without citing its original source. This happens quite a good deal. The phrase was used by Martin Buber, an Austro-Hungarian by birth but who became a philosopher in the new state of Israel and developed the theory to explain and put forward a special relationship between the

Jewish majority and Arab citizens, the concept of the community of communities.

What strikes me in the urban seats in this country when I look at them across the electoral map is that we have historically come to it perhaps by accident in many cases, but the history is there. We have recognized this notion of community of communities. I embrace with pleasure the fact that my own constituency has 22 different communities within it and that to win a nomination and to win a majority in an election one must put together a platform, an approach consistent with one's party position that can build a consensus that extends to all groups or a sufficiency of groups.

One of the things that troubles me in the reports of the 11 boundary commissions I am referring to is that they again in a somewhat cavalier position have tended to put this aside. They seem to be looking back more to a 19th century concept of constituencies based on single communities.

I think this is interesting but it is back to the future and not a good way. I cite this simply to say that we were dealing with as a committee highly contentious and arguable reports made by boundary commissions. To give the ladies and gentlemen on these commissions full credit and honour they were the victims of the laws that did not adequately spell out what they should do.

(1310)

The chief electoral commissioner correctly, because he is a man of high intelligence and high integrity and respect for the constitutional proprieties, concluded that it was not his function to spell out criteria that Parliament had not spelled out.

This is the reason we have attempted in a comprehensive law limited to this one problem getting the electoral boundaries issue dealt with adequately and to concentrate on that problem.

I would have liked to address also the issue of capping the size of the House. It seems to me that is for another statute. I would simply add as a member from British Columbia that the bill guarantees a point very dear to my province, our constitutional right to two extra seats in the House of Commons with the next federal election. There is an iron clad guarantee there.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member for Vancouver—Quadra who not only served on the committee of procedure and House affairs but was very active in the discussion relating to the whole process we are currently discussing and have spent some time on.

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Being an academic who has been involved in looking at this process historically and currently he speaks with some authority I am going to ask him to take off his academic hat because I also know he has practical experience, having served on a commission. He also knows very well the contents of the motion that has been presented by the procedure and House affairs committee for the consideration of the House.

He served on a commission in British Columbia in the past and who knows, he may in the future if he continues to follow various careers. There was a strong feeling in the interior and northern part of British Columbia that the ridings should be at the low end of the variable quotient, say minus 20 rather than zero. That was a strong representation both from members and from the population. In the lower mainland he heard the opposite hue and cry. The population is growing very quickly, as the member would agree. They asked to have their growth taken into consideration and put them down around 20 per cent on the negative side of the variable quotient.

I know the hon. member is not biased; he is a very fair minded man. However, if he and his fellow commissioners were biased and perhaps all lived in the lower mainland and wanted to represent the concerns of the lower mainland ahead of the concerns of the interior and northern British Columbia, would this legislation prevent him from carrying out that bias?

Mr. McWhinney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for a very thoughtful question. I have never accepted the concept that equality requires an absolute equality of rule application under all circumstances. As the United Supreme Court and Justice Douglas have said, you treat equal things equally but there is an element of discretion.

I recognize as part of the principle of equality of representation that we are entitled to and in all decency must make variations that take into account extreme geographic conditions such as we find in the north and the interior of British Columbia.

In exercising discretion as an electoral boundary commissioner in the past in British Columbia we did take that into account and gave it weight against the clamant demands in the city for mathematical equality of representation of all constituencies. I would think a commissioner, within the parameters established by the act, would properly exercise similar discretion.

I wonder, and I believe this is the private view of the hon. member opposite, whether the 25 per cent offset is not too high and whether 15 per cent might not be more realistic under present conditions.

(1315)

Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on Bill C-18. Eleven months ago I rose to participate in the debate on this bill suspending the

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operations of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. At that time I questioned the political interference, the waste of millions of dollars and the fact that as politicians we were involved in that messy process at all.

I consider this whole thing to be unfair to the public. We are wasting taxpayers' dollars again, in the order of \$5 million, and once again we will be soliciting their input. I have had discussions with many members of the public and they have lost the thread on this whole redistribution exercise, as have I from time to time. It is beginning to read like a bad novel.

Some of the debate that has gone on today reminds me very strongly of why politicians should not be involved in drawing lines on a map. Some of the objections are tantamount to that.

Eleven months ago I also expressed regret and concern for overturning a process which had been in effect every decade since 1867. I could not determine precedent for this action and nothing has changed my mind in the intervening time.

It remains a shame why we have gone through this process at all, and having gone through it, we have achieved so little. What we have before us today, in my view, confirms that fact. This is an exercise which retroactively thwarts a longstanding, non-partisan method of redistribution.

The Constitution sets out the formula for representative government based on the concept of equality of voting power, that all Canadians should have an equal voice in governing themselves. This concept has been modified over time to ensure equality and continuity. Today's report does very little, in my view, to solidify this notion. We had hopes for a workable report. This attempt does not meet our standards and that is why we submitted a minority report.

First, the total number of seats in the House is not reduced. They have increased from 295 to 301, which was the original situation with the Electoral Boundaries Commission reports that were previously made. We have gone through this whole exercise and we are right back at the same place we started.

We argue that it is time to reduce the cost of the precincts and reducing the number of seats is an important first step. There seems to be a notion that the more members of Parliament we have the more will be accomplished. We should not confuse more and motion with real progress.

The hon. member for Calgary West described the capping of the number of seats very well so I will not pursue that in my speech today. However, we have had a consistent message throughout this piece. I am a member of Parliament from British Columbia where we have the somewhat unique situation of getting additional seats. We receive two of the six additional seats in this proposal. Our message has been consistent. It is consistent whether we reduce the number of seats to 265 or

whether the number goes to 301. The message is that B.C. should get its fair share, as should the other provinces and territories. We started this exercise on the basis that the Liberal government wanted to freeze the number of seats at the 1993 levels. That is not where we are now.

(1320)

The recommendations on the quotient factor contained in the report do not deal effectively with the 25 per cent quotient factor or the what is called the population variance factor by some.

The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act specifies that a commission is to draw constituency boundaries in such a way that the population of each constituency is as close as possible to the quotient obtained by dividing the provincial population of eligible voters by the number of seats in each province. No constituency is permitted to have a population smaller than 75 per cent of this figure or greater than 125 per cent under this proposal.

Elections Canada reports that 51 of the 295 existing ridings exceed the current permissible population variances. By suspending the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act we have perpetuated present inequities. What we are being offered today as a consequence of Bill C-18 and suspending the work of the commission, is 25 per cent. Surely we should expect an improved situation as a consequence of this delay and study. That is not the case. In fact, the recommendation is worse and ultimately the situation will be too.

We are very concerned that the commission will continue to be allowed to draw maps that from the very outset vary up to 25 per cent from the electoral quotient. This will compound the quotient factor in light of population shifts between redistributions.

The Reform minority report advocates an allowable maximum variance of 15 per cent to ensure the primacy of equality of voting power over sociological considerations.

The report states that there may be some ridings that should be more or less than 25 per cent of the provincial quotient and that these ridings should be set out in a schedule to the act. What a contradiction. We are allowing a plus or minus variance from the 25 per cent. With a variance of 25 per cent there should be no exceptions, no need for a schedule, I might add a schedule without guidelines.

Can we really say there has been any substantive changes to the bill? When one considers the lack of reduction in the size of the House of Commons, one has to consider the conviction and the motives of the legislation. It is very difficult to justify discarding the work at great public expense of the existing Electoral Boundaries Commissions for these so-called changes.

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Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from my point of view today is a very important day for Parliament. We are here to recognize for the first time a new way of doing business in Parliament. We are today debating—I hope the House will adopt it—the motion whereby the government will introduce into the House legislation that was drafted, not by the Department of Justice, not by some unknown bureaucrat for whom I have the greatest of respect most of the time, but by parliamentarians at committee.

(1325)

This has occurred using the new rules of procedure that were introduced into Parliament by the government very early in its mandate. It is a very refreshing step to take. For the first time Canadians will have before them legislation that their MPs drafted.

I am not saying that this is how all the laws should be drafted all the time. This time we are showing Canadians that the system will work, that their Parliament will work and that we can do a job that is terribly fundamental in the way we are perceived by the rest of Canadians.

We are debating a motion for concurrence in the work that a number of MPs in all parties participated in and worked on quite hard at committee. I was there. I was one of the many. We look forward to it being adopted at concurrence and then becoming a bill.

I hope we will have a chance to do this in Parliament many more times. I hope that the bureaucracy, the public service, the executive branch of government, all the lawyers whose job it is to draft legislation, will begin to understand and support the growing role of parliamentarians in actually putting the words and concepts to paper.

Aside from the importance of the steps we have taken and the way we produced this legislation, the legislation itself is actually kind of good. We have done the best we can within the political context that exists at this time to reform and draft a bill that provides a better electoral boundary redistribution process. We are just dealing with the process. No one should think that the legislation we are working on now actually permits MPs to redraw the riding boundaries. That is not what it is.

We have reformed the process whereby electoral boundary commissions redraw those boundaries. We have done a number of things that have reformed and improved the process.

One of the issues that was submitted to the committee for consideration and which really does not end up being reflected in the draft legislation is the issue of capping the size of the House of Commons. The committee was asked to consider that issue in dealing with this statute although the statute itself does not designate the number of MPs in the House. The redistribu-

tion of boundaries legislation does not itself set out a formula as to how many MPs should sit in the House of Commons.

Those formulae are actually contained in the Constitution. What the committee was asked to do was to reflect on the constitutional provisions that dictated how many MPs should sit in the House of Commons. More than one section deals with those formulae. They prescribe that based on the current population of Canada the House of Commons for the next general election some time in 1997 or 1998 would have 301 ridings. At the current time there are 295. That would mean a growth of six.

It is not a big number but for many of us on the committee there was a principle. I was one of those who felt that there was a principle that maybe the House of Commons did not have to grow forever and ever into the future, that maybe it could be capped. Maybe we could say 295 was really enough to represent all the various parts of the country. We did not need 350, 400 or 500 as time went on.

(1330)

That is how I felt. I still feel that way, that we have an open-ended formula. As the population of the country grows the number of MPs will grow. That is going to be slow and marginal over time. It is not something I have to lie awake at night to worry about now. The number is going to go up by six. The House can physically accommodate six more bodies but it is getting a little tight in here.

The real issue is whether we want to end the continuing growth. I am one of those who would like to do it in some way that would, as my hon. friend from North Island—Powell River stated, be fair to all provinces. Therein is the problem. How do we be fair to all provinces?

We have two constitutional provisions now that define the growth. One of them is called the senatorial floor, which means that no province will have a number of MPs less than the number of senators which it currently has in the Senate. The other formula is in section 51 of the Constitution Act. It says that provinces with declining populations will not be prejudiced by the decline in their population. In other words, the province will not lose MPs as its population declines, even relative to the population of the rest of the country.

Those are constitutional provisions and I think everyone knows in this Parliament that this is not the time to be tinkering with the Constitution. While I want Parliament to deal with the issue of how much it will grow in the future, this is not the time to start dealing with any particular provision in our Constitution. Canadians are suffering from overload in dealing with constitutional reform.

It simply was not going to be within our ability as a committee to deal with this particular issue effectively. I have accepted that a future committee, maybe even the same committee, or maybe

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another committee in the same or the next Parliament should be dealing with this issue of capping.

What have we done in the current bill to remodel the way we set the electoral boundaries? This is aside from the number of MPs and the number of ridings. We have accepted that there can be a population deviation in any one riding above or below the average population in a riding, plus or minus 25 per cent. This is the one that has been used for a while.

There are some deviations out there. The last hon. member who spoke indicated that there are 50 out of the 295. They are there for a reason. The electoral boundaries commissions accepted that there were reasons for the deviations. I accept that there simply are reasons for which deviations should or could continue to exist over time.

I think of the example in my province of Ontario where there is a stable or decreasing population in the north with a quickly growing population in the south. If we did not allow some deviation, we would end up redrawing boundaries in northern Ontario which would radically diminish the current representation of those people in northern Ontario in this House of Commons.

I was not prepared to say to all of those people: "We are going to pull one or two MPs. I am sorry, but the mathematics say you have to go with fewer MPs". Those ridings are huge and the federal issues that those MPs deal with are no less important than the issues urban MPs deal with. I did not want to be the one to say that they had to give up their representation in this House. Relatively speaking we have the status quo in terms of the deviation.

(1335)

One thing we did recommend which is included in this bill is we took away the ability of the electoral boundary commissions to go beyond the 25 per cent deviation. That is no longer there. At the present time I think there are only one, two or maybe three ridings that go beyond the 25 per cent deviation. That should be seen as being distinct from the current circumstance because certainly there are ridings now that go beyond the 25 per cent simply because since the last redistribution populations have grown.

Going back to the last time a decision was made about boundary sizes, there are only one or two ridings that went beyond the 25 per cent. We are of the view, and I hope the House agrees, that the boundary commissions themselves should no longer have the discretion to permit a deviation beyond the 25 per cent.

We have made other changes which we believe are helpful, cost effective and useful in the current process of redesigning riding boundaries. We adopted the mechanism of a five-year redistribution, a quinquennial redistribution. Rather than going into the mathematics of it, it simply means that where there is a

rapidly growing riding in terms of population we get a chance to adjust it in relation to other surrounding ridings at a five-year period rather than at a ten year period. Therefore we will not have people underrepresented or overrepresented and we will not have these huge populace ridings as have developed in this Parliament.

It is somewhat unfair to the population of those huge ridings with a quarter of a million people. There are one or two out there. My riding has 150,000 people. The average in Ontario is about 100,000. It means that servicing these ridings is a bit more difficult. Therefore, if we have a five-year redistribution for some targeted ridings that have grown quickly we put the problem to bed earlier and we do not have these huge, huge ridings developing over a ten year period.

We have put in place a more transparent method of appointing the commissioners of the electoral boundaries commissions. We think the process is better. We think we are more in control. The quality of those appointments will be improved. We have involved the Speaker of the House of Commons more directly. We have linked that to the floor of the House of Commons at the very beginning so that we will be more certain—one cannot ever be 100 per cent certain—that we will have quality and non-partisan representation on the boundary commissions.

I would point out that the chief of each of the commissions has been and will continue to be a judge of the Supreme Court of each of the provinces, or a judge designated by the chief justice there. That has always been helpful in providing non-partisanship in the drawing of the boundaries.

The new process will provide an initial notice that has more detail in it. It is not just going to read: Be aware that we are going to redistribute ridings and we are going to redraw the boundaries, so get ready. It is going to have more information.

In addition, the boundary commissions are going to have to publish more than just their map of proposals. They are going to have to provide two alternatives so that average Canadians who want to be involved in the process are going to see some of the trade-offs, some of the different ways of looking at boundary redistribution.

Canadians will come to the realization early that when we change the boundary of riding *a* we are also therefore by definition changing the boundary of riding *b* next door and riding *c* and on down the road in a domino effect which occurs in many cases. The additional maps will be very helpful not to the members of Parliament but to the average Canadians who want to be involved and understand the process.

We are also, as I have said, changing the way the appointments to commissions occur. We have reduced the time that will elapse between the triggering of it and the presentation of the final decision. Time saved is money saved in my view. I am sure Canadians want to save some money. We have found some ways

to save money in the process in the way the maps are printed and distributed.

(1340)

Last but not least, under the current legislation there is a way that MPs at the end of the day could deal with the redistribution on the floor of the House of Commons after the boundary commissions had reported. That sometimes happened as I understand it. Keep in mind this only happened once very 10, 11 or 12 years. However, there was a potential for what some people would call gerrymandering. At the end of the process in the old days after the boundary commissions had done their work, the matter could come to the floor of the House of Commons.

That is not going to happen any more. Parliament will simply accept that the commissions will make their decisions and they will be accepted by the House as being the best decisions.

I would like to close by commending members from all sides of the House who have participated in the process of redesigning the bill. The new bill was not accepted 100 per cent by every member. There certainly were some trade-offs and compromise. There may still be bells and whistles some members would like to see in the draft bill which are not there now. However I think we have designed and produced a bill that meets the needs of the 1990s and will serve members and their constituents well for many years to come.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's praise of this proposed legislation.

As my colleague the member for Calgary West mentioned in his speech earlier when he quoted the hon. member, he very clearly indicated he was opposed to an increase in the number of members in this House. When serving with him on the procedure and House affairs committee I distinctly remember him saying that even an increase to the number of 301 was totally unacceptable. I think he used such illustrative language as we may have to knock out walls and destroy the beauty of this House of Commons if we do not come to grips with the rapidly expanding House of Commons.

We have a growth of population coming both from outside our borders and from within our borders. This legislation is set up in a way that the number of seats are determined by population. People are coming into Canada, about 200,000 or more a year, so that represents two seats per year. Then there is the growth within the country. I am not sure of the latest figures but it may be a similar amount. Even if it were half that much that would be three seats per year. Therefore by the year 2001 the increase of six seats from 295 to 301 may seem small by comparison.

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This legislation does absolutely nothing to counteract that problem. In fact it just says that we cannot do anything about the problem. We will leave that for some future body, some future commission, some future committee of members to deal with.

How could the member change his position on this matter?

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I do not think the hon. member is correct in saying that I have changed my position. I have already articulated my position that I would not want to see an increase in the number of members of the House of Commons. That was in my remarks when I began.

The hon. member obviously has never had the responsibility of piloting a constitutional amendment through this House. Neither have I. He probably never will have. If the member thinks that we can simply pass a statute in this House that says that the House of Commons is capped at 295 seats, he is mistaken. It is much more than that.

First, even if we were to say that we want it to be 295, we have to find a new formula to address the needs of all provinces, just as this member prefaced his remarks by saying that we have to be fair to his province of B.C. We have to be fair to all the provinces including those with declining populations that are going to say: "We want a floor; you can add more seats somewhere else but you are not going to take any more away from us".

(1345)

The government has to find a new formula. It has to pass a constitutional amendment and get it approved by all provinces or by two-thirds in a process that will take a number of years. While I am willing to embark on the process, it certainly is not going to happen this month, this year, in this Parliament.

I support the principle and the objective.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I compliment my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River who gave us an opportunity to witness a very complex and complicated issue in three very simple and very easy to understand formulae.

First he addressed the process that involves the House of Commons and something to which every member of the Chamber ought to adhere and applaud. The committee has given Parliament, the House, an opportunity to appreciate what members can do and ought to do.

On the basis of process, not only the way the committee works but the way it arrived at a decision, I compliment him and the other committee members who put the proposal forward. I urge all members to support it. I also compliment him on the way he outlined the basics of the content.

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The content addresses a very important principle in the House, that is how we work for our constituents and how Canada will be reflected in the Chamber. We cannot do that simply by cutting the number of seats or by increasing the number of seats willy-nilly, in a very whimsical fashion.

By pointing out the process for establishing the kinds of representations we would like to see evolve for the House he has done us a great credit. Most important, the member has done something that all other speakers and interveners have unfortunately neglected, that is he gave an indication of the reasons or the philosophy behind this proposal.

That basic philosophy recognizes that the House always has a very difficult time getting a singular view. There is a very important reason for this, that the country as diverse and as large as it is cannot possibly have a single homogeneous view on the basis of a partisan perspective.

I compliment the committee for recognizing that very integral difficulty in governing a country like ours and in making provision in the rationale and the motivations for redistribution so that members can bring forth many important views that differ not only in content but in motivation.

I compliment the member for Scarborough—Rouge River. He has given members of the House an opportunity to take a look at the issue in a very dispassionate, non-partisan and yet forward looking fashion.

I encourage all members on both sides of the House not only to agree with his position but to applaud the efforts of the committee and vote in unison on the issue.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his remarks.

On the suggestion of the member opposite that we really should have tried to do something to cap the number of MPs, or even reduce the number of MPs in the House, I would say that if there were a motion on the floor of the House of Commons to cap, reduce or deal with unending growth of the House of Commons I would vote for it. He should get a motion introduced and I will vote for it.

However the member must be aware that after the motion passes, after he articulates his good wishes, he still has to go through all the constitutional reform procedures and deliver a formula that will be accepted from coast to coast. That is the challenge.

(1350)

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks but I would point out to him that my colleague from Calgary West suggested constitutional changes that can be determined within

this body and without agreement of the provinces because it did not affect the senatorial floors and so on.

He did not appear to support these moves, even though he had the opportunity. In fact he changed his mind.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I would ask the hon. member whether his home province of Saskatchewan would be willing to give up seats to accommodate the proposed cap that his colleague put forward.

I hear otherwise. It might be worth a look and when it comes up I will be on side and in favour of ending the unending growth of the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, of course I have considerable interest in speaking today, because my riding of Cochrane—Superior is in northern Ontario, and its survival is at stake.

I would first like to pay tribute to the committee chairman and to all of my colleagues who helped draft this report, which I would call apolitical. I attended a few meetings, and I must say in all sincerity that they have done a tremendous job. It was, however, a job that had to be done; it was inevitable, given the situation. First, the act dates from 1964; it bears no resemblance to the way Canada's current electoral map looks today.

On issues of representation, the report focuses significantly on the quotient, the variance of 25 per cent. This remains something that is very important for me, for the simple reason that, because of this quotient, large rural ridings in Canada will never be safe and will never have equal representation here in the House. I need only point out how far we have to travel to serve our constituents. This is our prime function, to serve people.

For example, if a riding like mine were abolished, according to the recommendation of the September report, the four surrounding ridings would simply become bigger. It would therefore simply increase the already excessive demands on each of these members, or rather on their resources, energy and ability to reach remote communities.

If I may be permitted to speak specifically about remote communities, my riding of Cochrane—Superior includes 21 Indian communities, 16 of which are north of the 49th parallel. For the most part, there are no roads leading to these communities, which means that when I want to go there, make myself available to them, I must charter a flight, which is extremely expensive but must be done. This then contradicts the Reform Party's argument that it is too expensive to have a great number of members in the House. This argument verges on being absurd.

S. O. 31

What good will it do to increase, to double the population of such a riding while retaining the same member without giving him the resources, both human and financial, to carry out his work?

(1355)

And what purpose will it serve to do away with many rural ridings only to increase the size of so-called urban ridings and thereby, as stated, make demands exceeding the members' resources and energy. More importantly, should this come about, it would be a direct attack on democracy, here in Canada, because all Canadians, wherever they live, have the right to be equally represented in the House of Commons.

I would of course like to reserve my main comments for the third reading of the bill once it is tabled.

These are the points I wanted to make at this time. I have not addressed the true substance of the report. I will wait for the bill to be tabled. At that time, I will be able to provide the statistics to back up what I have just said.

This report is not acceptable for northern Ontario, not at all. It is not acceptable at this time. I will therefore certainly table an amendment in the House, first and foremost to restore the schedule of ridings called "special" because of their geography. That has been removed from the report. I definitely intend to attempt to have it included again. I hope my colleagues will appreciate my purpose and will support me in this matter.

[English]

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I commend the member for identifying a very real problem in our Constitution. We have a real anomaly. If we were to be honest we would have to say a constitutional change is in order.

If Canada's population remains constant but Quebec's population goes down, we need more members in the House of Commons for that reason, by our present rules. That does not make sense in anybody's thinking. Therefore we do need to have a change in this regard. There ought to be a formula that recognizes geography, the area of a constituency, because it is a very real factor in any area away from the more densely populated areas.

The member who just spoke was right on the button when he said that we need to change the rules so it is possible for an MP to do his work. As far as the numbers are concerned, I think Canadians would have no trouble at all with supporting their members of Parliament.

The Speaker: It being 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(5) the House will now proceed to Statements by Members, pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the constituents of my riding have given me a clear message to pass on to the Minister of Finance for the budget.

Eliminate waste in government. In particular, stop the rip-off of taxpayers' dollars by the military, by their inefficient management of government moves, and implement the government's own reports and contract out move management.

Stop double dipping by MPs and civil servants. Reform MPs' pensions. Deal effectively with the deficit to get Canada's fiscal house in order.

We must also reaffirm our commitment to our internationally renowned system of higher education, maintaining accessibility through an income contingent loan repayment scheme and support for our federal granting councils to sustain university research efforts in Canada. We need strategic long run investment in wealth creation through university research funding.

The University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College in my riding are existing testimonials of wealth creation for all Canadians through support for research and higher education.

* * *

[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval-Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in several cities in Quebec, the province's student associations have indignantly protested social program reform, especially changes to the funding of post-secondary education.

They have all said that the proposals are unacceptable and that they will have the negative effect of causing an unprecedented increase in tuition fees, which in turn will bring student debt to dizzying heights.

Lucienne Robillard, the Liberal Party's candidate in the riding of Saint-Henri—Westmount, surely agrees with the students' criticisms. In fact, on May 29, 1991, she said in the Quebec National Assembly that she had to insist that the federal government was completely out of touch with today's world of education.

Need I say more?

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[English]

INCOME TAX

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate a Liberal MP backbencher today. I was at a meeting in a constituency not so long ago. With the press in attendance this powerful MP made an amazing promise. He promised that he would not vote with the government on the budget if the budget raised more taxes than a gasoline tax and a lottery tax.

Reformers say that no taxes should be raised, but this powerful MP made that promise. Everyone was there to hear him. Think of it. No more cattle herding by cabinet solidarity; free MPs to vote their constituents' wishes.

I would like to congratulate the member for Cambridge. His constituents will remember the promise and we will watch carefully whether or not that support is forthcoming. Congratulations.

* * *

EATING DISORDER AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind members of the House and Canadians that February 6 to 12 is Eating Disorder Awareness Week.

The theme is: "Breaking free: Celebrating our natural sizes". The goal is to increase awareness of the social factors which contribute to the development of anorexia, bulimia and weight preoccupation, and to prevent them.

Anorexia and bulimia are more common among women between the ages of 13 and 25 and is increasing rapidly in a society that glorifies thinness.

During this week, the National Eating Disorder Information Centre will provide messages consistent with Health Canada's vitality program, promoting healthy weights. The vitality program pinpoints our society's preoccupation with weight and unrealistic body size and responds by building self-esteem and a positive body image.

Healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. A good weight is a healthy weight, not just a low weight. Dispelling the myth about weight and directing Canadians to appropriate resources is only the start in correcting this insidious disease that devastates our young women.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, International Development Week, is a time for Canadians to become more aware of the challenges facing people of developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. It is also time to recognize the effectiveness

of the Canadian international development programs that support sustainable development and alleviate poverty in developing countries.

With assistance programs, more than 80 per cent of the world's children have been immunized, sanitation and water quality have improved, more people are living longer and healthier lives, food production has tripled, and there is greater literacy in the world.

Co-operation between governments, the private sector, the United Nations, international banks and other organizations and will continue to bring immeasurable benefits to the global community. During International Development Week we should keep in mind that we do after all share one world and a common future.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, lately there has been much speculation about the imminent federal budget. The previous government raised taxes 39 times under the guise of deficit reduction, but the deficit continued to swell uncontrollably.

I frequently said during the election campaign and again in the House that we need more people paying taxes, not people paying more taxes. I believe Canadians are generally fair-minded about taxes, but I am certain they will accept only changes that make the system more equitable.

(1405)

During recent weeks the leader of the Reform Party and others in his party have been talking a lot about a taxpayers' revolt. This negative rhetoric is not constructive and does not reflect the new way of doing politics which the Reform Party so frequently espoused before coming to Ottawa.

It is also unnecessary. The government and indeed very member of Parliament knows that middle class Canadians cannot bear a greater tax burden. In fact, the Liberal members addressed this problem head on during the last election campaign.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the consultations on social program reform, the following message came across loud and clear: the main problem is lack of jobs, and students and the jobless should not have to shoulder all of the deficit reduction measures, because social program budgets have already been squeezed enough over the past 10 years.

However, despite the opinion of the majority of witnesses who spoke before the committee on the proposed reforms, the ministers of finance and human resources development appear poised to revisit last year's budget this winter, by heaping most of the budget cuts on the most needy and the middle class.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to make the two ministers see reason? Any effort to get our financial house in order should target those who are best off, the rich who are still able to avoid paying taxes.

* * *

[English]

ELECTRONIC VOTING

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, governments around the world are introducing new direct democracy initiatives while our Liberal government refuses to even consider modifying our outdated parliamentary system.

New Zealand, the first country to have universal suffrage, passed the Citizens' Initiative and Referendum Act in 1993. The state of Montana recently authorized the use of electronic voting in school board elections.

Elections Canada has been closely observing the use of touch tone telephone voting in our country and I am confident that it will use an electronic voting system in a byelection before the turn of the century.

Of course it is the Reform Party which is the leader in this field. We are involved in two more electronic town halls on February 12 and February 19 at 8 p.m. eastern time as part of our commitment to enhance and develop the use of this technology.

I urge all members to tune into their local cable television stations on Sunday to witness the making of the new democracy right before their eyes.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last November it was announced in the House that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment will chair an international meeting of environment ministers from the group of seven industrialized nations.

I am pleased to inform the House that this important meeting will take place in Hamilton at McMaster University from April 29 to May 1. We will demonstrate Canada's leadership in working on solutions to difficult global challenges such as climate change, biological diversity, the management of toxic substances and the international mechanisms that we use to tackle these issues.

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The government's recent actions to get our own house in order, greening our operations and policies, will also be shared with G-7 colleagues. Invitations have been sent to environment ministers from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States as well as the European Union and the executive director of the United Nations environment program.

All Canadians will welcome these efforts to address global environmental problems.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. John Maloney (Erie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CBC has made an application to televise the proceedings of the Paul Bernardo trial, a motion that is strongly opposed by the families of the innocent victims, Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy.

One must question the motives. Ratings, sensationalism and profit quickly come to mind. We have open court rooms. We have a jury of our peers to represent society. Surely this is enough.

The people of Niagara knew these victims and we know their families. These two unfortunate teenagers have become children of our nation. Let us protect their dignity in death.

It is time to deal with this situation in a judicial and responsible manner and to respect the rights of the victims not to be exploited further. There is no need to glorify these tragic events. There is no need to satisfy the perversion of tabloid journalism. There is no need to bring the O. J. Simpson circus to Canada.

I implore the CBC to withdraw its application. It is simply not the Canadian way.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development is to be applauded for considering a ban on replacement workers in the event of a strike. Such measure would mirror legislation already existing in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia.

(1410)

The banning of replacement workers has not harmed the economies of these provinces. On the contrary, such legislation would help to motivate labour and management to begin early the collective bargaining process, thus averting costly work stoppages.

As emotion often runs high during a strike, this measure would help prevent tragic events such as those recently witnessed at Yellowknife's Giant gold mine.

Liberals look forward to passing such legislation.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

MINING

Mr. Bernard Deshaies (Abitibi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance is preparing his budget, I hope that the federal government gave due consideration to the recommendations contained in the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. As you may recall, these recommendations were made in light of the evidence given by all those who took the trouble of appearing before our committee to describe the situation in the mining sector.

I especially want to remind you of the second recommendation in the report, namely that the federal government should include in its February 1995 budget tax measures to stimulate mining exploration in Canada. It has been demonstrated that mining exploration is an investment rather than an expenditure.

Implementing this tax recommendation will have a direct beneficial impact on job creation that will be more than welcome in my region of Abitibi, in Northern Quebec and in all mining regions of Canada.

* * *

[English]

FAMILY INCOME

Mrs. Sharon Hayes (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada's annual report on family income verifies what many Canadians have known for years: family budgets do not balance. Why? StatsCan reports that family income has actually declined by 6.7 per cent since its peak in 1989. The report calls it the longest and steepest decline in the last four decades. In fact, the average family income in 1993 was slightly lower than the level recorded in 1980.

As if that is not enough, personal per capita income and take home pay has also declined. The culprits? The PST, GST and UI premiums. We are income taxed to death.

It seems easy for the government to dismiss the grassroots tax rallies springing up across Canada. In doing so it blithely dismisses the growing economic nightmare of those individuals and families that hold our future as a nation.

The finance minister must recognize that Canadian families will not sit back and watch this trend continue with the imposition of further tax increases in its forthcoming budget.

* * *

PULP AND PAPER INDUSTRY

Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I note the recent announcement that the Avenor newsprint mill in Thunder Bay is planning to

install a treatment system which will allow the mill to become completely effluent free.

This project represents the first mill scale development under a memorandum of understanding signed in March 1994 by the federal government and the Pulp and Paper Research Institute of Canada.

Two successful pilot tests of the process to be used have been completed and a secondary treatment system for the mill will be installed in 1995. The complete, totally effluent free process should be in place by late 1996.

The initiative shown by the pulp and paper industry and companies like Avenor is clear confirmation of the industry's commitment to the principles of environmental responsibility and sustainable development.

* * *

INSTALLATION OF GOVERNOR GENERAL

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House I would like to acknowledge the observers from the Reform Party who graced us with their presence at the installation of the Governor General yesterday.

For the next such ceremony that members of the Reform Party attend, my colleagues in the Liberal Party would ask that they please show some signs of life, as yesterday we were quite concerned that they had all passed away in their seats. It must have been extremely difficult for many of them to sit so quietly for so long.

After the ceremony I learned that certain members of the Reform Party had not been present. Perhaps these members could not find cabs, which of course they could have billed to their tax free allowances. Or perhaps they all got lost somewhere in Ottawa—Vanier. After all, it is difficult to read French street signs.

* * *

(1415)

LIBERAL PARTY

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am submitting a refresher course on the translation of Liberal rhetoric.

When the Liberals say that they hate the GST and will try to kill it, what they really mean is they will try selling it under a different name at 8 per cent.

When they say that their interest rate projections are bang on, what they really mean is give or take 4 per cent.

When the Prime Minister says that everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die, what he really means is that they are going to raise taxes.

When the Liberals say that they are going to get tough on young offenders, what they really mean is: "We will slap you on both wrists".

When they say that western economic diversification helps thousands of western companies secure new markets, what they really mean is that re-election in Winnipeg is in the bag.

When Liberals say that they will reform our social programs at any cost, we now know they mean it, at any cost.

Finally, when the finance minister uses clichés like keeping our feet to the fire and squaring the circle, beware, Mr. Speaker. What he really means is that like the Prime Minister and because of his cabinet he just does not know. He does not know.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday when the Minister of National Defence answered one of our questions in the House, he said he had absolutely no knowledge of the existence of a third videotape concerning the Airborne Regiment in Petawawa.

How could the Minister of National Defence say he had no knowledge of the existence of a third videotape, when General de Chastelain specifically informed him of the existence of this third tape in a memo he sent to him personally on January 23?

Hon. David Michael Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. member for Charlesbourg asked me the following question:

Can the minister promise that this new tape will not be destroyed like some of the evidence—

[*English*]

Also he went on to talk about the tape as being of "similar quality and horrendous nature as the one to which was referred earlier about the hazing incident". I replied that I had no such evidence of the existence of that particular tape. However I went back to the report and we sent out a clarifying release last night so that there is no misunderstanding.

In the report that came to me there was an acknowledgement of a videotape of something that was described as welcoming party, the activities at which were mostly beer drinking and other things that people do from time to time in a social context, but one where there was masticating of bread which of course we find totally abhorrent. It was described in the report to me as

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something that was not of a serious nature, that it was something that was not in comparison with the earlier tapes.

The interesting thing is that I have just been informed—and I want to get to the bottom of it after question period; I am sorry that question period will not wait for me—that the description of the events in the report that was given to me by the chief of defence staff two weeks ago does not corroborate with what I was given five minutes before two o'clock today.

Because I would like to get to the bottom of this I want to ask for the indulgence of hon. members so that I can come back certainly tomorrow and give some clarification of the matter.

(1420)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by all means, by all means. Considering the controversy around the regiment in Petawawa and the fact that this controversy has even led to the immediate disbanding of the regiment, how can the minister seriously say, two weeks after reading the report from the chief of defence staff, no less, how can he seriously say that yesterday he had no knowledge of the existence of a videotape and today, that he is not sure that the report from his chief of defence staff gives an accurate description of the content of the tape?

[*English*]

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have to understand the context of the question of the hon. member for Charlevoix yesterday.

He referred to the existence of a tape that was worse than the ones that were made public and which led to the dismantling of the regiment. I said yesterday and I say today that I have no evidence of that kind of tape being in existence.

However what I am saying is that in the report I got two weeks ago there was no reference to an initiation ceremony, nothing of that nature. There was reference to a welcoming party where the description I gave was applied.

What I am saying is that the description that I got two weeks ago did not add up to what I have just been told was actually in that video. It still does not go any way along the lines of the earlier video in terms of the abhorrent nature of the contents of that video to Canadians.

What I am saying is that since I have just been informed of this I would like to get to the bottom of it to clarify it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister says he has no proof of the existence of this tape. It

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seems to me that if the chief of defence staff mentions it in his report, that should be sufficient proof for the minister.

Are we to conclude that the minister was so prompt to disband the Airborne Regiment in Petawawa without, as he himself admitted, being aware of all the facts and all the available evidence, because he was probably trying to put a lid on it? Was he trying to cover up reprehensible acts engaged in by senior officers of the Canadian Forces, acts that would tarnish the army's reputation?

[English]

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision to disband the regiment was made on good grounds. We made that public two weeks ago and it was made notwithstanding the recommendations of senior officials in the armed forces.

One of the reasons that I believe disbanding the regiment was right at that time is that I did not know as minister what else may be out there.

When the hon. member spoke to me yesterday it seemed to me he was referring—I have heard lots of rumours about other video tapes—to the existence of other evidence that may come to light.

What we did two weeks ago is that we took the sequence of events, the deployment last year to Rwanda where some of the airborne got in trouble, the two video tapes, and we said that there was something radically wrong with this regiment, that there was a systemic problem, and on those grounds we ordered the disbanding of the regiment.

The Speaker: I know the seriousness of this issue. I would ask that the questions and the answers be to the point.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say to the minister that if this tape does not contain anything of serious concern, it should be made public and we will see for ourselves. It is being held by military police and no one can deny that.

Last December, the minister of defence announced that a commission of inquiry was being established to investigate the events in Somalia involving soldiers of the Airborne Regiment of Petawawa. In spite of additional events which further exacerbate the situation, the minister did not deem it necessary to take immediate measures.

How can the minister of defence justify not yet having established a commission of inquiry into the actions of the Airborne Regiment although section 45 of the National Defence Act gives him full authority to do so?

[English]

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going over some ground that was covered a couple of weeks ago.

After the juxtaposition of events of the report based on infractions in Rwanda, the second video tape with racist behaviour involving some people now before courts martial, and the third involving the hazing, we felt that was enough. Enough was enough. We believe the problem was of such systemic origins that it had to be dealt with by disbanding the regiment, and I think there has been widespread public support for this.

(1425)

In a perfect world I would have waited to take any action with respect to this regiment until after an inquiry had reported. I have to underscore the fact that the government inherited this particular dossier and what we will be judged on is how we handle the matter now, not how it got to one place right at the beginning months ago.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, may I remind the minister that we must distinguish between the events in Somalia and the events in Petawawa. Section 45 of the National Defence Act authorizes him to establish a commission of inquiry immediately, rather than disband the regiment and wash his hands of the affair and punish no one except enlisted men.

How can the minister claim to deserve the confidence of this House and of the public when, on the very day he set about disbanding the Airborne Regiment, he concealed from the public the existence of a third tape?

[English]

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to make light of the hon. member's intention, but the fact is that when we are talking about the existence of other tapes I do not know how many tapes are out there. I do not know how many copies there are. I do not know how many camera people there are. What is obviously happening is that as modern technology is catching up with everyone, including the armed forces, people are taking tapes of certain activities and I do not know exactly what is out there.

With respect to the question of why, sure we have the authority to set up an inquiry right now. There is a court decision now before the Supreme Court, the Westray Mine decision, that calls into question the fact that we could have an inquiry, a coroner's inquest or judicial proceedings all at the same time.

Once judicial proceedings were initiated, and they were initiated before we were elected, there was no choice but to adjourn the original inquiry. What we are saying is once due

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process is followed with the existing courts martial, and that would be the middle of March, there will be an inquiry. It will be public. It will be headed by a civilian. All these questions on how the regiment was fit for deployment to Somalia will be answered.

* * *

PENSION REFORM

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are angry and we witnessed this last night at the huge anti-tax rally in Toronto. They cannot believe the government is considering tax increases.

An hon. member: They were all Reformers.

Miss Grey: I do not think it was just Reformers at the tax rally.

In the 1993 election we heard the present Prime Minister challenge then Prime Minister Kim Campbell to recall the House of Commons in the middle of August so that pension reform could be dealt with. He promised and told the press that the Liberals would change that plan in a day. Over 600 days have passed since then and Canadians are still waiting.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What changed since the 1993 election campaign? Why is the minister backtracking right now on his election promise? Will he introduce legislation now to reform MPs' pensions?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I thank the hon. member for Beaver River and other members of the Reform Party who attended the installation ceremony of the Governor General yesterday.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and the other members of the Bloc Québécois who attended this ceremony.

[*English*]

It was a sign of respect for the institution. They did what is expected of all members of Parliament; they displayed good manners.

As far as the bill is concerned, there will be legislation very soon in the House of Commons. It will be announced either before or at the same time as the budget.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we heard something to that effect this morning on "Canada AM". What surprises me is that we have heard cabinet ministers, especially the Prime Minister, say that they cannot reveal anything that is going to be in the budget. How things change.

He has just revealed, quite likely, that it would be revealed in the budget.

(1430)

The Prime Minister said: "MP pension reform is in the red book and I am committed to everything that is in the red book". This vacuous document unfortunately has become the Liberal's book of excuses. It is like the fine print on a legal contract, just like the Deputy Prime Minister's promise to resign if the GST were not scrapped in a year. We are waiting for that to come true.

Will the Prime Minister go beyond the bare minimum outlined in the red book which does not address the problem of only six years for people qualifying for pension and paying in, and a contribution ratio of employer to employee of eight to one?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to be courteous to the hon. member, I would not like to see the bill passed before March 13. That will be the day she will qualify for the pension.

The bill will be dealt with. We made promises in the red book which will be kept. There are some people who want us to move further. We are discussing that at this time.

However, there is one thing I would like to say to all members of Parliament and to the public. The salaries of members have been frozen for years. Members of Parliament work very hard and are not very well paid. Many school directors and chiefs of police and so on are making much more money than members of Parliament.

I am not one to try and score political points at the expense of people who try to serve their citizens well as members of Parliament.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would agree that Canadians are not unreasonable. Nobody is suggesting that MPs do not work hard or that they do not deserve fair compensation for their years of public service. They simply want the MP pension plan brought into line with the realities faced by the private sector and do not violate the Income Tax Act.

If the Liberals are not willing to reform their gold pension plan, then start with mine which does kick in on March 13.

How can he justify a pension plan that is eight times as rich as the people who are paying for it, the taxpayers of Canada?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was a commission that looked into this problem not long ago and reported. It said members are really underpaid for the work they have to do. I agree with the commission.

This pension plan was established a long time ago. I have been a member of Parliament for 32 years this April and I have seen members of Parliament who had a very difficult time adjusting

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to life afterward. I am informed that there are a lot of former members of Parliament who were in this House two years ago who are having a difficult time, some of them 58, 59 or 60 years of age, finding another job because they were in Parliament 15 years and cannot make the transition to private life very easily.

I am not about to play politics with it. We will be fair to members of Parliament. I ran on a program and it was written there that it will be at least the minimum we will announce before the end of this month.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

According to the Liberal member for Gander—Grand Falls, senior finance officials have already presented the measures that the Minister of Finance plans to take in the next budget to influential business people and bankers.

Will the Minister of Finance confirm that he is considering the following measures, among others: a \$4 billion reduction in transfer payments, a one per cent increase in the GST rate and a one per cent tax on the capital held in pension funds and RRSPs?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that I have no intention of making any comment on specifics concerning the budget. Having said this, I can confirm that no meeting such as the one described in the hon. member's letter ever took place.

(1435)

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance could perhaps explain to us in what context the meeting occurred, if it did not occur in the way I described. Also, given the disastrous impact that a one per cent tax on capital accrued in RRSPs and pension funds would have, will the Minister of Finance commit to immediately and unequivocally ruling out this tax which would cost taxpayers, mostly from the middle class, some \$5 billion?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have obviously just seen the drawback of writing the supplementary question before getting the reply to the first.

It is impossible to describe a meeting that never took place.

[English]

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Indian affairs.

According to a story in today's *Winnipeg Free Press*, an aboriginal band in northern Manitoba is sending 53 band members to a conference in the Dominican Republic at taxpayers' expense.

Does the minister approve of this waste of taxpayers' money? Does he simply not know what is going on in his own department?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a story that came today. This is not my department. This is an aboriginal decision.

This is something I will look into and I will get back to the hon. member with the information. Unlike members of the Reform Party, I want to hear both sides of the issue before I respond.

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said a few minutes ago that people find it difficult to find jobs when they leave this place and it is because they have made such a mess of the economy.

I can understand the minister having a difficult time understanding why things like this offend the taxpayers because members of his own caucus like to go on these kinds of junkets.

Can the minister tell this House what the goal of this trip is, how he justifies it? Is it just the case of the government looking for expensive new ways of appearing ridiculous, in which case it has succeeded admirably?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated to the hon. member, I will discuss it with the First Nations of Manitoba.

If it is inappropriate in my opinion I will so state. I will at least talk to them unlike the hon. member who, when he talks about fairness and has a meeting in his own riding, sends out notices at our expense and advises everybody except the aboriginal people in his own riding.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

At the start of the week, the Minister of Human Resources Development stated that the government would proceed with its reform of social programs and that it would be consulting the

provinces. The last federal–provincial ministers conference on income security was cancelled on April 18 due to the strong opposition of a number of provinces to its reform.

Does the Minister of Human Resources Development plan to call a federal–provincial conference on social program reform before the upcoming federal budget?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. I can answer very briefly that just before the Christmas break my deputy met with his counterparts in the provincial governments to talk about the process they would like to initiate. A meeting was also held in the third week of January with the social service deputies to raise that question.

The response we received back from the provinces is that they would like to wait before they start a formal process until after the budget to be sure on the fiscal parameters.

I would like to indicate to the hon. member that I had a meeting last week with all the social service labour market ministers from the Atlantic provinces.

(1440)

We had a very good discussion about how we can approach ongoing consultations with the provinces. I will be meeting with other provincial ministers individually over the next couple of weeks. I can confirm for the member that several provinces are quite ready to look seriously at how we can work together for the development of a new social reform package.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the government intends to present the provinces with a *fait accompli* by failing to call a federal–provincial conference on the proposed reform prior to the budget? Is it the government's intention, despite the discussions that have taken place and despite the additional cuts planned in the budget, which the number of rumours about would appear to confirm, to simply announce to the provinces, without prior consultation, what the cuts will mean for them?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I explained to the hon. member that in the meetings we held in both December and January at the senior official level in which we raised the issue of how we should proceed with a useful process of discussion, it was the wishes of the provincial representatives that any further meetings of ministers await the tabling of the federal budget.

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In all things we are most sensitive and interested in the points of view of the provinces and therefore abide by their wishes.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of saving hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars I ask the minister of immigration if he would consider the following Reform proposals: eliminating the Immigration and Refugee Board; selecting more refugees from abroad and reforming visas to end abuse; creating a safe third country list; negotiating a cut to legal aid for court appeals for illegal residents; not issuing any more amnesties for failed claimants.

The Speaker: Colleagues, usually in Question Period we might get a question and maybe tack a little one on behind. When we get up to five that is a little much. Perhaps the hon. minister could answer the first two.

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with you more.

This government has already taken measures to improve not only the immigration but also the refugee determination system.

We passed the other night Bill C–44, intended to improve the system and cut down on the very abuses that are part of that. We said at the end of last year as part of the program and agency review that additional reforms will be brought before the House of Commons in the very near future.

I ask the member to also judge us on that record.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if the minister will not agree to those proposals, how about a pledge not to repeat expenditures like these next year: furniture for his friend Michael Schelew, \$100,000; a \$100,000 handshake when Schelew had to leave; \$25,000 for a trip for senior bureaucrats to Vancouver Island; \$2,000 for bookmarks with the—

The Speaker: These multiple questions are difficult for the Chair to control in question period. As long as the questions deal with the administration of a minister's department, of course I will consider them. When questions are so specific that perhaps they should be best put on the Order Paper, hon. members should consider that.

I will permit the hon. minister of immigration to address himself to the first two questions.

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of grandstanding that you cannot help but contrast the kind of spirit of these types of questions when we are looking at an important dossier like immigration. Contrast that with the speeches of the Prime Minister and the Governor General yesterday with the gener-

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osity of spirit, the kind of vision that it takes to build a country like Canada which has been built by both newcomers and those who have been here for a long time.

* * *

[Translation]

FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

(1445)

The Minister of Health has obviously been overtaken by the events and stubbornly refuses to assume her responsibilities with respect to AIDS. This minister shows her staggering incompetence by displaying her inability to understand what those afflicted with this terrible disease must go through.

How does the Minister of Health explain that, two weeks before the federal budget is tabled, an amount of \$1.1 million earmarked for the fight against AIDS is still unused and that, after waiting for 10 months, the minister still refuses to allocate this amount so that people with AIDS and community field workers can get help?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry but if someone has been overtaken, it is the hon. member, because I have explained several times how we handle the money set aside to fight AIDS. We have, in phase II, \$40.7 million a year, which is spent directly on assistance and research programs to prevent AIDS.

In addition, the Medical Research Council spends \$2 million each year on research programs. At the international level, CIDA also spends money.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister rise in this House and justify the fact that seven community projects are waiting on her desk, when they have been approved by her officials? Can the minister tell us whether or not she will help community groups and authorize these projects, which have been waiting for her signature since October?

[English]

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many projects under review within my department, far more than the seven that have been indicated here today.

The challenge is to ensure that every dollar we spend is spent effectively. That is what we are doing and that is what we will continue to do. Good projects will receive funding.

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this question is for the Minister of National Defence.

On several occasions the minister has assured this House of his strong concern for the health and welfare of the Canadian troops. Is the minister aware that Canadian forces personnel are complaining that they are experiencing effects which are sometimes called the gulf war syndrome?

Can the minister tell this House what is being done to address these complaints for the future well-being of the Canadian forces members?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been concerned about this problem for some time.

No definitive link has been made with respect to some of the symptoms people are experiencing and the participation in the Gulf war. A registry has been established at veterans affairs. A special clinic here in Ottawa at the National Defence Medical Centre has been established to deal with it. A protocol has been put forward for all medical personnel in the armed forces to deal with these complaints as they come forward. The Surgeon General of the armed forces has written to every member serving in the Gulf to ascertain whether or not the kind of complaints which have surfaced in some cases are prevalent.

We have no definitive link yet. Neither do similar authorities in the U.S. and Great Britain which also served in the gulf. It is something we want to get to the bottom of and we are at least putting these steps in place to address this very serious problem.

* * *

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand a report that was produced over a year ago by the department that answers to the Minister of Human Resources Development. This report shows that the unemployment insurance program is so poorly designed that the unemployment rate could be .5 to 1.5 per cent lower than it currently is.

The minister's own department admits that unemployment insurance needs reform. He has had over a year to do something and has done nothing. When will we get some real action?

(1450)

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would be

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courteous enough to tell us exactly what this report is, I would be glad to take a look at it.

As the hon. member knows, but I hope this does not come as a great surprise to him, we have just spent four months on a major public consultation by a committee looking at the unemployment insurance program. Members of Parliament, including his colleagues, have made a number of recommendations. In fact, I think he was on the committee. It strikes me that if he had all of this information, why did he not use it then?

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, what is happening here is that we have a government that uses consultation as an excuse for inaction. That is what is happening. This report is available.

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member not to use any props. If that is indeed the report, I would just ask him to put it down so he can put his question. No props.

Mr. Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, Canadian taxpayers are sick of people who abuse our social programs, but they are even more sick of politicians who do not do anything. The minister is bent on making his programs bigger; he seems incapable of making them better.

Will the minister finally admit that big government programs are actually the root of the problem?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to go back to the hon. member's somewhat fiery declamations, after yesterday's question period I made a special point of going back and looking very carefully at the recommendations tabled by the Reform Party as part of its committee report.

After carefully reading them, I came to the conclusion that I agree fully with the comments made by the hon. member's colleague, the member for Calgary North. She said: "They were not thought through very well; they were rushed into print" and no one should take them too seriously. That certainly speaks to the whole position of the Reform Party on social reform.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport.

The Minister of Transport recently announced his policy on assigning new international routes to air carriers. This policy will give Canadian International an advantage by granting it a quasi-monopoly on Pacific routes and excluding Air Canada from this lucrative market.

Would the Minister of Transport agree that by denying Air Canada access to the Hong Kong and Chinese market, he is also depriving Canadians of the substantial benefit they would enjoy as a result of competition between the two carriers?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada is of course interested in the Hong Kong route. However, as you very well know, in 1994 we gave Air Canada access to Japan with a route to Osaka via the new Kansai airport. I can assure the hon. member that the outlook is pretty good. Air Canada will hire more than 350 flight attendants and recall about 100 pilots. That is not bad.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Transport explain why, after the Gemini affair and the guaranteed loan of \$50 million to Canadian International, the federal government has once again decided to give Canadian International an edge over Air Canada? Does he have an explanation?

[English]

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is trying, but I want to point out that with respect to international routes we need to be very careful on exactly what was done and when. This government certainly did not contribute any \$50 million guarantee to Canadian Airlines International.

(1455)

In spite of what the hon. member is trying to produce in front of the House today, again I want to quote: "Under the existing international air route policy, Air Canada has just announced that it is increasing its international capacity by 18 per cent".

If the hon. member would look back to where we were this time last year with Air Canada and Canadian Airlines International, he would understand how far we have come.

* * *

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

The minister has promised to begin an inquiry into the incident surrounding the airborne regiment in Somalia after the appeals are completed. It seems as though much of the airborne regiment's trouble has to do with the breakdown of the command structure.

Would the minister at least commence the inquiry procedure by naming the members of the inquiry so that there will be no delays after the appeals?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has obviously not been following what I announced

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before in this House. The inquiry will begin not after the appeals but after the initial proceedings, the courts martial. That will be sometime in mid-March.

Once the judicial proceedings are finished, the hon. member will know the people involved in the inquiry and the terms of reference. I am sure that once he sees them, which will be soon after the judicial proceedings are completed, he will be quite satisfied.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I was merely suggesting in order to make sure there were no further delays after the inquiries take place that we move quickly to at least name the people on the inquiry board.

The morale of the Canadian Armed Forces is in serious jeopardy and I am sure the minister realizes that. There are such events as those of the airborne regiment, sailors on welfare, subsidized housing, golf trips for generals, and now cuts to the medical support for Canadian peacekeepers in Croatia which was reported today.

How can the troops be expected to have confidence in their commanders while these devastating morale problems remain unresolved?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I ever saw a loaded question that was one. Everything the hon. member has ever learned about the armed forces, anything negative in the last little while has been rolled up into one question. I really cannot give a detailed answer to everything because I would be here until 3.30.

With respect to the inquiry, it will begin once the courts martial are over. With respect to the other questions he raised, I have responded to those questions in public and I can give detailed answers to the hon. member.

I will say one thing. We all have a responsibility as politicians to ensure that there is adequate, informed and reasoned debate about any institution so that we do not undermine the morale of institutions like the armed forces.

* * *

PESTICIDES

Mr. Gary Pillitteri (Niagara Falls, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years Canadian growers have been wanting a level playing field with American growers.

The red book promised to improve the pesticide regulatory system. What is the government plan on regulating pesticides to mean to Canadian farmers especially to horticultural growers?

Mr. Lyle Vanclief (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Niagara Falls for his continued interest.

We are certainly pleased that later today the government will be announcing a new and revised pesticide regulatory system in Canada which will be under the direction of the Minister of Health.

The system we already have is one of the most rigorous in the world today. However we are going to improve that even further so that the availability of products to our horticultural producers, our foresters and all Canadians will be provided in a more efficient, more cost effective, environmentally safe and competitive manner so that we will all be better off.

* * *

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

I have been informed that the new plan for the Trans-Canada Highway through New Brunswick is on the desk of the premier of the province of New Brunswick and he is negotiating with the federal government for funding for same.

(1500)

The proposal cuts off the largest industrial base in the province of New Brunswick, the city of Saint John. I am informed that it costs over \$1 billion to go through the base.

There is another route and that is the existing route—

The Speaker: The hon. member's question, please.

Mrs. Wayne: Will the Minister of Transport confirm to this House that his government will not be part of a cost sharing agreement for the TCH in New Brunswick that will cost the taxpayers \$1 billion when the present route can be built for \$200 million which ensures that all the three major cities, Saint John, Fredericton and Moncton, are treated equally and are connected to the U.S. border with a four-lane highway from St. Stephen?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question because I know it may be one of the last questions she raises in the House. I understand she is looking forward to replacing Dennis Cochrane in New Brunswick as leader of the Conservative Party and thereby reducing the Conservative caucus in this House by 50 per cent in one crack.

With respect to highway construction in New Brunswick, as is the case everywhere else in the country, the hon. member would be aware that it is a provincial jurisdiction. If the Government of Canada is able to participate, we certainly will try.

As far as the routing of the highway is concerned, because of the nature of the provincial jurisdiction she would have to negotiate that in her new incarnation in the legislature of New Brunswick with Premier McKenna.

*Speaker's Ruling***POINTS OF ORDER**

COMMENTS DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the minister of aboriginal affairs made some statements about my conduct as a member of Parliament in that he suggested I was carrying on with public consultations without consulting with aboriginal or native people in my riding.

This is patently false and I would ask that you ask the minister to withdraw these remarks.

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mine was the same point of order.

I would like to correct the geographic error I made. I have three, sometimes two, critics in the Reform Party sitting in the same area, the hon. member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley and the hon. member for Skeena. Both ridings abut. The member for Prince George—Bulkley has 11 First Nations and the hon. member for Skeena has 23, 30 per cent of his population.

There was a meeting called 'let the people speak'. There was a panel set up and notices were sent out. The notices did not go to any aboriginal people in the riding and no aboriginal people were asked to sit on the panel.

It was the riding of Prince George—Bulkley Valley and not the riding of Skeena. I apologize on a geographic error but certainly not for the sentiment expressed.

The Speaker: I hope the matter has been cleared up. There was an error in geography. This is what the hon. member was referring to.

Mr. Scott (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about my having a meeting in my riding. If he examined the facts I had several meetings in my riding and I personally invite—

The Speaker: We will have the usual question for Thursday.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, to announce the business of the House for the coming week.

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is our intention this afternoon to continue with the

motion regarding the 51st report of the procedure committee on redistribution legislation.

We will then resume consideration of second reading of Bill C-65, the government organization bill with respect to organization and reduction of certain government agencies, followed by second reading of Bill C-67 to reform the veterans appeal board process, and second reading of Bill C-61, the agriculture bill.

(1505)

On Friday we will commence the report stage of Bill C-37, the young offenders legislation. On Monday we will deal with the report stage and, if possible, third reading of Bill C-59, the income tax bill. If this is completed we would revert, if necessary, to Bill C-37 or, as the case may be, to the list given for today at whatever point we leave off at the time of adjournment this evening.

Tuesday and Wednesday of next week shall be allotted days.

Finally, I shall consult with my colleagues opposite early next week with regard to the business for next Thursday and Friday.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the matter raised by the hon. member for Delta, on December 13 and December 15, 1994 regarding the response and supplementary response of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to Order Paper Question No. 82. I would also like to thank the hon. member for his very detailed written submission dated February 1, 1995 which served to clarify his remarks in the House.

I wish to state at the outset that having reviewed all that was said in the House as well as the answers to the question printed in the debate, I remain of the view and must reiterate that this is not a prima facie case of privilege.

[Translation]

Before explaining my decision, I would like to draw members' attention to citations 31(1) and 31(2) in Beauchesne's Sixth Edition, which state:

(1) A dispute arising between two members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfil the conditions of parliamentary privilege; and

(2) The failure of a minister to answer a question may not be raised as a question of privilege.

[English]

Although I have not found a prima facie case of privilege, I want to comment on this matter for the benefit of the hon. member and of the House. Beauchesne's sixth edition, citation 403 states in part:

Speaker's Ruling

The House recognizes two broad categories of questions—the oral question, which the Standing Orders recognize as dealing with matters of urgency, and the written question, which is designed to seek detailed information from the Ministry.

I emphasize the last phrase because the purpose of the written question should be to seek and receive precise, detailed answers to carefully worded questions.

In his representation the hon. member for Delta stated that members expect the responses to Order Paper questions to be accurate and well reasoned. He noted that the question he submitted was one requiring detailed study by the government and was one for which he wanted a detailed answer. He also argued that it is incumbent upon the government to provide not only the questioner but the House with accurate information. In this the hon. member is absolutely correct.

[Translation]

The wording of Standing Order 39 itself gives us further information about the nature of this type of question. It reads, in part, that members may put questions to the ministry “—but in putting any such question or in replying to the same no argument or opinion is to be offered, nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question the matter to which the same refers shall not be debated.” Because questions on the *Order Paper* are not meant as a vehicle for debate, the rule expressly prohibits the inclusion of opinion or argument, the very things which lead to debate.

[English]

The Clerk of the House, acting on behalf of the Speaker, has the full authority to ensure that questions placed on the Notice Paper are coherent and concise, in accordance with practices of the House.

(1510)

As Speaker Fraser noted in a ruling on October 2, 1991 at page 3147 of the *Debates*, questions are scrutinized as to the correctness of their form and content before they are placed on the Notice Paper. To aid members as well as the Clerk and his staff in ensuring that questions for the Order Paper are properly formulated, citation 428 of Beauchesne's sixth edition lays down an extensive list of restrictions applicable to written questions. It is, however, incumbent upon the members submitting a question for the Notice Paper to ensure that it is formulated carefully enough to elicit the precise information sought. There are, however, no similar provisions in the Standing Orders for the Speaker to review government responses to questions posed.

In the present case we are dealing with a matter of the interpretation of the wording of a question placed on the Order Paper. The hon. member for Delta anticipated a particular reply

which was not the reply tabled in the name of the hon. minister. The member contends that the written response provides erroneous information. He argues that he has found discrepancies between the minister's response and information contained in documents he has obtained through the Access to Information Act. For his part the hon. minister maintains that every effort has been made to answer the question posed by the hon. member for Delta.

I remind all hon. members that we have a tradition that what is said in the House or placed on record in the House is accepted as true. My predecessor, Speaker Jeanne Sauvé, phrased it aptly when on February 28, 1983 at page 23278 of the *Debates* she stated that it is not the role of the Chair “to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate”.

[Translation]

Joseph Maingot in his book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, at page 199, summarizes well the situation faced by the Speaker in such circumstances. He writes that before the Speaker can find a prima facie case of privilege in a situation where there is a dispute about facts, there must be “—an admission by someone in authority, such as a minister of the crown or an officer of a department, an instrument of government policy, or a government agency, either that a member of the House of Commons was intentionally misled or an admission of facts that lead naturally to the conclusion that a member was intentionally misled, and a direct relationship between the misleading information and a proceeding in Parliament.”

[English]

This is not the first time there have been disputes over replies to Order Paper questions or over the content of documents tabled by the ministry. For example, I refer hon. members to three rulings, the first on February 28, 1983 at pages 23278–9 of the *Debates*; the second on February 21, 1990 at page 8618; the third on May 15, 1991 at page 100. I must point out, however, that in none of these cases was the matter found to be prima facie. As Speaker Fraser noted in the May 15, 1991 ruling:

The hon. member has raised an issue which is not an unusual kind of issue to raise. The hon. member is not satisfied with the response given. The difficulty that is always with the Chair in these cases is that there are often very great differences of interpretation on answers given. It is not a question of privilege, it is a question of disagreement over certain facts and answers that were given.

This precedent holds true in the case now before us.

Questions on the Order Paper are a very important tool in the hands of members. As I stated earlier, their purpose should be to seek through a precise, detailed formulation precise, detailed information that will enable members to carry on their work. It is incumbent upon all those involved on both sides of the process—the members formulating the questions, House officials reviewing those formulations, the individuals drafting the replies and the ministers of the crown tabling those replies in the

House—to ensure that every care is taken so that these exchanges remain as fruitful and as useful as possible.

I want to thank the hon. members who intervened in this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

(1515)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in my place today to discuss the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding redistribution.

I would like to congratulate the committee for its very thoughtful report. The conclusion of this report as far as I understand it is basically the result that we are going to create six new electoral ridings in Canada.

I had the honour to appear before this committee on June 24, 1994. The substance of my submission to the committee at that time was very similar to my thought process today. The bottom line is that the people of my riding and indeed the people of Canada do not want to see any further increase in representatives in Canada's federal House.

As we look out at industry today the buzzword is downsizing. Everyone is becoming more efficient, more effective. We are analysing the civil service, finding ways it could be more effective with the labour force it has. We have a freeze going on in the civil service to make it smaller and more effective. Today bigger is not necessarily better.

I refer to an old bad joke that Canadians often quip on the hustings: It is fortunate that Canadians do not get all the government they pay for. It is a bad joke, but it is a bad joke on the people of Canada, the taxpayers of Canada.

Today we have telecommunications and all kinds of communication media to access our ridings and the people of Canada. I have become a great user of the information highway, the Internet. I can go to my office this afternoon and broadcast a message across Canada. These are the kinds of efficiencies we have to bring to government and to the House of Commons.

I spend roughly 80 per cent of my staff's time in the riding dealing with roughly 10 per cent of the population base. Ob-

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viously members can increase their constituency size, the number of members and constituents they deal with, without an effective increase in the cost of operations.

I look at my own particular riding of Durham which takes in a number of other political jurisdictions. Along with myself, there is one senator. We have five MPPs in Queen's Park. We have a regional government of 32 members. We have 66 mayors and councillors. The question of course is: Is this type of governance giving us better representative democracy in Canada? What do other jurisdictions do?

As I mentioned in my submissions to the committee in June, a fair comparison would be that of our southern neighbour, the United States. In 1911, 84 years ago, almost 100 years ago, the United States capped its system of representative democracy with 435 representatives in Congress and 100 senators.

In Canada, we have one federal representative for every 75,000 people. In the United States, it is one for every 465,000 people. The U.S. manages its system much the way we manage ours. Every 10 years it has a census and it redistributes within the existing system. Some states get more representatives and some less, depending on their population growth.

(1520)

If we continue our current arithmetical formula, obviously this House is going to extend out on to the Ottawa River. We have over half as many representatives as the United States, yet it has 10 times our population.

I read in the report on page four comments regarding a cap or reduction as not feasible at this time. On page five I read that to change the electoral process significantly would be highly disruptive at this time.

I thought that as members of Parliament we came here to make decisions and that was what we were being paid for. Maybe we are saying we cannot make decisions and we need more members to make them for us. I do not know if that is what we are trying to put across here. I do not believe the people of Canada want any further increase in representatives.

There are basically two issues of concern here. One has been represented by some of my Reform colleagues which is to reduce the actual numbers of federal members of Parliament. The second one is a proposal by the committee that is basically to increase the representation by six members.

I have a better solution that is somewhere in between. This is Canada's constant striving for compromise. I also recognize there is a problem as was mentioned in the committee report itself. A grandfather clause signed back in 1986 with a number of the provinces stated that reductions in the seats by provinces would not change beyond the 1986 level. It is clear that agreement has to be revisited and renegotiated. I am suggesting

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that has to be renegotiated and revisited now, not some time in the future.

Six more members of Parliament, people have suggested to me, might cost as much as \$6 million. That does not mean that members of Parliament get \$1 million a piece, but when we start adding up the duplication in services, duplication in staff, et cetera, we find there is a tremendous increase in cost. My constituents and I are very supportive of reducing the cost of governance.

The problem basically has to do with mathematics. Unfortunately in this House we seem to have a lot of problems dealing with mathematics. In my office this morning I took the existing level of seats and the popular vote and reduced both the seats and the population base taking into account the senatorial floors of the existing provinces that are already at their senatorial floors. From that figure I also subtracted the 75 seats that are now represented by the province of Quebec. After this mathematical formula takes place, the 75 seats roughly equal the 25 per cent of the population base of Quebec as related to the total population of Canada.

The bottom line is a result like this: It would add one seat to the province of Alberta, two to the province of British Columbia, but would reduce by three for the province of Manitoba, increase by six to Ontario, and reduce by four to Saskatchewan. New Brunswick would have no change. Newfoundland would lose one seat. The Northwest Territories would remain unchanged, as it is already at its senatorial floor. Nova Scotia would lose one seat. Prince Edward Island would be unchanged. Quebec would be unchanged. Yukon would be unchanged. The sum total is 295 seats, what we have here today.

Looking at population statistics there is no deviation. Looking at the 1991 census there is no deviation in those provinces greater than 1 per cent of the total population of our country. In other words, it is representation by population which is basically what we are trying to achieve.

(1525)

I have not dealt with the aspect of distribution within provincial boundaries, the differences between rural and urban areas. Presumably we can follow the guidelines of the report, using an electoral boundaries commission in concert with the provinces.

In conclusion, it is clear to me that the people of Canada do not want an increase in the number of members of Parliament at this time. It seems to me that we should possibly rethink this and go back to see whether we cannot renegotiate that grandfather clause.

I have found there are too many decision makers and not enough decisions being made. Let us refocus our attention to making this a reality today and not pass the decisions off on some future Parliament.

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member to clarify what he just said about renegotiating grandfather clauses in the Constitution of 1867. Perhaps he could explain what he had in mind.

[English]

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I was not actually referring to the Constitution Act. I was referring to a separate agreement which I believe dates to 1987. It is a fairly recent agreement with some of the provinces and basically said that from 1987 onward there would be no reduction in their seats. It is not actually in the Constitution Act; it seems to be a separate agreement with some provinces that they simply would not be reduced from what they were in 1987. It is not a constitutional amendment.

[Translation]

Mr. Lebel: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member perhaps explain what he was referring to, if it was not the British North America Act of 1867? I would like to know under what legislation these provisions were made. I ask this with all due respect for the hon. member from the Liberal Party. I was unaware until now that such legislation existed.

[English]

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I am simply reading the committee report. On page 7 it reads: "Issues such as senatorial floor and the grandfather clause whereby no province can lose seats from the number it had in 1986". The report is available from the committee. That is basically what it says. Obviously it is referring to a specific grandfather clause which existed and dated from 1986 onward.

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favour of the government's motion for concurrence in the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

It should be noted that the bill included in the report before us is the result of the first use of the new procedure under the Standing Orders of the House of Commons whereby a committee can be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill. Standing Order 68(4) to (8) which was approved by the House on February 7, 1994 sets out a process for committees to draft legislation.

On April 19, 1994 the House of Commons adopted the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill, in accordance with Standing Order 68(5), respecting the system of readjusting the boundaries of electoral districts for the House of Commons by electoral boundaries commissions, and, in preparing the said bill, the committee be instructed to consider, among other related matters, the general operation over the past 30 years of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment act, including:

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(a) a formula to cap or reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons;

(b) a review of the adequacy of the present method of selection of members of electoral boundary commissions;

(c) a review of the rules governing and the powers and methods of proceeding of electoral boundary commissions, including whether those commissions ought to commence their work from the basis of making necessary alterations to the boundaries of existing electoral districts wherever possible;

(d) a review of the time and nature of the involvement of the public and the House of Commons in the work of electoral boundary commissions;

That the committee have the power to travel within Canada and to hear witnesses by teleconference; and

That the committee report no later than December 16, 1994.

(1530)

The committee reported to the House earlier than that, on November 25, 1994 when the chair presented the 51st report of that committee to the House. As a new member of the House I am delighted that committees now have this power to develop and bring forward legislation of this and other types.

I would also like to thank the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, his staff and the staff of the committee and all the witnesses who appeared before the committee, including fellow members of this House, for their expertise and advice which were invaluable in assisting the committee in its consideration of the various complex and sensitive issues with which that committee had to deal.

Turning to some of those issues, the report 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". Significant among the reasons given for that conclusion which appear to be counter to the instructions that the committee was given by the House—

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt, but I believe the hon. member who is speaking is wearing a campaign pin for the Liberal candidate in Ottawa—Vanier. I know that maybe the Reform Party candidate is giving him a hard time but I would prefer he follow the instructions in the orders of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Forgive my questionable eyesight if in fact the hon. member for Peterborough is wearing such a label or tag. I see he has removed whatever that pin was. We thank him for his co-operation and we return the floor to the hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Adams: Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the member and the members opposite. I was canvassing this morning and I forgot to change before I came in. I apologize.

It is not possible at this time to cap or reduce. Hon. members concluded that the establishment of such a cap or reduction would require all provinces to agree to the amendment of section 51 of the Constitution Act of 1867, in order to eliminate the requirement of proportional representation among the provinces, and the amendment of section 51A of that same act to eliminate the so-called Senate floor provision which ensures that no province shall have fewer members of Parliament than it has senators.

Any cap or reduction would unfairly penalize provinces with growing populations unless constitutional guarantees of disproportionate over-representation for provinces with smaller or declining populations were abolished. The abolishing of such guarantees could result in a sudden and drastic loss of representation by provinces with smaller or declining populations and by large, sparsely populated rural areas anywhere in Canada, including in the north.

The committee's decision means that the current compromise system of calculating the number of seats in the House of Commons will apply to the redistribution of seats based on the results of the 1991 census. The small increase in the number of seats from the current 295 to 301 would appear to be reasonable, given the overall increase in the population of Canada. Two of the six new seats will go to the fast growing province of British Columbia and four more to populous Ontario.

(1535)

The committee does not recommend any changes in the structure of the federal boundary commissions. The chair of each commission would be appointed by the chief justice of the province and the other two members would be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons as has been the case in the past.

However, the bill which has been prepared by the committee provides for the Speaker to publicize the upcoming appointments and solicit applications. The Speaker would be expected to hold a wide range of consultations before making any appointments. The Speaker would then table his or her appointments in the House of Commons where a procedure would exist for 20 or more members to request a vote on any individual appointment. In the absence of a negative resolution, the appointments would be final after 10 sitting days. I am in full agreement with this opening up of the appointments process which has been recommended by the committee.

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With respect to the powers, processes and proceedings of the federal electoral boundaries commission, it should be emphasized that a major reason for the suspension of the redistribution process last year and the approval of the order of reference of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was the perception by many Canadians, and I include many of my constituents among them, that they had been excluded from the process.

Many people felt they were suddenly surprised by extensive proposals for major changes in electoral boundaries without having had any opportunity to influence the content of those proposals. That was certainly the case in the riding of Peterborough.

The recommendations contained in the report now being debated are designed to ensure that Canadians have a better opportunity for fuller participation in an improved redistribution process based on the 1991 census. Among those recommendations are the following.

In order to ensure that the public is better informed about the redistribution process from the outset, electoral boundary commissions "should provide general information about the redistribution process and statistical information on the province and census results as well as a general statement describing the manner in which it intends to proceed with the readjustment of electoral boundaries. Interested parties would then have 30 days in which to submit comments on the general parameters of the process".

Electoral boundaries commissions would be required to prepare three plans and maps showing alternate ways in which boundaries could be drawn rather than a single map that was proposed in the past.

There is also a provision for a second round of public hearings on the proposed boundaries recommended by a commission if the changes which result from the first round of public hearings are significant. The second set of hearings could be held if the commission or the Chief Electoral Officer so decided.

Members here will be interested to know that they will in future be on equal footing with other residents of Canada with respect to the proposals of commissions when the requirement that the commissions' proposals be tabled in the House of Commons for debate and study by a committee is eliminated.

The time period between the proclamation of a representation order based on the final report of the commissions and its coming into force will be reduced from 12 months to 7 months. This delay is provided in order to give Elections Canada, returning officers and political organizations time to reorganize their operations on the basis of the new electoral boundaries.

On the subject of the actual drawing of electoral district boundaries during the course of redistribution, I am especially interested in and support the committee's recommendation with

respect to the factors which must be considered by electoral boundary commissions. I refer here to community of interest, manageable geographic size for districts in sparsely populated rural and northern regions of the province, and the probability that there will be a substantial increase of population within those areas over the next five years.

They would also be directed to recommend changes to existing boundaries only where these factors are sufficiently significant to warrant them.

Community of interest is more clearly spelled out in the bill prepared by this committee.

(1540)

Clause 19(4) provides that "community of interest includes such factors as the economy, existing or traditional boundaries of electoral districts, the rural or urban characteristics of the territory, the boundaries of municipalities or Indian reserves, natural boundaries and access to means of communication and transport".

In my riding, the township of Ennismore and the First Nation of Curve Lake were specifically put at a disadvantage because community of interest was not defined in this way in the previous attempt to reallocate those boundaries.

These provisions should ensure that future electoral boundaries commissions will be obligated to consider the factors specified which should result in the drafting of more reasonable and acceptable boundaries.

In an effort to minimize the possible effects on electoral boundaries of changes in population recorded as a result of the major 10-year census which is conducted in the years ending with a one, 1991, 2001 and so on, the committee recommends that there should be redistribution of electoral districts within provinces on the basis of the five-year census. Those are the census which take place in the years ending in six, 1996 and 2006. In those years, although there might redistribution within a province there would be no change in the number of electoral districts in that province.

In a further effort to minimize the possible effect of population changes recorded as a result of the major 10-year census, the committee also recommends that no electoral boundary commissions should be established where no significant changes in population have occurred. If the number of electoral districts to which a province is entitled remains unchanged as a result of the 10-year census and none of the existing districts is above or below the 25 per cent provincial quotient, no commission would be established.

In the case of the five-year census a commission would only be established if more than 10 per cent of a province's electoral districts vary by more than 25 per cent from the provincial quotient.

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I know this is very clear to you, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to explain a little bit further. While the committee has not recommended any change to the maximum possible population deviation at 25 per cent above or below the provincial quotient established as the ideal average population for electoral district as a result of the 10-year census, the committee does recommend the elimination of the provision which permits an even greater deviation in exceptional circumstances.

However, the committee does recognize that there may be exceptional circumstances by recommending that electoral districts whose population deviation is greater than the permissible 25 per cent should be specifically set out in a schedule to the legislation which can only be amended by an act of Parliament. The exceptional ridings will be listed separately and can only be changed by an act of Parliament.

It is essential that the process of readjustment of electoral boundaries be completed so that the next federal general election, which is expected to take place in 1997 or 1998, be contested on the basis of electoral districts whose boundaries fairly reflect their populations as established by the 10-year census that was conducted in 1991.

It would be grossly unfair to residents in areas where they have been major changes in population if that election was contested on the basis of the present electoral district boundaries which were established on the basis of the census of 1981.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate and I would be glad to attempt to answer questions or engage in discussion with members.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the member's presentation which of course was excellent.

As the member knows, the population of Canada in our centennial year of 1967 was approximately 20 million people. We were quite proud of the 20 million that we accomplished at our centennial. Approximately 30 years later our population is about 30 million.

(1545)

We have increased by 10 million people in 30 years. Looking forward from the 1991 decennial census to the 2001 decennial census our population could very well increase by 3 million people. We are in the guessing game but it is a fair guess.

At the current time we have about one member of Parliament for every 100,000 residents of the country. That means by the year 2001 perhaps we will need one dozen, two dozen or as many as 30 more members of Parliament if we do not restrain the growth of the House of Commons.

Can the member condone this piece of legislation which does not deal with that pressing problem?

Mr. Adams: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment. I think the member knows that one of the reasons this matter of electoral boundaries is so debated in this country compared with some others is the one that he has put his finger on, the fact that this is a growing country, that it is going to continue to grow.

There will always be debate on the appropriate size of ridings in a country like this. We have the additional problem that we have huge areas as the member knows from his own province that many people in the cities think are empty but which are fully occupied by aboriginal people and other Canadians, yet in very small numbers.

We constantly have to ask how those people should be represented in comparison with people in the very large cities like Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and so on. It will always be a matter of debate.

The suggestion here is a reasonable compromise. It is going to involve an adjustment for the next 10 or 15 years of a few seats in the House of Commons to recognize the enormous growth in British Columbia and the continued growth in the province of Ontario.

There is one more thing I would like to say. He mentioned 18 to 67. Another variable in this has to do with communications and the way in which we, the member included, represent our ridings.

There was a time as the member knows when the people in the west all came here and spent their winter in Ottawa. They did the best they could even without telephones to represent the people of the west.

The hon. member flies. I drive three and a half hours to my riding once or twice every week. I am on the phone every day. I have a fax machine. I am on the E-mail. The member is speculating but in 20 years it may well be that members of this House can represent more people even more effectively than we can because of the change in communications.

I am sure members of the House then will deal with that matter and like us will change the legislation to adapt to those new modern times.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the comments that the member for Peterborough made. I would welcome him out west to the province of Saskatchewan to see how well we are able to serve our constituents considering the technology we have.

We have this immediate problem of an expanding House of Commons. I want to ask the member where we are going to put the extra seats. Are we going to put them in the middle here? Are we going to put them in the gallery, behind the curtains? We have some constitutional issues to deal with.

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Some of these we can deal with as the House of Commons. Some do not need provincial ratification. This is an immediate problem.

If we wait 10 years we exacerbate the problem and suddenly we are trying to find place for 30 or 40 more seats in this House. Are we going to renovate? What is his solution?

Mr. Adams: Mr. Speaker, I do not see this matter of representation in terms of seats and in terms of furniture. If I felt that it was necessary to take over the Senate, for example, which might not be a bad idea, I would take it over and there are plenty of seats there.

The suggestion here is for six more seats. I am absolutely sure that we can find space for six more seats in this Chamber. I would think we could find more. The problem is not seats. It is whether, for modern times, an adjustment of six is worthwhile so that we can better serve the people of Canada.

(1550)

The member is right. I expect this to be a phenomenally growing country in the next several decades and I expect Parliament of that day to deal with the conditions of that day. At the moment we are trying to deal with growth over a 10, 15 or 20 year period. I think six more seats in the two provinces I mentioned is a reasonable compromise to that.

The proposals come from a standing committee of this House. It is not something that has been brought forward to the government as has been the case in the past. We should respect our colleagues on the standing committees who struggled with this matter for a number of weeks and months.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to say a few words today on procedure and House affairs committee report and the government's request for concurrence in that report dealing with a study of the electoral boundaries readjustment system.

I have a number of things that I want to say about the report and about the process. I also want to say in advance of those comments that I find it interesting that the government members in particular are so anxious to debate this issue at a time when unemployment is running rampant in our country, when globalization is threatening to take away the economic sovereignty of governments and when poverty is creating illness and lack of education in our country.

There are many issues, including those of international governance, that this House should be applying the majority of its time to, to ensure that the people of this country are able to secure employment, to build a quality of life, to educate themselves and their children, to relieve the nation of poverty

and the stress of poverty and unemployment which creates, to a certain extent, crime in our streets and insecurity among many in our society.

The issue before us has some importance in and of itself, but if I were sitting on the other side of the House today I would be ensuring that the priority for debate was on those issues that directly affected the quality of life of the people of our country.

However, the bill is before us and as a result of that we certainly cannot ignore the opportunity to address the issues in front of us. In response to that I want to say that I sense a bit of a dilemma facing me as a member of this House because on the one hand I agree with those in this Chamber who today have argued in opposition to concurrence on this motion because I believe that the process that the government has undertaken here significantly disturbs a process that was working in this country and a process that could have been changed not by disrupting it but in addition to that existing process.

I also find myself in agreement with a number of the provisions of the committee's report; a number of provisions which I think will improve the adjustment process in the future. Let me take that in a bit of order and indicate that my preference today as I rise to speak and as I realize I will be called upon to vote shortly is to withhold concurrence on the committee report simply on the basis that the government's interruption of the process was uncalled for and seems to be, in the words of a member who spoke previously, the result of a panic that occurred as a result of Liberal members seeing the results of a boundary redistribution that they were unhappy with.

(1555)

Granted I have a number of reasons to be concerned about the new boundaries that were created in my own province. Perhaps I will address that briefly before I sit down today.

However, I do not believe that arguments made in reaction to a map that was drawn or arbitrary lines that were drawn on a map is any reason to shut down the process and ignore the work and the regulations that had been established previously.

A number of things have been said today as well. I have listened to the debate reasonably carefully. I recognize a number of things have been said about the numbers of seats in the House of Commons. While that is not a part of this report, I do believe it is worth commenting on.

The mandate of the committee did include a responsibility to have a look at the possibility of restricting the numbers of seats and perhaps even reducing the number of seats in this place. I understand from the comments of the committee chairperson and from reading the report that the committee, not in its entirety but the majority, believes it was not feasible to discuss the cap at this time.

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I come from the province of Saskatchewan and so I believe it is sometimes necessary to reduce the numbers of people who represent the population. However, since we are sitting in the federal House and there are more practical matters at work than simply the capping of the number of seats, we owe it to ourselves to look even beyond that particular issue.

When I mentioned coming from Saskatchewan I said that because I am very proud of the Saskatchewan government, the New Democratic Party government, which after it became elected set in motion a process which did reduce the number of seats in the Saskatchewan legislature. A colleague of mine from Saskatchewan earlier today alluded to the fact that Saskatchewan had done this.

The people of Saskatchewan have reacted positively to the move to reduce the number of seats in the provincial legislature. I have found in my own travel through my own constituency and elsewhere throughout Saskatchewan that it is not the numbers the people are concerned about, it is the representation. Listening and responding to the needs of the people are major concerns.

Certainly some have raised the issue of cost. In my own estimation the cost of running government is actually small compared with the cost of providing services and delivering on decisions that governments make. As a result, if we are able to listen and respond well the people of our province and of Canada will respond positively to a government or a political party that is prepared to do that.

In Saskatchewan the people and the government felt that a reduction in the number of seats was possible. They have embraced that concept. I believe, contrary to arguments made by the government side today, the people of Saskatchewan would also understand that if the number of seats in this Chamber were restricted in the future, our province would have a smaller number of members of Parliament and fewer individuals to represent their views in Ottawa.

I said earlier this has to be taken into a broader context. Representation by population in this country does mean that some regions, some provinces, some territories will receive less attention as a result of the number of people who can vote on issues. Therefore it is necessary for the whole concept of reform or the rebuilding of Parliament, not just the House of Commons, to be done as a unit at the same time.

(1600)

If the House of Commons is to be reformed, if it is to be rebuilt under representation by population, I say without condition that I want to see that done in conjunction with and parallel to the reform or the rebuilding of the second chamber of Parliament. An elected and accountable Senate that would represent the regional or territorial interests of the country must

occur at exactly the same as a redistribution of seats in Parliament.

While I believe the Chamber can debate and should be looking at the possibility of reducing its number of seats, in the future the committee must also take into account that it cannot be done in isolation. It cannot be done on its own, or the people of Saskatchewan and other provinces that may lose seats as a result of redistribution would have a grievance against a government which is not listening to the long term grievances of western Canadians about the lack of concern of the House of Commons wherein the majority of members voting on bills come from the more populated parts of the country.

A number of things I want to discuss in relation to the report have some positive aspects to them and are in direct relation to my feelings about how the redistribution process should occur. When speaking to the bill earlier today in his opening remarks the chairperson of the committee, the member for Kingston and the Islands, said that there were a number of problems with the system the committee was trying to correct.

He spoke about the proposed maps that come with no forewarning or opportunity for input from the public. He talked about commissions currently not being required to justify the rationale for their decisions. He talked about the lack of standard application of rationale across the country, that we had different decisions made by different commissions in different provinces across the country and therefore a patchwork of reasons for commission maps being produced in different parts of the country.

He talked about commissions making seemingly unnecessary changes to boundary maps when there were very few reasons for change. He talked about the size of the House and the growth of the numbers of seats. These were problems the committee wanted to address.

In this regard I want to talk about the beginning of the process. The chairperson of the committee was absolutely correct when he said that the public first comes upon the report of the commission when most of its work has been done. The public sees a single map, a redistribution based upon the commissioner's feelings about how that map should be drawn.

The proposed map is put before the electorate as a fait accompli. It takes a considerable amount of work on behalf of the public, often in conjunction with members of Parliament, to come up with a good rationale for changing the maps presented by the commissions.

(1605)

The committee has done a fine job of responding by calling for an initial public notice of the beginning of the process and a twofold requirement that the commissions produce three maps with justifications for their decisions in each case. This will go a

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long way to correcting one of the serious problems that affects the process as it exists today.

In Saskatchewan, The Battlefords—Meadow Lake constituency that I currently represent virtually disappears under the new map drawn by the commissioners in our province. If I agreed with the initial premise or the rationale of the commissioners, I would have no difficulty with the disappearance of my constituency. There would be an obvious determination on my part as to whether or not I would seek renomination and re-election in another constituency.

However, it is impossible to disagree under the current set of circumstances with the commissioners' original rationale for starting where they started to draw their maps. In Saskatchewan's case the commissioners decided, given that there were no new seats to be allocated, they would redraw the Saskatchewan map by giving the two urban centres, Saskatoon and Regina, an extra seat. Each of them currently have three seats. That meant that each of those major centres in Saskatchewan would be given, the commissioners argued, a fourth seat. Saskatoon and Regina would each have an urban and a rural part. All rural seats surrounding Regina and Saskatoon had to be pushed out a bit, pushed north and south a bit, and two of them squeezed out entirely. As a result The Battlefords—Meadow Lake and the constituency of Mackenzie virtually disappeared.

In order to argue the boundaries we have to argue the entire map of the province of Saskatchewan and the original rationale of the commissioners. If we have the opportunity to discuss that in advance we may feel that we have a lot more opportunity in the process. In fact we might indeed have a lot more input into the process.

While the current map exists and people in Saskatchewan are generally expecting the constituency boundaries to change, I want to stress the recommendations contained in the report in front of us. Perhaps someone can correct me if I am wrong, but if by June a new bill has not been passed the boundaries established by the current commission would stand. However, if the new bill were to pass by June, new commissions would perhaps be established based on the new rules set out in front of us. Therefore I believe the people of Saskatchewan will have to wait until the end of June to know whether there will be new boundaries for federal ridings within our province.

I do not believe the changes in the bill justify the suspension of the current process. I am quite prepared to work with the new boundaries that exist in our province.

(1610)

I want to make a further comment before sitting down. I commend the Saskatchewan Boundaries Commission that currently sits on one count. It has created a northern seat that is separate and apart from an urban centre. I have criticized the

commission and will criticize it in concluding my remarks today by indicating that it created that northern seat by pushing the boundaries surrounding the city of Prince Albert farther south. It had to do that using the available quotient to remove the urban centre of Prince Albert from that seat.

That created a northern seat with a fairly large agricultural and rural municipality component to it that has absolutely nothing in common with northern villages, the Metis and aboriginal communities in the north.

I applaud some of the changes made by the committee. I deplore the process the government has used here. I certainly look forward to what will occur over the next few months as the process continues.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my fellow member from Saskatchewan, the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake. I agreed with the majority of the hon. member's comments.

He began by saying that he felt in Canadians' eyes that this was perhaps a low priority issue given the state of our economy and concerns over employment. I would add to that concerns over high deficits and high taxes. However, because of the self-interests of politicians, he and I both recognize the issue has come to the floor of the House of Commons.

I also heard him say he would oppose the proposal based on the principle that it was a matter of interference where interference was not required. I concur with his observation in that regard.

The hon. member talked about the fact that if we capped or reduced the number of seats in the House of Commons, Saskatchewan would have fewer seats than its current 14. I think the hon. member and I are approximately the same age; I am not sure who is older. However, when I was young the province had about 21 seats if I remember accurately. Now we are down to 14 seats and I expect, unless there are some constitutional changes, that floor will remain.

I am not sure what the number of seats in Ontario was at the time when we had 21 seats, but I know it was less than the 99 it now enjoys and we know it is now going up to 103 under the new proposal.

If we do nothing Saskatchewan will remain at 14. Ontario may increase its seats to 115 or 120 if we look far enough down the road. Saskatchewan is losing clout no matter which way we look at it as far as the number of seats in the House of Commons is concerned.

The member correctly reflected on the solution, which was Senate reform. I was pleased to hear the hon. member say that, because I thought members of the federal New Democratic Party were supportive of abolition of the Senate. I know that pro-

vincial members, particularly western spokespersons for his party, have supported the triple E concept.

I wonder if the hon. member is supporting the triple E concept of Senate reform, one that is not abolished but rather is reformed so that it is elected, has equal representation from every province, and maintains the effective powers that would give clout to provinces such as Saskatchewan which, no matter what way we look at it, is going to lose clout in the House under the current scenario or under the past scenario whether we are looking at new legislation or the status quo.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster has given me to explain the position of New Democrats with regard to the Senate. Certainly we are asked about this frequently because there appears to be a contradiction when no contradiction exists.

New Democrats, myself included, have always called for and continue to call for the abolition of the unelected, unaccountable Senate. The fact that the Senate has failed to live up to all its obligations over its entire history with one or two exceptions gives us many reasons to believe that the Senate as it exists today must be abolished.

(1615)

However, abolition of the existing Senate does not preclude the establishment of a new second chamber, a second chamber that has a new mandate, that is elected by the people of Canada, that provides representation to provinces, territories or regions, however it gets defined across the country, one that does have effective powers.

The key to all of this is the ability of the Senate to respond to these issues. The effectiveness of the Senate is a very important part of this whole package.

In response to the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and to all others who have questions about this position, we believe very strongly in the rebuilding of the Senate to be elected and accountable to the people of Canada.

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to monopolize the time. I do have a following brief question. I would encourage the hon. member to make sure his colleagues, particularly those in Ontario at the federal level, make it very clear to Canadians that they are not ambiguous in suggesting that in certain parts of the country they would abolish the existing Senate and replace it with a reformed Senate, and in other parts of the country indicating they would abolish it and not replace it. I would like to hear those kinds of responses from the premier of Ontario and federal representatives of the party in Ontario.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to encourage my colleagues in the party across the country. I cannot help but think I would be very grateful if the premier of Ontario were to listen to all of the things I might have to say to him.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division on the question now before the House stands deferred until Monday at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, at which time the bells to call in the members will be sounded for not more than 15 minutes.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to further defer that vote from Monday at the time of adjournment until Tuesday at 5.30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION ACT (FEDERAL AGENCIES)

The House resumed from February 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-65, an act to reorganize and dissolve certain federal agencies, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

(1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

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Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Call in the members.

And the division bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Pursuant to Standing Order 45(5)(a), the recorded division on the question now before the House stands deferred until the usual time of adjournment on Monday, at which time the bells to call in the members will be sounded for not more than 15 minutes.

[English]

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to further defer that vote until Tuesday at 5.30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The House has heard the suggestion. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

VETERANS REVIEW AND APPEAL BOARD ACT

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (for the Minister of National Defence, Lib.) moved that Bill C-67, an act to establish the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, to amend the Pension Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts and to repeal the Veterans Appeal Board Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to begin second reading on Bill C-67, an act to establish the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, to amend the Pension Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts and to repeal the Veterans Appeal Board Act.

The legislation is straightforward and its objectives are simple. We want to streamline the veterans pension application and make the decision making process an improved service to Canadian veterans.

The bill before us does not change benefits that veterans now enjoy, nor does it reduce the right Canadian veterans have to a complete and thorough appeal process with free legal assistance.

Veterans have been faced with long delays when they apply for pensions, sometimes very long delays. We know that those delays are usually caused by the elaborate process we have put

in place. We want to simplify that process to provide veterans with their benefit as quickly as possible.

As most hon. members will be aware, veterans pensions provide compensation for service related injuries, wounds and disabilities. Civilians who served in close support of the armed forces during wartime may also be entitled to pension benefits.

Additional pension benefits can be paid to a pensioner's spouse or dependent children. Survivor pensions are payable to the spouse of a deceased pensioner.

This legislation will affect a wide range of people, veterans, their spouses, their dependents and others. More than half a million Canadian veterans are alive today and at this moment there are about 150,000 veterans or their survivors who are getting disability pension benefits. We get about 13,000 claims a year. That is a lot of applications. Canadian veterans are still applying for benefits in large numbers.

(1625)

Some members of this House may be asking why we are getting so many applications almost 50 years after the end of the second world war. It is simply because many of the wounds and injuries received in the line of duty half a century ago are beginning to have a real effect on the lives of our veterans. The effects of those old wartime injuries have become more obvious, more painful and more difficult to live with, and now many finally have decided that maybe it is time to get some help.

These veterans have reached a time in their lives when the benefits available for the disabilities they received serving Canada so many years ago can make a real difference in their lives. They really need the benefits now. That is why we are processing so many applications.

We have also found that many of the applications are taking longer to process. Many are going through the appeal process because in the years immediately following their service in the armed forces it was easier in the average case to make the connection between the veteran's service and the resulting disability. As the years have passed it has become more and more difficult to find the link between service and disability.

I want to emphasize that the first benefit to which our veterans are entitled is the benefit of doubt. If there is a real doubt about whether a claim is justified, that doubt goes to our veteran. Our system is designed to help veterans by providing assistance in preparation of first applications, and that will continue to be the case.

The disability pension process was designed to be fair but the process was not designed to be fast. Now with the average age of our veterans at 73, these Canadians can no longer afford lengthy delays.

Under our current system successful disability pension applicants will wait on average 18 months for their first pension cheque, a year and a half. Clearly that is not good enough. If the

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application is turned down and its appeal is successful it can now take up to three years. Clearly that is not good enough.

These delays are not the fault of the people who work with the current process. It is the fault of the process itself. We know that the only way we are going to catch up is to make the overall system more efficient.

There have been a number of attempts over the years by governments to make changes in the pension process. There has been some tinkering, or some small process has been changed. In some cases this has assisted the veteran but in some cases it has only added to the bureaucracy. Add to those problems the number of first applications we have and we have a situation which is simply no longer acceptable and must be changed.

Most veterans have reached the time in their lives when they want to enjoy their pension benefits. Surely they deserve that. Some will use the disability pension cheque as an added source of income in their retired years. Surely they deserve that. Others need the veterans benefits to obtain the medical services they need. Surely our veterans deserve that.

Over the past year we have commemorated many important events leading to the end of the second world war. I am very pleased and proud to be part of the 'Canada Remembers' program. This program makes Canadians and people around the world aware of the dedication and sacrifice our veterans made for us and for democracy around the world.

Canadians want our veterans to be treated fairly. They want us to do the right thing and they want us to do the thing right. Our veterans deserve that. Therefore, we will improve the process with the bill before us today.

(1630)

At present a veteran applies directly to the Canadian Pension Commission or contacts the department or one of several organizations which will act on his or her behalf. Some veterans go to such organizations as the Royal Canadian Legion or the War Amps of Canada. Others go to the Bureau of Pension Advocates which is now involved in most of the applications for pensions. However immediate involvement of legal assistance at the point of first application almost assumes legal dispute.

It was certainly never the intention, however, just by providing legal advice at that point, to make it look as though we were going to contest the application. That is not what we want, that is not what Canadians want, and that is certainly not what our veterans want.

Canadian veterans should not need legal help to apply for pensions. With the passage of this bill they will not need such help. The need for legal advice and assistance will come in the appeal process.

Our lawyers in the Bureau of Pension Advocates are highly trained people. They will continue to work hard for Canada's veterans where their expertise is needed. Why have legal experts using their time in the detailed preparation of a case that is not going to be contested anyhow?

At present, the department receives the application on behalf of the Canadian Pension Commission and prepares a medical summary and opinion. It examines the degree of the disability and recommends the amount of assessment. In many cases it is obvious the applicant will be approved but the department cannot approve it. It sends the application to the Canadian Pension Commission. The CPC has to decide on two things, the first one being entitlement. Does the applicant have the qualifying service? Is the injury or condition likely to be a result of that service? Then, assessment. That is based on the degree of disability and it is a decision on how much pension to pay.

The Canadian Pension Commission makes its decision on those two issues: entitlement and assessment. It then passes the decision on to the department which informs the veteran and delivers any cheque or payment.

If the Canadian Pension Commission decides that the applicant is not entitled, the applicant can go before something called the Entitlement Board. If the commission had agreed that the applicant is entitled but the applicant does not agree with the assessment, there can be what is called an assessment hearing.

Both the board and the hearing are made up of members of the Canadian Pension Commission. If the applicant does not like either decision at this level he or she can appeal again. At this time it goes before the Veterans Appeal Board.

After all of that, we arrive at a final decision on whether a disability pension will be awarded and, if so, how much. The information goes to the department and then begins the process of having the first cheque delivered to our veteran.

In a nutshell, that is the system as it currently exists. It relies on the work of four different government bodies: the Bureau of Pension Advocates which provides free legal assistance when veterans apply; Veterans Affairs Canada which completes medical examinations, summaries and opinions, and does the administrative work, including preparing and researching files, communicating with clients and calculating and making payments; the Canadian Pension Commission which decides on first applications and then hears initial appeals; and finally, the Veterans Appeal Board which hears final appeals.

(1635)

The system is thorough. The system is fair but the system is not fast. It can take up to three years from the time the veteran first applies until the first cheque is delivered. Our Canadian

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veterans deserve better than that. We have been looking for ways of speeding up the process for a period of time.

In 1992 Veterans Affairs Canada completed an evaluation of the process. The following spring it consulted with major veterans' organizations, employee unions, staff and other stakeholders. The evaluation made 55 recommendations on ways to improve the pension process and we have implemented those that we could.

Now has come the time to act on those recommendations that need legislation, the long term recommendations that streamline the process.

The legislation before us acts in three broad ways. First of all, Veterans Affairs Canada, the department, makes the first decision. In many cases veterans affairs employees will be able to counsel and assist veterans with pension applications in their own homes and communities.

Second, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates becomes part of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The bureau will no longer be involved in first applications, therefore the bureau's lawyers would concentrate on helping veterans in the appeal process.

The third broad area concerns the appeal bodies. As I have said, the Canadian Pension Commission hears first applications. If first applications are now to be heard by the department, then the Canadian Pension Commission in handling only appeals would have the same mandate as the Veterans Appeal Board. This legislation merges the two agencies into one body. The Canadian Pension Commission and the Veterans Appeal Board will be combined into the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to hear appeals at the first and if necessary the second level.

I want to emphasize that we maintain two levels of appeal. However, we do it with much more flexibility built into the system. We will have board members who are not locked into just one level of appeal, meaning that we can utilize the board members' time with maximum efficiency.

Some members of the new board will be deployed across the country to hear initial appeals. If the applicant wants to continue the appeal process, final appeals will be heard by different members of the same board. We will again speed up the appeals process by combining the expertise of both former agencies and having them concentrate only on appeals, not on first applications.

One overall theme is important to all these measures. We will maintain all veterans' benefits and appeal rights. Decisions will still be based on the principle that veterans receive the benefit of the doubt. Two appeal levels will continue to be available.

The Government of Canada spends about \$1.1 billion on disability pensions. Nothing in these proposed changes will affect the amount of money veterans receive through the process.

Our only objective is to make sure that the veterans get their applications dealt with faster. I am sure the House will agree that our veterans deserve this. I know we all recognize the debt that Canadians owe to our veterans. Veterans deserve their disability pensions and this is the time when many veterans need them the most.

I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting this bill because this is an occasion where we, together, can further help those who have served our country so well. Surely our veterans deserve that.

(1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to speak today on behalf of the Bloc Québécois during the debate on second reading of Bill C-67. This bill is of paramount interest to veterans. I have just listened to the secretary of state and I share his desire for continued recognition of all those who kept war away, maintained peace and continue to enrich our society through their community involvement.

We owe a lot to the veterans and that is why all of us, regardless of party, want to improve their living conditions. Canada has not failed in its duty. From the very start, it established and maintained resources for veterans.

These resources became more structured after the first world war. A system of pensions was born. Pensions were awarded according to disability criteria established by an independent body. It was not long, however, before criticisms were raised.

The main criticism, still heard today, concerns the delays in the pension process. This issue was given a hard look in the 1980s. In chapter 13 of his 1986 annual report, the Auditor General of Canada established that the disability pension process took an average of 13.2 months. The delay was criticized at the time. The Auditor General proposed improvements in efficiency, including automating the process and computerizing files. It was felt these measures could increase productivity by 25 per cent.

In 1987, legislative reform to do with the Veterans Appeal Board brought a flood of optimism. The Minister of Veterans Affairs at the time took the opportunity to affirm his confidence in the processing of pension applications. He said, on June 26, 1987, in the House, and I quote: "Hon. members will be aware of the substantial progress that has been made in reducing delays in the disability pension process. In the last two and one-half

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years the time required to process pension applications has been cut by well over half. At the same time, a far greater percentage of decisions are going in favour of the veteran today than was the case previously”.

The Conservative minister, the Hon. George Hees, went further, and I quote: “These very satisfactory results have been achieved in the face of an almost 100 per cent increase in case load. It is quite a remarkable feat for any operation to double its work-load while slashing its turnaround time by over half”.

After an exclamation like that, all opposition members applauded. Even the Auditor General of Canada in his 1988 report estimated that the follow-up to his 1986 audit examination was adequate. He indicated, and I quote, “The department took positive action after making a decision on the best way to handle each case”.

Yet we are sceptical now of this great optimism. Consider for instance that, according to the most recent studies, in 1992 the process took on average 18 months from the time of the initial application until the first decision. We believed things were better but that was not the case. To an ageing veteran, such a delay is incredible and unacceptable.

The longer waiting periods can be attributed to several factors. Numerous studies cited the department’s move to Charlottetown in 1984 as a major one. The most recent of these studies, conducted at the department’s request in 1993, also indicates very clearly the context of such delays and the accumulated backlog.

(1645)

At this point, I would like to quote an excerpt from volume 4 of that study. “The move to Charlottetown gave rise to a significant loss in the organization’s memory and technical skill. Partially in response to this loss, additional quality control procedures and steps were added to prevent serious errors on the part of employees not sufficiently familiar with the process or lacking full training. In time, some of these additional control measures and procedures took root, with the result that applications are now to a great extent processed sequentially and manually, which takes an unnecessarily long time”.

Another important factor merits consideration. From 1982 to 1990, that is for nine consecutive years, the number of first applications increased continuously and regularly. For each of those eight years, the number of first applications increased on the average by close to one thousand. The number of first applications has gradually increased from 5,300 in 1982 to 14,100 in 1990.

Everyone will agree that a pension allocation system, regardless of how efficient it is, cannot do any better than its original capacity permits when it has to process 14,100 first applications in 1990, as opposed to 5,300 in 1982. Because of these factors,

processing takes longer, and veterans, who do not have the time to wait, have to wait longer.

Therefore, we are in favour of the government’s fundamental objective of reducing processing times and accelerating the process. This objective must take precedence over all other concerns.

However the official opposition wonders about the way with which the government proposes to attain this necessary objective. The bill proposes to merge the Canadian Pension Commission by transferring to the minister all jurisdiction over first applications on the one hand, and on the other, by transferring to the appeal board all staff and jurisdiction over the review process.

In the same breath, the government is bringing the Bureau of Pension Advocates back under the department’s jurisdiction and has taken away from first-time applicants for veteran’s benefits the right to approach the bureau for recourse.

Allow me to review the basic elements of the bill, starting with how it deals with the Canadian Pension Commission. The department proposes to eliminate, so to speak, the Canadian Pension Commission. The department justifies this measure by saying that the Canadian Pension Commission’s favourable trial decisions were found to be consistent with favourable recommendations by the medical advisory services.

The department then questioned the existence of an independent commission which merely rubber-stamps the departmental services’ recommendations. It then thought of replacing this commission with an initial decision at the departmental level and allocating commission resources to the review and appeal board in order to speed up the process.

We are concerned about this. For the first time since the pension allocation system is in place, initial decisions are subject to departmental authority. We understand that this measure is aimed at bringing the decision-making process closer to those directly affected. However, this measure to be implemented under departmental authority must respect the principle of impartiality at this stage. To process initial applications faster, we need to open up the decision-making process to those who do the work.

Another important element of this bill is the conversion of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates from an independent agency to just another organization within the Department of Veterans Affairs. This proposed conversion challenges government policy since 1971, when the bureau was set up outside the department in the name of openness.

We hope that this openness will be maintained for seniors applying for the first time who served many years ago. Of course, many things have happened and many laws have changed since then. We sincerely hope that removing this step will help veterans cut through departmental red tape. The report of the Senate sub-committee chaired by the hon. Jack Marshall,

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which was released last autumn, reflects the scepticism this measure elicits.

(1650)

The department intends to refer only cases heard after initial decisions to the Bureau of Pensions Advocates. In a way, this is like saying a veteran only needs legal assistance when he has to apply for review or appeal and when a decision, although favourable, is not satisfactory. This is an interesting assumption.

One wonders why it is necessary to merge the Bureau of Pensions Advocates with the department. Of course, if this speeds up the processing of veterans' claims, we are all for it. However, we must make sure that the integrity of the process is maintained.

The Bloc Québécois earnestly hopes that veterans will see their claims processed more expeditiously, within structures that are fair, transparent and just. For years, many suggestions have been made at various levels for improving the pension allocation system. I would like to recall some of these suggestions which were included, for instance, in the assessment study of disability pensions conducted at the request of the department and released in 1993.

This study involved the organizational services branch and two consulting firms: Coopers & Lybrand and Deloitte & Touche. The latter firm dealt with issues relating to the pensions process.

Upon examining the firm's report in volume 4 of the study, one is struck first of all by the extent of control measures and additional procedures that cause undue delay. In 1992, these measures and procedures were applied within the department at the Veterans Services Branch, the Benefits Division, the Medical Advisory Branch, the district offices, decision-making support and non-medical benefits, the program planning and pension services, the pensions distribution service, the Medical Claims Research Section, standards and operations, supplementary benefits section and administration section.

This is just to illustrate how complex the system is. Imagine: every pension claim with its own specific file has to go through all these levels, each of which has several file check points. That is a major cause of undue delay, and that is why the study's recommendations included a substantial reduction in the number of check points within the department.

The department's study gives the distinct impression that the proliferation of these check points may be exacerbated by a climate of suspicion that prevails within each section and in relations between the sections. One feeds upon the other. I do not know whether this view of the pensions allocation system is held by the parties concerned, but this climate of suspicion may have helped to compartmentalize the various sectors and their activities. The answer would be to break down the walls and

make the process more flexible. The bill seems to reflect the study's recommendations.

It is unfortunate to note, as the study does, that many suggestions for improving the system had fallen on infertile ground. The firm of Deloitte and Touche noted that, during its stay in Charlottetown, it was literally flooded with useful suggestions for improvement, which had been made internally, with no response. Here were first line employees making all sorts of suggestions, employees really hoping to improve the quality and the performance of the service. For people living in an atmosphere of mistrust, this is a rather odd sort of behaviour.

(1655)

These suggestions, many of which were similar to other approaches contemplated over the years in various reports, proposed amalgamation of pension entitlement and evaluation processes; a single document on service for all needs; more involvement of regional advisors in the application review process; requirement that applications be accompanied by a diagnostic report and physician's medical report. These suggestions would certainly help cut delays.

Finally, seven main recommendations emerged from the study evaluating veterans' disability pensions. The only one that seems relevant to the bill is the third one, which provides that the department and the Canadian Pension Commission should streamline the decision-making process by combining pension entitlement and evaluation, by cutting the number of quality and process controls and by transferring responsibility for primary decisions to the group of pension medical advisors.

Do all these measures aimed at improving the process of pension allocation jeopardize the principle of arm's length relationship with the department? The study on pensions carried out for the department in 1992 would seem to have not gone unnoticed. During fiscal years 1992-1993 and 1993-1994, a number of changes were made to the pension process. The Estimates suggest that these changes would streamline operations and improve processing times.

A good number of the proposed improvements have already been implemented. To quote the Estimates for 1994-1995, "One of the most significant implementations resulted in a change in internal procedures which enabled the CPC to adjudicate on entitlement and assessment simultaneously. It is expected that this new procedure, implemented in May 1993, will reduce turnaround times in the first application process by four months".

So the minister has done his homework. It is 1995 now and we can no longer say that the average turnaround time for first applications is 18 months. Substantial improvements are presumably being implemented at this time. The system for recording medical benefits claims was apparently reorganized in 1993.

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A new computerized system for pensions and the status of pensions was to have been implemented in March 1994, thus finally allowing computers to meet veterans' needs. If I may quote once again from the 1994–1995 Estimates: "Changes in procedures that have improved client service include sending favourable special awards and assessment hearing decisions directly for simultaneous pay and promulgation. Approximate turnaround time savings for favourable assessment hearings and special awards average 40 days and 45 days respectively".

Work on reducing turnaround times and the backlog is therefore underway at this time. This all augurs well, although there is always room for improvement. Let us hope that the bill proves to be helpful in this sense in bringing about further improvements in the system. Any delay for veterans is unwarranted. It is with this outlook in mind that the former Hon. Senator Marshall carried out his work in early fall of last year.

In the report of the Senate sub-committee he chaired, there is a very interesting section, called: "What is "the" system and how can it be improved now?" This section contains 10 very practical recommendations, numbered 32 to 41. They are very down-to-earth recommendations on how the system could be improved, by reducing delays and the backlog. The committee recommends the following: "That requests for service documents be forwarded electronically to Outside Documentation Section and that the documents be provided at no cost for veterans' organizations which operate a service bureau".

(1700)

If we can believe how hard the department has been trying over the past two years to reduce delays, this recommendation should be implemented without a problem. And, furthermore, we are in the era of the information highway.

I continue to quote recommendations 32 to 41. "That the pages of the copy of the service documents be numbered to facilitate the work of the Précis Writers who will add their own extracts of the service documents, without typing, to the submission of the application for pension, and forward the package to the Medical Advisory for comment. That this documentation to which a copy of the Commission's decision would be attached serve as the "statement of case" in the next stage of the process, the hearing".

Can you imagine doing it any differently? Such sample solutions show that the kind of structure in place contributes little to the causes behind the delays and backlog. It seems that, to a much greater extent, the delays and backlog are due to entrenched ways of doing things that have resisted change.

The Canadian Pension Commission's persistent reluctance to give veterans the benefit of the doubt led to the following recommendation in the Marshall report: "That serious efforts be made by the Canadian Pension Commission to apply the provision of the 'benefit of the doubt' at the first decisions level, in accordance with the Pension Act".

We feel like giving the benefit of the doubt to new services, new organizations better able to give veterans the benefit of the doubt.

The Senate subcommittee's report also contained the following recommendation aimed at speeding up assessments: "That the senior district medical officers rule upon assessments at the district level; that assessments for claimed conditions be determined by senior district medical officers in the early stages of the preparation of pension claims; that senior district medical officers rely on reports prepared by medical specialists qualified in the field relevant to the veteran's pensionable condition in order to raise the assessment of their patients who are veterans".

These recommendations are consistent with the desirable, contemporary objectives of process devolution and decentralization and with the department's intentions.

To conclude with my examples of concrete measures, the Senate sub-committee ruled on the decision-making process for awarding disability pensions by making this recommendation: "That all fully favourable decisions rendered by the Canadian Pension Commission and the Veterans Appeal Board —be ideally less than a page in length, and that unfavourable or partly favourable decisions strictly deal with the reasons why the application or appeal is being turned down".

These measures are likely to speed up the process and reduce the backlog of cases. We must check how such measures will be implemented, if we have not done so already. The Bloc Québécois is committed to pursuing the changes designed to make the system even more effective.

Speeding up the process and reducing the backlog is mostly an administrative matter involving program structure, the department, the organizations, regulations, procedures and control measures. All these elements are involved in the exact way a public service is provided.

Administrative order must be based on principles. In the case of the veterans pension awarding process, some principles were established and applied. These principles are: equity, impartiality, uniformity and vested rights.

The government's bill can be neatly summed up by listing three recommendations contained in the briefing paper on pension reform, namely delegating the first-level decision-making process to the department; concentrating the appeal preparation work done

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by the Bureau of Pensions Advocates; and merging the Canadian Pension Commission with the Veterans Appeal Board.

(1705)

Does this bill challenge the basic principles behind the pension system? That is what we are concerned about and what we want to look into.

We agree with the worthwhile goal of speeding up the process and reducing the backlog in the veterans disability pension awarding process.

However, before making a final decision on this bill, we will pay attention to what veterans, veterans' organizations and public entities affected by the proposed reform have to say about Bill C-67. Our first priority will be to listen to their positions with attention and respect and, to the extent possible, support their wishes for the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Louis-Hébert—U.S. president's visit.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill C-67 on behalf of the Reform Party. After initially reading Bill C-67, reviewing it, reading it one more time and reviewing it again, I thought it was necessary to put a face to the word veterans. I did not have to go very far to put a face to that particular group of people.

As a matter of fact, even in the Chamber we see constables walking around doing their duties. Often we see medals on their chests from campaigns of yesteryear. It is good to know that these people have served our country in that way.

In my community of Summerland in the Okanagan I looked around to see if I could find some examples of veterans. Again I did not have to go very far. Steve Dudson comes to mind, the gentleman who served as dominion president of the Royal Canadian Legion in Ottawa. He is still very active in the local legion in Summerland.

Other names also came to mind such as Mr. Ed Lanfdale who served in World War II. He is very active with the Kiwanis Club in Summerland and is involved in all kinds of fund raising activities for worthwhile groups and organizations in the Okanagan. Also there is Don Bowen. I cannot forget about him because he served under me at the cadet squadron in Summerland. He was a Korean war veteran. He is still wearing a uniform today and serving his community by helping out the cadet program in Summerland.

Then I looked to my own family and I did not have to look very far to find veterans. I go back to my grandfathers who both served in World War II, my uncle who served in Korea, and several other family members. Some were distant but had names like Donnan, Killipf and McFadzen. All these are names of people in my family who served for their country and are veterans.

It made me very proud that one thing these people seemed to have in common even today, although we are far away from war in this country, is that they are still serving their country. This made me very proud as a Canadian to know that our veterans who once served for their country still continue to serve our great nation in one form or another today.

The current situation with respect to veterans and their families is nothing short of appalling. Tens of thousands of men and women have risked their lives for this nation. Yet, in their later years when they turned to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disability pensions, they ran up against a bureaucratic nightmare. Before many make it through this quagmire they have passed on without being fairly compensated. Veterans must wonder why the country they served so valiantly now serves them with such contempt.

I want all my colleagues in the House to consider the following figures. The average turnaround time for veterans who apply for benefits is 18 to 20 months. That is at the first level. Due to the fact that the benefit of the doubt clause has not been appropriately applied only 30 per cent of cases are accepted. That is almost two years for veterans who are currently at the average age of 73 years old.

(1710)

On the advice of their independent advocates many appeal their cases, and this can take up to three years. Of those who appeal, 70 per cent end up receiving benefits and many may only receive a portion of the expected entitlements. This situation is unacceptable.

We are making thousands of veterans in their advanced years wait almost five years to receive benefits. Currently there is a backlog of 12,500 cases and 10,000 more veterans are expected to apply for benefits this year.

After being chastised by the subcommittee on veterans affairs the government promised to act on behalf of veterans to correct this shameful situation. Bill C-67 is the government's answer.

I have been told the main intent of this piece of legislation is to cut the existing turnaround time for veterans' disability pensions by up to half without affecting veterans' benefits or their appeal rights. I have been assured by the minister and the deputy minister that the department will achieve their stated goal within two years.

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My main concern, however, has been to determine whether such an objective is feasible without adversely affecting the rights and benefits of veterans.

For well over one month now I have been deliberating over this piece of legislation. During this time I have consulted with a number of veterans and veterans' organizations. After careful consideration and in the best interests of all Canadian veterans I must come out in opposition to Bill C-67. The bill adversely affects the rights and the benefits of veterans.

Even though the Liberal government claims to have the best interest of veterans in mind, this piece of legislation was drafted and approved by cabinet without consulting veterans' groups. This lack of consultation with the grassroots was particularly ominous given the fact that after cabinet approval the government informed groups that were more favourable to the proposals first.

The National Council of Veterans was informed of the department's proposals in March 1994, while the Royal Canadian Legion, the army, navy and air force veterans were not consulted until the summer of 1994. Why this unacceptable disparity?

It is also disturbing to note that Bill C-67 was not based on the advice of veterans but on the advice of two management consulting firms. This lack of consultation with grassroots veterans is evident throughout this piece of legislation.

One of my prime concerns is that Bill C-67 removes the right of the veterans to have their first level application prepared by the Bureau of Pensions Advocates. Under the current system each veteran has the application prepared by a trained, independent lawyer. In addition each veteran enjoys solicitor-client privilege. There will be reference to solicitor-client privilege throughout this speech because I find it very important.

However, the government claims that the use of the bureau by the veterans at the first level is too time consuming and is largely responsible for the 18 to 20 month turnaround. Yet if we turn to page 50 of the report "Keeping the Faith into the Future" we find the breakdown of the time. The report from the Senate committee states that the time required to process a claim at the first level in the department, the Department of Veterans Affairs, was 11 to 13 months and only 5 months with the bureau.

In my own investigations I found that most of the time it was two months with the bureau. One must also ask: if the bureau overprepares its cases, why are 70 per cent of them turned down at the first level?

(1715)

The removal of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates from the first level process is ominous for a number of reasons. First, the

veteran is now reliant upon the department to prepare and adjudicate his or her first level decision. This is not only a conflict of interest but it removes the veteran's right of that solicitor-client privilege. The importance of the solicitor-client privilege cannot be understated.

In the subcommittee report on veterans affairs, "Keeping the Faith", Mrs. F. L. Crummer, a witness who has been battling for six years with the department, most eloquently states the need for solicitor-client privilege. She states:

An important consideration which must not be forgotten is the average age and education level of the clients serviced by the bureau and the fact that most of them know little or nothing about how the system operates. Their link with the system is their advocate, the person in whom they place their trust.

The solicitor-client privilege enshrined in the statute is one of the inherent strengths of the bureau and of the pension act. It forms the basis for the trust clients place in their advocate.

She goes on to say:

Changes could place clients in jeopardy and destroy their trust not only in their advocate but ultimately in the system itself—. No changes should even be contemplated to section 19 of the act which establishes the independence of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates. I feel it must remain independent of the department in order to properly service veterans and dependants.

I would like to remind this House that my primary concern is to speed up the process without taking anything away from our veterans.

Another concern I have with respect to removing the bureau from the first level decision making process is that veterans will be dealing directly with the department whose employees have been known to not have the best attitude. Mr. Cliff Chadderton, chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations, recently stated:

The problems which occurred in regard to the old legislation were, in our view, largely ones which might be attributed to either attitude, lack of knowledge or possibly incompetence. In other words, regardless of the framework of the new legislation the results will depend upon the manner in which the administration thereof is carried out—. The ability to reduce delays in adjudication will depend upon the will of the administrators to make the system work.

Knowing that an attitude problem exists within the department, I find it incomprehensible that the department believes it can offer veterans a better service than the Bureau of Pensions Advocates. What veterans face at the first level could be an indifferent or incompetent pension officer who lacked the will or the knowledge to inform veterans to pursue benefits to which they are entitled.

I am also concerned that veterans may not be informed they are able to apply for an appeal of the department's decision. Even if the pension officer has the best intentions, I am not confident that applications they fill out will be as good as that of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates.

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Let us examine once again the people we are dealing with here. A 73-year old man or woman entering the Department of Veterans Affairs used to go to the bureau and now they will approach a counter—I am told that one of the biggest disability claims is for hearing loss—and be instructed that they must fill out the draft of the application form, a 10-page complicated application form for their disability pension. Most elderly veterans who find dealing with bureaucracy extremely stressful would also find it too complicated to fill out.

Considering the fact that the veteran will be assisted by a departmental pension officer without the solicitor-client privilege, I am concerned that the application may also form an entrapment whereby the veteran may mistakenly commit incorrect information that is official on his record. The end result would be a fast rate of first level rejections.

(1720)

I foresee another difficulty with the bureau being removed from the first level. Under Bill C-67 the size of the bureaucracy will increase and the minister will get more power to influence the department's internal affairs. Under these proposals the minister may have undue influence over the whole decision making process and the quality of service or the rate of acceptance.

Departmental employees will be vulnerable to receiving direction which could deter them from encouraging veterans to pursue benefits and services to which they are entitled. They will also be under pressure to take part in fiscal restraint. Even an offhanded remark by the minister could affect the way his staff deals with veterans.

I would like to remind this House that my primary concern is to ensure that the process is speeded up without taking anything away from veterans. With the current rejection rate of 70 per cent and an 18 to 20 month waiting period, I have no confidence that the removal of the bureau from the first level will speed up the process and improve the acceptance ratio. In fact advocacy will suffer from the lack of continuity.

Currently an advocate from the bureau will deal with a veteran from the first level to the review, to the appeal stages, ensuring that the advocate is familiar with the merits of the client's case. Under the proposed system the pension officer, after the first level, will have no mandate to be involved in the case whatsoever.

The case will be turned over to the bureau lawyer, who will be unfamiliar with the case at that point in time. It will be passed on to him and in my opinion that will cause further delay. He will be unable to properly advise the veteran on the merits of his appeal until after some time considering his application. At this point I must ask a number of important questions.

First, how can veterans believe that the counsellor is acting on their behalf and that the information they give, which is in confidence, will not be used against them when the department is also adjudicating the decision?

Second, who exactly will adjudicate decisions at the first level and how will they be trained?

Third, how will the removal of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates from the first level decision speed up the decision making process when currently the initial application at the bureau level is such a small part of the delay? The delay is in the department, not with the bureau.

Fourth, will a fast rejection rate at the first level lead to even more congestion at the appeal level?

Fifth, given the fact that the government promises to halve the backlog within two years, where exactly will the promised savings in time be made?

A second aspect of this piece of legislation that concerns me is the proposal to join the BPA, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, to the department. Again, I am concerned about the chances of conflict of interest arising and the lack of solicitor-client privilege.

With the bureau restricted to hearing appeals and as a part of the department, I feel that the bureau may no longer provide the objective, expert, independent advice which it currently offers. As departmental employees they may become party to any cost cutting or ratios alluded to by the minister because they will now be answerable to superiors within the department. I fail to see how this will serve the best interests of the veterans.

A third aspect of this legislation which concerns me is the merging of the Canadian Pension Commission with the Veterans Appeal Board. From my research I have determined that currently the pension commission has a much more restrictive view of what constitutes a disability than does the Veterans Appeal Board. However, when working independently they provide a system of checks and balances.

The proposed amalgamation of the boards could see the more liberal policy of the Veterans Appeal Board watered down, which would adversely affect veterans rights and benefits. This would not be acceptable to me or to the Reform Party.

In addition, I am concerned that the proposed veterans review and appeal board will not examine base their examination of each review and appeal on the merits of each case. Rather it would decide whether the department followed its own stated policy and procedure. This would be a further erosion of veterans rights and benefits.

(1725)

A fourth aspect of concern is the proposal that the review panel in clause 23, the appeal panel in clause 32, the minister in clause 82, be given the right on their own motion to reconsider a

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decision they have made and amend or rescind that decision if it determines that an error was made with respect to any finding of fact or interpretation of any law.

This power is unprecedented. In court one cannot be tried for the same crime twice after sentencing. This is not due process. In fact I wonder if this is even constitutional.

When I met with the deputy minister to discuss this bill, he assured me there was no need to worry about apparent conflict of interest, lack of client-solicitor privilege or attitude among the department employees. He argued that veterans will be given the benefit of the doubt at all levels of decision making.

How can I possibly be confident that the department will apply the benefit of the doubt when it has not been used liberally in the past? The benefit of the doubt was given to adjudicators under the Pension Act and the Veterans Appeal Board Act to improve the odds of veterans receiving early acceptance.

The commissioners and members of the Veterans Appeal Board were, as stated in the act, to bend in favour of the applicant. Yet in practice this does not happen. As pointed out in the subcommittee on veterans affairs report, the commission did not apply the benefit of the doubt but rather rubber stamped the advice of the pensions medical advisory.

Why now should the department be trusted to apply the benefit of the doubt? No wonder the Bureau of Pensions Advocates over prepares cases.

I would like to sum up my remarks by stating that Canada and Canadians have a legal obligation under the Pension Act to pay compensation for death and disability relating to military service. In addition to the legal obligation I feel that we also have a moral obligation to support veterans in a reliable and timely manner.

I understand the government is trying to rush this bill through the House. I have numerous reservations about the effect of this bill.

The Royal Canadian Legion which represents 240,000 veterans also has numerous concerns. I just received a letter from the dominion president the other day in which he lays out many of the concerns. He states: "In light of these concerns, the Royal Canadian Legion considers it to be most important for the parliamentary committee to deal with and resolve the concerns before endorsing the legislation. At the same time, it is recognized that there is a need to move quickly. The Royal Canadian Legion stands ready to contribute to the process".

In conclusion, I would like to read once again from "Keeping the Faith: Into the Future". I would like to commend the people who sat on that committee, particularly the Hon. Jack Marshall who has recently retired. It is a superb piece of work.

On page 85, Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden articulated Canada's obligation to veterans when he addressed the soldiers about to depart for the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917.

He said: "You can go into action assured of this and as the head of government I give you this assurance, that you need to have no fear that the government and the country will fail to show you just appreciation for your service to the country in what you are about to do and what you have already done. The government and the country will consider it their duty to provide to the returned men its just and due appreciation of the inestimable value of the services rendered to the country and empire and that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Call in the members.

And the division bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division on the question now before the House stands deferred until Monday at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, at which time the bells to call in the members will be sounded for not more than 15 minutes.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find unanimous consent to further defer the vote from Monday at the time of adjournment until Tuesday at 5.30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

(1735)

Some had to borrow, also at high rates, against other assets they had, the money they needed to fill the gap imposed by this sudden hike in the interest rates. I remember a real estate transaction involving two rental properties with 12 apartments in which the vendor, already choked by his mortgage lender, a bank, one of the big six, had to pay out \$56,000 in dollars of the time in interest penalty for breaking his mortgage. In the United States, the federal law on housing provides that no penalty may be charged for breaking a mortgage, and yet the American economy seems to be in good shape.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS*[Translation]***INTEREST ACT**

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ) moved that Bill C-273, an act to amend the Interest Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am both disappointed and appalled as I rise in the House to speak to Bill C-273, an act to amend the Interest Act. You will understand my frustration when I explain how I became aware of the fact that the Interest Act is totally ineffective.

I am a notary by profession. Over the years, I have finalized at least 5,000 real estate transactions involving either sales or financing. In 1981 and 1982, a steep rise in interest rates forced mortgage holders to renew their mortgages at 18, 19 or 20 per cent, and I even saw a second mortgage renegotiated at 24.41 per cent.

When rates settled to more civilized levels, the same taxpayers—of every political stripe, by the way—tried to renegotiate their mortgages to take advantage of the sudden drop in interest rates. Mortgage lenders argued, not unreasonably, that they themselves had borrowed on term deposits at very high rates.

They found a sympathetic ear in the Minister of Finance at the time, a Liberal, and I am referring to Marc Lalonde who was Minister of Finance in 1983 and who told us at the time that the banks had initially borrowed the money at high rates and that changing the rules of the game at this point might put them in a rather difficult situation. I could see that, and I think the members of the House of Commons at the time understood the situation.

Could I perhaps ask the Speaker to urge our Reform Party friends to be silent?

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I wonder if we could ask for the co-operation of the House while the member has the floor. If there are discussions that have to take place, they might be held outside the Chamber behind the curtains or in our respective lobbies.

[Translation]

Mr. Lebel: Soaring interest rates in 1981 and 1982 were very damaging for small owners of rental buildings and owners of apartment buildings.

In the face of the outcry against such abuses, the Minister of Finance had asked bankers to take themselves in hand and show a human face to their mortgage borrowers. How pure of the minister. Taxpayers were nevertheless understanding and, as always, reacted calmly to the problem. Because of a lack of political will on the part of the Liberals of the time, they as usual bore the entire cost of the mess.

Since then, interest rates have been civilized, although recently, because of the collapse of the Mexican currency, we are told, they have tended to rise. When interest rates dropped recently to 5.25 and 5.5 per cent per annum, this was the time for the party in power to act. The situation that existed in 1982-83 had evaporated. There was therefore no way the banks could be taken by surprise now. Last summer, the banks paid 2, 2.5 and 3 per cent on term deposits and charged 5, 5.25 5.5 per cent on loans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, 2,500,000 people are having to deal with a mortgage in Canada at the moment. They are held hostage by financial institutions and the market, not just by the financial institutions, but by fluctuations in the market. This is becoming distressing, and it affects our economy, not always predictably, but certainly noticeably.

Outraged, Mr. Speaker? Yes indeed, and here is why. Private members' bills are first drawn at random. The bill before us, Bill C-273, has passed that stage. A private member's bill is next referred to a sub-committee on private members' business, comprising a majority of Liberals and Reform Party members and a single member from my party.

This committee decides whether the bill will receive a simple one hour debate, as in the present case, or whether it is to be voted on. If it is decided that it will only get an hour's debate, the whole matter is dropped at the end of that hour, it is history, over and done with. If, however, this committee decides that it will be put to a vote, then the parties can express their opinions, debate it and, after three hours of discussion, the member's bill is put to the vote.

There is no doubt that if a majority of members in the committee is afraid that a member's bill may be passed into law, they assess the impact on their constituents, their supporters and, indeed, on their financial backers. In that case, it is either

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debated for three hours or referred for an hour's debate like this one.

There is no need to spell it out. If it were passed, the bill before us would cause the banks to lose huge sums which they now collect in penalties.

(1740)

Last November, these poor banks declared overall profits of \$4.3 billion at the end of their fiscal period, no doubt after having made provisions for bad debts and withheld taxes owing; \$4.3 billion, imagine that.

Why did the Sub-Committee on Private Members' Business, in which our friends opposite and beside us call the shots, oppose putting the bill before us to a vote? Could it possibly be because the six big chartered banks each contributed an average of \$250,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada during the last election campaign? One might think so.

This obscure committee did not include the interests of the Canadian taxpayer in its decision, but only those of its financial backers. There you have the results of politicking, an art the Liberals have mastered.

Reform Party members are learning quickly too now that they are aiming to form the next government. God forbid! For Canadian taxpayers, the lesson to be learned in all of this is that, if a vote is sure to be won, you are the last ones to be considered.

I would like to warn the members who are in the majority in this committee about their attitude in this case. I plan to send to all regional and national newspapers in their ridings a copy of *Hansard* including this debate, so each and every one of them will have to explain why they refused to put the bill before us to a vote.

Coming back to the bill, I can see right away from the reaction of my colleagues opposite that they will claim such a measure might harm certain investments. I rather doubt that and I shall tell you why.

At present, a loan granted for more than five years can be repaid in advance provided that a sum equal to three months' interest is added to the capital and interest due. For a few years now, however, the Bank of Montreal has given out loans for seven years or even more.

Nor is there any validity to the argument that such a procedure would mean that individuals who invest their savings for the long term in banks would lose money. If people want to get a relatively high return for their investment dollar, a return that is competitive with bank rates, they can always buy Canada, Quebec, Ontario or other savings bonds, or municipal bonds. Municipalities are not known for the bad habit of reimbursing their debts before the end of the term. Therefore, these people

will nevertheless be paid the interest that they are entitled to receive.

Section 93 of the consumer protection act that took effect in Quebec in 1976-77, I believe, prohibits any creditor from demanding from a consumer any payment in addition to that which is due on the day of payment—the act makes no mention of mortgages, because the Interest Act falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Therefore, as long as you are not a business person, because the Consumer Protection Act only applies to individuals, no penalty will apply if you pay off your television or car early. This did not prevent finance companies, business people in Quebec from doing business. What may have slowed them down more was the negative impact that a provision of the Interest Act had on Canada's economy in general.

When people who could get other financing elsewhere are compelled to go to the end of their mortgage terms or pay astronomical amounts, that could hurt the province's and the country's economy, in my opinion.

(1745)

In 1976, the Hon. Anthony Abbott of the Liberal Party, the predecessors of the people on the other side of the House, introduced Bill C-16. This bill was a "providing for" bill. It provided for the protection of borrowers and depositors, for the regulation of interest rates on judgment debts and was to repeal the Interest Act. Since 1867, the Interest Act had not been substantially amended and had only been changed to include the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. The bill, which probably was killed through pressure from lobbyists, big banks or some other source, proposed to cancel or repeal the Interest Act.

Clause 15 of that bill provided that any borrower who pays off early all or part of the principal of a mortgage under the preceding subclause is not obliged to pay, on the early payment, the greater of the penalties stipulated in the loan agreement—i.e. in the contract—the penalty payable being the lesser of the interest payable for a period of three months or the interest which would have been payable if the loan had run to its term.

In other words, the lesser amount of the two; a maximum of three months' interest or less than that amount, if in fact a shorter period was left on the term. And that penalty was to be calculated on the amount of the early payment at the interest rates applicable to the loan.

When I introduced my bill, I was not aware that this bill had been introduced in 1976. I discovered it when I was doing my research. This bill does not come from the Social Credit Party of Canada, the party of infinite love or the transcendental meditation party; it comes from the Liberal Party, from the people sitting opposite us. Why did they renounce their principles?

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What has happened to that party since then? Did they get contaminated by the Reform Party? I know that they are against.

If a group in Canada has been penalized by the measures in the Interest Act, it is the western farmers. As we know, western farmers are expecting large payments. Do they get paid when they sell their crops or do they rely on their various insurance policies or on income stabilization plans? I do not know. But the fact is that they sometimes have to wait a while before they receive their money. In the meantime, they have to secure their loans by taking out a mortgage. Since they need money to tide them over for a certain time, they borrow from the banks.

They are perhaps among those hardest-hit in Canada because of the large amounts they borrow on a regular basis, almost annually, while waiting to receive the amounts owed them.

I am disappointed because I sincerely believed that, political games aside, this bill was aimed at protecting for once—it is not much, just once—ordinary people who have trouble paying their mortgage. I thought that all members of this House, whatever their party, would automatically look after the interests of ordinary people, of those who allowed them to sit opposite us. But they were fooled once again by powerful lobbies and monopolies putting pressure on them and saying, “Listen, I do not want to lose my \$4.3 billion”.

According to press reports, it will probably be worse next year because of the economic recovery. Their net profits may exceed \$4.3 billion. Of course, together they can give \$1 million, \$1.5 million or \$2 million to the party that can promise them not to touch the Interest Act, so they do not lose astronomical amounts in penalties like those they lost, I gather, unfairly.

I also wanted to table this bill for my constituents in the riding of Chambly for whom I worked for 15 years as a notary, handling transactions and mortgages. I saw some of them leave my office with tears in their eyes. I saw people who could no longer make their payments put the key on my desk and tell me, “Please give it to the bank manager; I am going to rent an apartment in Montreal because I can no longer make my payments”. I saw that in 1982 and 1983. It was heartrending.

(1750)

When I decided to go into politics, one of the promises I made to the people of Chambly was to try to persuade the government to amend this act, which struck me as inhuman, as Mr. Lalonde, the finance minister at the time said, but then he asked the banks to implement their own controls. It is a bit like asking a fox, who has already made it into the henhouse, to eat only a few. It is like turning the blood bank over to Dracula. It amounts to almost the same thing.

I say to the people of Chambly, at least I have tried. Those of you who are watching can see that I have tried to change things. I am disappointed that it did not pass. And it was because of

ignorance, the wish to do nothing of certain of my colleagues, most of them, unfortunately, from the party in power. I say to them that we will not give up, and that we will try again, perhaps at a time when they are less worried about their corporate constituents, the banks, and come back to the charge with a similar bill.

[English]

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regretably the hon. member for Chambly significantly weakens his debate for his private member's bill when he makes the far reaching and one might say ridiculous argument that his bill did not win three hours of a debate in this place because Liberals would be embarrassed by his act to amend the Interest Act.

I remind the hon. member opposite that there have been a number of private member's bills introduced by thinking, backbench government Liberal members which run counter to the suggestions of a minister; but still received three hours of debate and a vote. The most recent that I can recall was the private member's Bill C-226, an act to rescind section 745 of the Criminal Code which received three hours of full debate in this place and carried on a vote by the members of this place.

On the matter at hand, I consider it a privilege to speak to Bill C-273, an act to amend the Interest Act. Let me begin by commending the hon. member for Chambly for his well intentioned effort on behalf of Canadian mortgage borrowers.

The bill before us calls for changes to section 10 of the Interest Act. It only calls for the words “12 months” to be substituted for the words “five years” in two places in that section.

At first sight this appears to be a small change but I am concerned that what may seem like a small change could have far reaching consequences. I am worried that what on the surface appears like a consumer friendly improvement may in practice be quite the reverse. If this legislation were to pass mortgage financing for Canadians could become less available and mortgages could be higher and the range of financial instruments available to Canadian borrowers and savers could be reduced.

I want to demonstrate to my parliamentary colleague opposite why such a simple change would have negative consequences. The difficulty is that this bill could inadvertently hamper the flow of funds into the mortgage market by increasing the risks associated with mortgage lending. Hon. members may recall that section 10 of the Interest Act provides for a penalty equivalent to three months interest in the prepayment of the outstanding principal after five years on conventional mortgages with terms greater than five years.

The bill under consideration, this bill, would extend these same provisions; that is, a penalty of three months interest for

prepayment of outstanding principal after only one year on mortgages with terms greater than one year.

As hon. members and many Canadians are aware, long term mortgages are uncommon in Canada. The vast majority of mortgages in this country are issued with terms of five years or less.

(1755)

One might ask why this lack of long term financing? Unfortunately the prepayment penalty provision in section 10 of the Interest Act is a real factor. This has been recognized by consumer associations, financial institutions, as well as the construction and real estate industries.

Now we have today's proposed legislation which could compound, not improve problems with timely mortgage financing because by adopting Bill C-273 we would risk similar results in the medium term mortgage market. Prepayment penalties for short and medium term mortgages are usually based on the present value formula which compensates the lender for differences in rates which would apply. This amount may be more or less than the three-month penalty proposed by the bill.

We have to recognize the cascading effects such a problem would create. Nervousness about such losses would effect the availability of not only mortgages but also medium term GICs. In turn, the resulting less efficient, smaller mortgage market would have negative implications for the construction and real estate industries.

Let me reiterate. I understand this bill has been put forward with good intentions, that it was tabled with the welfare of consumers in mind. However, in deciding whether Bill C-273 should go forward to committee, hon. members must bear in mind the unintended but adverse consequences which could flow from this bill.

In summary, these consequences include reductions in the choices that will be available to Canadian consumers in their capacities as mortgage borrowers and as savers, increases in the cost of mortgage financing, reductions in the availability of medium term mortgage funds, and adverse spill over effects on the construction and real estate industries.

The hon. member for Chambly does, however, by introducing this bill, underline the need for further consideration of how best to provide Canadian consumers with the opportunity to prepay mortgages in a fair and equitable way.

I understand that officials are reviewing this issue so that we may very well come back to it in a very short period of time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lebel: Mr. Speaker, may I reply to his question?

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): During the hour reserved for private members' business, there is no provision for questions and comments. The member presenting the bill in the House has 20 minutes, and those who follow have 10 minutes, with no questions or comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I too wish to compliment the member for Chambly on the intent of the bill. There is no question that his heart is in the right place.

Many people in this House and most Canadians felt the shock of the greatly increasing interest rates about 10 years ago. I certainly did. Unfortunately while the intent of this bill is noble, when we get the past the intent to look at the effects of this bill and what would happen in the marketplace, the results may not be quite as noble.

Before I get into my short comments about this I would like to respond to a couple of comments that the mover of the bill from Chambly brought into the debate. First was the notion of there being some sort of ne'er do well doing in that this bill is not votable.

I think there are 30 bills brought forward. Of that I believe about six or eight are votable. The decision on whether a bill is made votable is based on the content of this private member's bill as tested against all other private members' bills.

Sometimes they are found lacking and sometimes they are not. My private member's bill was not votable. I felt badly about it but that is the way the cookie crumbles. We have to deal with it. Another item was brought into this debate. The banks are hugely profitable and therefore we should change this. The banks make all kinds of money and therefore nobody likes banks. I do not like banks any more than anybody else but banks are a part of our life. They are a necessary evil.

(1800)

Banks have had an increase in taxes over the last few years of something in the region of 40 per cent. In fact they pay a fairly hefty bite of their profits as taxes.

As we all know banks have been increasing their service fees for everything because they are trying to get out of the cyclical nature of recovering all of their cost by interest as well.

The whole notion of the profitability of banks in this debate is a moot point. It does not have anything to do with what we are talking about. Banks make a contract to lend money to a client, the client makes a contract with the bank to repay the money.

If people wish and are in a position to prepay a loan for whatever reason, then it would be nice if the lender would be in a position to make it easy for them to do so. However for the number of people who would like to renegotiate loans when interest rates go down probably does not match the number of

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people who would like to renegotiate a loan when interest rates go up. I do not think I have heard of anyone going into a bank and saying: "I understand that interest rates have gone up. Therefore I want to renegotiate my loan so I can pay more money".

A contract is a contract. When depositors put money on deposit and buy interest bearing certificates at a bank, the bank generally matches those deposits with lending.

Perhaps we should consider letting the marketplace decide. If it is in the best interest of the bank, and some do, to ensure that their customers are able to have more flexibility in their mortgage loans, then they could advertise that they will be prepared after one year to allow the customer to collapse the loan, prepay three months interest and be out of the contract.

Most banks have open mortgages, one-year mortgages, six-month mortgages, five-year mortgages and ten-year mortgages. The Home Builders' Association would like to see much longer term mortgages so that people would be able to lock into a mortgage, perhaps even over its life, until it is totally amortized. This is done in the United States. Then when someone buys a home they know what their payments are going to be from the time they make their first payment until the time they make their last and the vagaries of interest rates will not drive people out of their homes. That again is another debate and another story.

Some lending institutions will lend money for mortgages in this country this very day that consider their mortgages fully open and will allow people to prepay without penalty at any time.

We should allow the natural competitive forces in a healthy marketplace make these decisions. We have many fish to fry in this Parliament. We should let the private sector do what the private sector should do and not further involve the government in more details that should be handled by the private sector. We should be getting out of business, not getting into business.

While the member for Chambly brings to the House a well-intentioned motion perhaps it also contains a bit of quicksand. I would suggest that if people are looking at this and we absolutely must do something about it as a Parliament, we might consider this. When a mortgage institution or a bank lends money on a mortgage expecting to get a spread of 3 per cent between the people who are lending money to the bank and the people who are borrowing money from the bank, their profit is included in that.

(1805)

Perhaps the banks might consider giving up their portion of profit. Certainly their expenses should be covered.

We are getting very complicated in this debate; at least I am getting very complicated. It is not really our decision and our job to decide what banks should do and how they should do it. That is a job for a free, competitive and open marketplace.

[Translation]

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support my colleague in this respect, and I think the hon. member of the Reform Party should realize this is a bill to protect the individual consumer who borrows money, not companies. If I understood correctly, the bill is not concerned with companies but individuals.

We all know that financial institutions, with their expertise, can easily predict the vagaries of interest rates and are in a better position to take advantage of that expertise than the average citizen who has to make a living and does not have the resources to be able to judge when he should pay up his mortgage or take out a mortgage and for what period of time, and so forth.

That is why I think the flexibility the hon. member for Chambly is seeking, to allow people to pay back their mortgages and renegotiate them at a lower rate, would give the average citizen, for whom a mortgage on his home is the only equity he has, a chance to borrow a certain amount using the mortgage as collateral, in order to save some money for later on when he retires.

As the hon. member for Chambly explained, in the past we have often seen people lose huge sums of money, mainly because here in Canada we have a major problem. If we look at the mid-seventies we had interest rates at fairly reasonable levels of 7, 8 or 9 per cent. In 1981, 1982, 1983, interest rates rose to 20 per cent and then went down to 7, 8 and 9 per cent, and then down to 6 per cent in 1994. Last year, you could get a mortgage at 6 per cent, and now we are up to 11 and 12 per cent.

Imagine what we have to cope with. I did not do a serious analysis of the situation in other countries, but I know that in the United States, you can still get a 30-year mortgage at a much lower rate than we pay here. This kind of stability means that wage earners with fairly stable incomes can budget their money better. In this country, however, with these tremendous variations in interest rates, people never know where they stand.

So if we gave individuals, since we are talking about private mortgages, if we gave individuals a chance to at least budget for their interest payments, it would help them balance their budgets generally, give them greater confidence, and make them more inclined to engage in real estate transactions, and in the process, this would help the economy. I think that this is what the hon. member for Chambly had in mind when he introduced this bill, and I think this is important, but unfortunately, it would seem this bill is being snubbed.

Adjournment Debate

I think we should have had more time to discuss the bill and a chance to improve certain guarantees available to individuals.

Once again, financial institutions are very well organized. They have their own experts who are able to evaluate the trends and the way interest rates are going, but the average Joe who has to learn a living does not have the resources to do this. That is why I support the bill standing in the name of the hon. member for Chambly.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Ms. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, you might find unanimous consent to suspend the sitting to the call of the Chair and the Adjournment Proceedings could commence at the normal time of 6.30 p.m.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Since there are no more members who wish to speak and the motion was not designated as a votable motion, the hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and pursuant to Standing Order 96, this item is dropped from the Order Paper.

[*English*]

I see the member for Louis-Hébert is present and as soon as we have the person who will respond for the government the Chair could reconvene prior to the normal hour, 6.30 p.m.

Is it the wish of the House to suspend the sitting to the call of the Chair?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 6.12 p.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 6.17 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

U.S. PRESIDENT'S VISIT

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to rise in the House to ask the parliamentary secretary to clarify an answer to a question I asked the Prime Minister Monday.

I had asked the Prime Minister which customary or parliamentary rule or law dictated that the Right Hon. Leader of the

Official Opposition could not meet the American President during the latter's upcoming visit to Ottawa, at the end of February. I also asked whether he considered it normal for a Prime Minister to tell the President of the United States what he can or cannot do.

Instead of answering my question, and being unable to find an excuse for his emotional, partisan and inappropriate reaction outside the House, the Prime Minister got tangled up in strange and confused explanations and talked about the letter the Leader of the Opposition had sent to Mr. Clinton requesting a meeting with him.

Finally, he said that, since the letter was addressed to Mr. Clinton, only he could respond to it. What we must understand from this part of his answer, Mr. Speaker, is that he could not tell the difference between a letter addressed to him and a copy of a letter sent to him as a courtesy.

The Prime Minister also lapsed into vaudeville and the absurd by pointing out to me that a meeting with the Leader of the Opposition was not a universal practice and that he, as Leader of the Opposition, had not always exercised this prerogative.

In fact he reminded me that the President of the United States, Mr. Zedillo, had not met with the Leader of the Opposition during his visit of last December. The Prime Minister must be reminded that Mr. Zedillo is the President of Mexico.

Except for his pitiful medical diagnosis of the Leader of the Opposition's state of health, which would make Hippocrates blush, the Prime Minister in no way answered my question. On what grounds did he decide that the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean could not meet with the American President?

After having so clumsily avoided answering my first question, the Prime Minister gave no more of an answer to the second one I put to him. Let me repeat this question: Now that he admits that the leader of the Bloc Québécois has the right to meet with the U.S. president "will the Prime Minister promise he will not use pressure tactics or indulge in any behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to try to discourage the U.S. president from meeting the Leader of the Official Opposition?"

The Prime Minister's answer was short and sweet:

—in the normal course of events, President Clinton's letter should come from Washington, not from Ottawa.

As you can see, this is not a promise not to use pressure tactics. On the contrary. What is the meaning of the expression "in the normal course of events" in his answer? Does it not clearly indicate that, in fact, the Prime Minister is not ruling out a possible attempt to dictate the answer that will come from Washington? The Prime Minister has mastered the art of dodging questions, as he showed us again in this case.

Adjournment Debate

[English]

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be clear and succinct in my answer which will also provide some information.

The question posed was answered by the Prime Minister in the House on Monday afternoon. The visit of President Clinton to Ottawa is an important event in the relationship between Canada and the United States. The government is very much looking forward to this, the first official visit of President Clinton to Canada.

He will arrive during the morning of Thursday, February 23. He will depart on the afternoon of Friday, February 24. The program will involve the participation of our new Governor

General, a visit to Parliament, meetings with the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois has sought an appointment directly with the President of the United States for his time in Ottawa. As the Prime Minister indicated on Monday in response to the question, it is up to the United States to authorize such a meeting.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Pursuant to Standing Order 38(5), a motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.22 p.m.)

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