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(HANSARD)

**Monday, March 21, 1994**

**Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent**

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 21, 1994

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

### APPLICATIONS FOR BENEFITS

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services)** moved

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of introducing legislation that would ensure:

(a) that any person who was once entitled to receive a monetary benefit from the federal government and did not make an application to receive such benefit, is allowed to file an application to receive the benefit, notwithstanding any limitation period affecting the application;

(b) that, upon receipt of the application, the federal government shall grant such benefit to that person where it is satisfied that the person would have received the benefit had the person applied within the limitation period; and

(c) that the monetary benefit bears interest as determined by regulation of the Governor in Council.

He said: Mr. Speaker, what we are discussing today is the possibility of implementing a mechanism to address a fundamental matter of justice: How to treat Canadians fairly.

[*English*]

I want to stress that what I am saying here is exploring the advisability of bringing forward legislation or some other mechanism to make certain that if Canadians lose a particular benefit it can be recouped.

For those of us, and generally speaking I think that is everyone here, who want to be fair to Canadians and make sure that governments respond to real needs I believe this is a wonderful opportunity to do so.

Let me be the first to say that no doubt all kinds of reasons could be brought forward to indicate that we should not be doing this. Let us look at those. If it is the right thing to do then let us explore together this notion. I do not want excuses from people saying that it is complex, potentially very costly or how would

we do it. What I would like to hear is how can we do this if it is the right thing to do in terms of treating our fellow citizens.

(1105)

Remember as well that governments have very little limitation on their power to go back and recoup the money they feel is theirs. They can go back and get it with very few limitations. What I really want is to put the shoe on the other foot. Surely if it is right for governments to go out and get that which is theirs, and I believe it is, then it is right for citizens to get that which is theirs.

[*Translation*]

This fundamental principle is very important to me. Indeed, if governments, and I believe it is the case, can, in almost any situation, go back and get what is theirs, why should this not be possible for Canadians across the country? I know that a number of reasons will be invoked against doing so. Some will say the issue is complex. Others will ask what we should do in such and such a situation? Others still will say that it could be a costly proposition. I understand all that, but what I would appreciate today is some help and suggestions as to how we could do it. If we agree with the basic principle that governments can go out and get what is theirs, why should ordinary citizens not be able to do the same?

[*English*]

I maintain that if governments have an opportunity, and they do, to go back and recoup, citizens should have more or less the same kinds of opportunities.

Some may ask why I brought this forward. I brought it forward because there are a number of cases in which people have been treated, in my opinion, unfairly, insensitively and unjustly.

I will share with members three such cases. I met a gentleman of 81 years of age. The reason I met him was that he was having some difficulty in making ends meet. When I looked at his pension I told him that there was a supplement. I asked him where it was and he told me that he was sorry, he did not know what I was talking about.

I told him that his income was so low he was entitled to the supplement. I asked him whether he had ever received it. He told me no, he did not know it existed. Members will have to understand that this was not an 81-year old man who was not with it. He had worked late into his life at his business and it was only a few years before since he let it go. He was not making a

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lot of money at the business, I assure members, but here was a gentleman who basically had been denied the supplement for a number of years.

When I brought it to the attention of the government three or four years ago, it looked at it very responsibly but, lo and behold, gave him 14 months of retroactivity.

Some people will say that it was too bad, he should have been with it, he should have applied on time. The truth of the matter is that he did not know it existed. The truth of the matter is that he did not have support systems in place that permitted him to know about it. The truth of the matter is that he got, in good old, plain Canadian English, shafted. I do not think that is right.

Let me give members another example. A lady came to me one day and wanted to chat about a special program that existed whereby her son might profit from training, but she did not have a great deal of money. It was helicopter training for her son.

She wanted me to make a special plea to the Government of Canada to find this funding. I asked on what basis she wanted me to make the special plea. To make a long story short, she had lived in a common law relationship with a soldier who had passed away. He had children from a previous marriage and they had some children from their own union. When he passed away she did not understand because of her situation that she was entitled to certain benefits.

Lo and behold, she sold her home and moved far away in order to start a new life. It was very difficult. She was alone. She had virtually no funds and she had a family.

Roughly 20 years later I found out that she was entitled to certain benefits. There were two types of benefits. In one case the retroactivity was two years and in another case it was three years. I maintain that is not fair.

Again we could argue that she should have known, she should have explored it, but she did not know and she did not explore it. She had lost a loved one. She was probably not in the frame of mind to go to the government and ask for help and inquire about special programs. She carried on as best she could and raised her family in a very meaningful way, and at a significant disadvantage. That is my second case. Cases like that, situations like that are unfair.

(1110)

Let me talk about a third case. A single mother came to me who was near the end of her studies. She had worked for many years. She had children and it had been extremely difficult. She had received minimal assistance from government. When I explored her case I thought at first glance that she should have qualified for more. I asked someone to follow up and sure enough she could have qualified for more. There had been an error made along the way.

This person had to sell certain goods she possessed in order to make her way. If that error had not been made some time before she would have had significant additional remuneration in order to continue and complete those studies. However, the attitude was: "You have made it thus far. We will help you to go the rest of the way. There is no way we are going back". I think that was unfair.

Let me assure the House that there are literally hundreds of cases like that. Some will ask if there are, would it not cost millions of dollars. I suspect not but I really do not know and I am not going to pretend I do.

Surely all of us here want to make sure that when an injustice has occurred, very often not because of anyone's particular fault, it is up to us to see how we can prevent it in the future. That is one of the responsibilities we have as a Parliament and as members of Parliament. If governments can go into a citizen's pocket several years after when they find out that a citizen owes them money, a citizen ought to be able to go into the pocket of government and recoup that for which they would have qualified.

[*Translation*]

As I said earlier, I understand that there could be a number of reasons for hesitating. Of course, there is a whole series of programs; some are still in effect, while others ceased to exist a long time ago. There is no doubt that it could cost a fair bit; I understand that. I also understand that we do not have the means to make frivolous expenses. But this is not the basic issue, and we must not fool ourselves into thinking it is. It is not. The fundamental issue is one of justice.

If it is right, if it is fair for the government to go back and recoup what was owed to it, should we not allow ordinary citizens to do the same? I personally think so. And I hope that today, during this debate, we will explore, as I asked, the possibility of legislating or doing something else which would have the same result. I do not consider the process itself to be nearly as important as the final result, which is to ensure fundamental justice by enabling people to have what is theirs.

This is all I have to say. I will conclude by simply asking the hon. members to help me with an open and creative mind, to recognize that a fundamental injustice exists, and to suggest ideas as to how we could correct this situation.

[*English*]

That is all I ask for. I do not ask for a whole bunch of excuses, and we are really good at those, as to why it cannot be done, the complexity and the costs or what have you. I ask for members' creativity applied to this basic problem to make sure that justice is done.

*Private Members' Business*

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to extend my congratulations to the hon. member for Saint-Boniface for the honour bestowed upon him this past weekend by the International Assembly of French-speaking Parliamentarians. He was awarded the rank of knight of the Ordre de la Francophonie, du Dialogue et de la Culture. Therefore, I want to congratulate him both personally and on behalf of my colleagues.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

(1115)

**Mr. Brien:** Now to the crux of his speech. After a number of days of budget debates, I am pleased to see the hon. member for Saint-Boniface get back to the concept of justice and staunchly defend the notion. This suits him far better than the role of ardent defender of the recent budget. Then, the notion of justice took a back seat to party interests. I much prefer to see him in the role he has taken on today.

The hon. member has said that we must focus on the underlying principle here, which is to give back to people what is rightfully theirs. I think we cannot disagree with this principle. However, care must be taken to ensure that the mechanism does not open the door to all sorts of applications from all kinds of people.

The first thing that needs to be done is to define exactly who these potential benefit recipients are and what type of benefit is involved. The hon. member mentioned income supplement recipients. He could have been talking about persons entitled to unemployment insurance. And what of all transfers to individuals?

Is this mechanism going to be limited to transfers to individuals, whether family allowances or pensions? Or will tax credits also be included? Would the government go this far, in keeping with the spirit of the bill the hon. member would like to bring forward? Would it be possible for individuals to claim unused tax credits several years after the fact? This process could end up being quite complex, and rather difficult to administer. Conversely, however, the Minister of Revenue does have the authority to make a provision retroactive and as such, he could in fact allow individuals to claim benefits retroactively. Of course, this would be to his disadvantage. But citizens should not be allowed to make it a habit of using tax credits in the wrong year, as this is relatively complex and would involve a rather substantial amount of extra work.

The basic question we must ask ourselves is why people do not understand the credits to which they are entitled? This is a very serious problem. How is it that individuals do not understand or that those around them cannot inform them properly of the benefits to which they are entitled? It took the intervention of the hon. member to help a senior citizen understand that she was entitled to receive an income supplement. That should not

be. We must understand that the system appears so complex to some that they are quite lost.

Perhaps more emphasis should be put on making information accessible to the people. This may be a simpler way and also a less expensive one to ensure that individuals can receive the maximum.

Of course, there will never be a perfect system where all individuals will be able to claim all that they are entitled to. Occasionally there is negligence on the part of individuals, not all but some. It may be unconscious, but it happens that individuals are negligent and at times heedless. But it is not always the case.

So, the first major factor is information or the lack of it. Complexity is also a factor making it difficult for some to find their way around these matters. At this time of year, the income tax return is a timely example. In spite of the fact that the income tax form has been made easier and easier year after year, people are still finding it harder and harder to fill. More and more people are asking for outside help to fill in their returns even though the number of lines on the form and the number of pages in the Guide have been reduced. The complexity remains. The problem is not necessarily with the Guide and its complexity but with the complexity of the system per se. Again, in the spirit of the hon. member's proposal, I think that we should focus on making our tax system simpler to make it more understandable to individuals. I think that the scope of the motion should be broadened to include not only benefits, but also tax credits that individuals are entitled to. It could be interesting to look into that area as well.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I have received very few requests. I have seldom had people come to me with this kind of problem, but there were a few cases. The fact that it is not a common occurrence does not mean that we should not look into it.

Let us examine a few positive aspects and perhaps slightly more difficult principles related to the application of all this. First of course, is justice. The principle of getting what we are entitled to, as we said earlier.

(1120)

At the same time, how far would it go? How many years can we go back?

We talked about the case where a measure no longer applies. Let us say, for instance, that in a year or two—which is not unlikely—the unemployment insurance program is completely changed. What would happen to people covered by the system in place five, seven or ten years ago? There will have to be a time limit so that individuals cannot go too far back in the past.

On the positive side, this bill would be better for the disadvantaged. Some people are better able to understand the system or can get professional advice in order to claim what is due to them.

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This principle favours redistribution in a way and that could be positive.

Of course, we would also restore the opposite right. The Department of Revenue can go back to your past and make you pay penalties and interest. So the reverse mechanism could be interesting.

What is negative is the complexity involved in managing all this, because it would not be simple. But, of course, we cannot say that we will not solve a problem because it is complicated. No problem is easy to solve and that is why we are here, to find solutions to complex problems. As for the management side, the hon. member seems to be earnest and it could be interesting to look more closely at a concrete, administrative solution allowing individuals to make sense of all this.

This should apply only to individuals, to people in difficulty, to disadvantaged people like those I talked about earlier. This principle should not be put in the hands of organizations or corporations already allowed to spread gains and losses over a certain number of years. It must not be a mechanism so open that everyone can use it to postpone or move up payments or to do what they like with tax rules because that would create great disorder in our tax system.

Really, there is something good in the fact that the rules cannot be extended indefinitely; that would be a bad idea. It could cause a problem, maybe even more so for seniors or the less educated people in our society.

There again, we need a time limit, even for those people, because otherwise the Minister of Finance will have great difficulty in financial planning.

If there were clear guidelines, it would be possible to plan, just as we plan for contingencies or set aside some financial reserves. We could do it with some programs, but as far as I am concerned, it must apply only to transfers to individuals.

Before I conclude, we must not forget one thing: the reason we are thinking about doing something like this today is that the system is terribly complex and individuals get lost in it. We often hear how complex it is.

People feel it is unfair because they think that those who know the system well take advantage of it and make better use of its benefits. They feel that because they do not understand it, they are being had. This feeds a deep sense of injustice and unfairness and we must all work to restore justice and some fairness, especially in the area of taxation, which is one of the most important reasons that people are unhappy with politicians.

In that regard, I think that I share the concerns of the hon. member for St. Boniface. It would be interesting to work on the principle of his motion, but we must keep in mind that it would

be complicated to administer, it is not a simple problem and we must work to restore fairness in our tax system. I congratulate him. I reach out to him and we will work together.

[English]

**Mr. John Williams (St. Albert):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose the motion put forward by the hon. member for St. Boniface. I know he put it forward with the best of intentions and he gave us some examples. There are some constituents in his riding who unfortunately have missed out on some of the government largesse through either lack of knowledge that programs were available or for whatever reason they were not able to claim the benefits available to them had they applied.

(1125)

There are two sides to every coin. If there is a responsibility on one side for the people to apply for it and there is also the obligation for the government to pay then it should not be an open-ended commitment by the government to pay forever should it be found at some future point that someone did not apply for a benefit.

We must remember the concept that benefits are to help people in their daily living. It is not for them to build a nest egg or a small fortune because they did not apply for it last year, the year before, five years ago or twenty years ago. The idea of the programs we have today, be it the guaranteed income supplement, be it the family allowance program, be it the old age security program or be it the Canada pension plan, is to help people in their daily living. It is not a savings program for them to pass on to their heirs. That is the first philosophical objection I have to the point raised by the hon. member.

He talked about being able to recoup a lost benefit. Yes, I know in the interest of fairness it would seem that if I had missed out on an opportunity to claim a benefit from the government some considerable number of years ago, it might be nice if I were able to go back and claim it. However I do not think we can leave it as an open-ended commitment.

The hon. member talked about responding to real needs. I mentioned, as I said, we are here to help people in their daily lives, not to build savings. He said it was the right thing to do. Yes, perhaps there is some merit in the fact that it is the right thing to do. However I believe if the person does not take some onus and some responsibility upon themselves to find out what they are eligible to apply for, to find out the programs offered through the government, a certain onus should be applied on constituents to say: "I have a need that perhaps the government will provide. Let me check it out".

He also mentioned that the government had few limitations on its side in order to collect the money from our citizens. I beg to differ on that. There is the statute of limitations. There are many rules, for example in the Income Tax Act, that put very specific

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deadlines on how long the government has before it loses its ability to go after the taxpayer to collect lost taxes.

I remember a tax case about four or five years ago wherein the government had for some unknown reason a tax return in its files that it had failed to process. About six years later the file was discovered and processed. In the particular case the taxpayer had actually owed the government \$250,000. It went to court. The government lost because there was an item in the Income Tax Act that says the government shall process tax returns within a reasonable period of time. The court decided that six years to process a tax return and send the person a notice of assessment showing how much he owed was not a reasonable period of time. In that particular case the government was out a quarter of a million dollars, plus whatever interest would have been applied.

There are rules on both sides. As I said, there are two sides to the coin. We have specific limitation rules on the government being able to collect and I think it is only fair that we have them.

The hon. member talked about examples of social programs to help people. He talked about the need and desire that we be fair. I think the hon. member is trying to be fair and generous with taxpayers' dollars. The point we are trying to make as the Reform Party is that there is a limitation to what the taxpayer is prepared to pay. Therefore that suggests we should not continue to have an open-ended situation.

(1130)

I was thinking in reading the member's motion that 100 years from now someone on reading their great-grandmother's correspondence may find that she said: "I did without my guaranteed income supplement because back in 1994 I felt the government deserved a hand. I passed up on my claim". The heirs come along and say: "Wow, here we are. Great-granny is long since gone but the claim is there". Let us not forget the interest. It is now tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars that the taxpayer would be on the hook for. Therefore, I cannot support the motion.

The member talked about people getting shafted. I remember some years ago while driving along I was pulled over by the RCMP. He advised me that I had entered a lower speed limit and because I was driving too fast he was going to give me a ticket. He said to me: "I've got good news and bad news for you. One, I'm going to reduce the amount of the ticket, but the bad news is that I'm going to give you a ticket anyway". I thought I was being shafted. I did not see that I was going to get any redress so I ended up paying the ticket.

I think the hon. member's point really is that we should simplify government so that we are here to help people in need. That has been the Reform Party policy. There is a myriad of programs out there. That is why people today cannot wade their

way through the red tape and government bureaucracy to find the programs that are there for them.

I suggest the hon. member go back and examine the nature and philosophy of his motion. We should simplify government and make it more responsive to the needs of people. In that way people in need will know that we have a program available for them. The complexity of government adds to the cost of government. It removes government from being able to help genuinely needy people while throwing all kinds of money through all kinds of programs to many thousands of Canadians who could get by fine without the money but it just happens to be a program that is there for them.

I therefore speak against the motion. I feel that the government does much today and, in many cases, goes overboard in the way that it spends taxpayers' money. I recommend that we oppose the motion.

**Mr. Julian Reed (Halton—Peel):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this motion very strongly. I speak as a former provincial member who has had direct experience with some of the very issues the hon. member has brought forward with this motion.

Fairness in government depends on being able to impart information to the population in order that what is going on is understood. Very often the potential recipients of some of these programs that they do not get are not understood by the people who deserve them or by the people for whom they were created in the first place.

I recall one story of a gentleman who was very seriously impaired through asphyxiation. He was a mechanic in a garage and inhaled a lot of carbon monoxide. He had to be given resuscitation to be revived. He did not recover to the fullest extent so that he could go back and pursue his trade. When I met him it was during a period when I was not an elected member. I was in self-imposed retirement. I knew of his financial circumstances and they were very modest, to put it mildly. I asked him if he was receiving the supplements to which he was entitled. He said he had a disability pension. I asked if he got a guaranteed income supplement that the province of Ontario provides. He did not know about that.

We were able to start some wheels turning and he got the supplement. However his entitlement went back to the time of his accident, the time he was so badly injured. He did not receive anything for that time period because application had not been made.

I would say that is the motivation of the hon. member in putting forward this motion. It is in order to correct what really is an injustice when the programs of government or what government does are not fully known by everybody.

I am supposed to be familiar with all of the government programs. I do not know them all. I can say what it is like for a

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private citizen who continues working day to day and really does not have direct familiarity with what is going on.

To be generous, I find the idea or concept put forward by my hon. friend in the Reform Party that "I'm all right, Jack, so everybody can look after themselves" unacceptable in this day and age. I believe we have a responsibility to make sure that whatever an entitlement is for a citizen that the entitlement gets to that citizen sooner or later.

I understand details are going to have to be worked out and there will have to be some limitations and so on so as not to create the extreme kind of circumstances that my friend in the Reform Party has brought forward.

Certainly the intent of this motion is clear and laudable and I am delighted to endorse it.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Colleagues, there being no further members rising for debate and this not being a votable motion, the time provided for consideration of private members' business is deemed to have expired.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 96, the order is dropped from Order Paper.

SITTING SUSPENDED

**The Deputy Speaker:** The sitting is suspended until noon.

(At 11.39 a.m., the sitting of the House was suspended.)

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 12 p.m.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT SUSPENSION ACT

**Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada)** moved that Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

[Translation]

I am pleased to support Bill C-18, An Act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

[English]

The current process of adjusting constituency boundaries by independent commissions has been in existence since 1964 when the government of Lester Pearson passed the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. Before then the House of Commons itself through a committee would carry out the adjustment of the boundaries of the ridings.

The current process has been in place since 1964. We believe that after 30 years the time has come for a full review of all aspects of this process by the House of Commons which passed the 1964 law in the first place.

According to the Constitution the readjustment process must take place after each decennial census. After both the 1971 and 1981 censuses the readjustment process was suspended to permit amendments to section 51 of the Constitution Act, setting out the formula for representation of provinces in the House and to make some changes to the readjustment process itself. In both cases the process was suspended at a late stage when the House was considering the commission's reports.

What we are proposing today is not something being done for the first time; it is not new or novel. There are certainly precedents for the bill that we are asking the House to adopt.

The government is of the view that the most opportune time to undertake a comprehensive review of the redistribution process is now before further effort and resources are expended on the process currently under way.

We should take a step back and have all aspects of the matter reviewed by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in a thorough way. As I said, this is an appropriate time to do so while we are at an early stage in the process and the existing electoral boundaries commissions have not yet begun to hold public hearings on their proposals for new riding boundaries.

While the redistribution or readjustment process is technical, I believe it is worthwhile to take a few minutes to outline how it works.

There are two stages in the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons. The first stage is governed by section 51 of the Constitution Act. This section specifies the formula for determining the total number of seats in the House of Commons and the allocation of those seats among the provinces. The second stage of the process is provided for in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act which establishes the process for the drawing of constituency boundaries for the ridings or constituencies within the individual provinces.

Section 51 of the Constitution Act requires redistribution after each decennial census and sets out the formula for determining the number of seats per province. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act sets out the detailed process for

the readjustment of the boundaries of each riding within a province.

(1205)

As the first step in the process the chief statistician of Canada sends the results of the decennial census to the minister responsible for the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and to the chief electoral officer. The chief electoral officer then calculates the number of seats allocated to each province by using the formula set out in the Constitution Act and publishes the results in the *Canada Gazette*.

The chief electoral officer, after having received the results of the 1991 census from the chief statistician, published in the *Canada Gazette* the allocation of seats to each province.

According to this seat allocation and if this process is completed under the current formula the number of seats in this House would increase from 295 to 301.

Eleven boundaries commissions, one for each province and one for the Northwest Territories, were created on September 1, 1993 under the terms of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. The chairs of these commissions were nominated by the respective chief justices of the provinces and the Northwest Territories. The two other members of each commission were nominated by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Each commission must set the boundaries for each of the specified number of electoral districts in the province for which it was established. Community of interests, community of identity, historical patterns and geography may be taken into account.

Using population data from the 1991 decennial census, the 11 commissions have published their proposals for new boundaries for the ridings in each province with a notice of the time and place of their hearings or sittings to hear representations on the proposed boundaries. These public hearings are scheduled to start in early April 1994 and will continue until June of this year.

The commissions must complete their reports on the new electoral districts no later than one year after receiving the population data. The commissions' reports are sent to the Speaker of the House who must then ensure they are tabled and referred to a parliamentary committee designated to deal with electoral matters.

Written objections, each signed by at least 10 members of Parliament, may be filed with the House committee after the tabling of a report. The committee has 30 days to discuss any objections to a report. The committee's minutes and proceedings are sent back to the commissions which decide whether or not to adjust the reports accordingly.

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The chief electoral officer then drafts a representation order describing and naming each electoral district established by the commissions and sends it to the minister responsible for the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

The Governor in Council must publicly announce the new boundaries in a proclamation within five days after the receipt by the minister of the draft representation order. These new boundaries for the ridings cannot be used at an election until at least one year has passed between the date the representation order was proclaimed and the date that Parliament is dissolved for a general election.

As members can see, a number of steps remain to be undertaken in the examination of electoral boundaries for ridings by the existing commissions.

Some dissatisfaction has been expressed with regard to the current process and the rules under which it operates. For example, the commissions publish their initial proposals without having had a chance to obtain input from interested parties so that when published these proposals generally come as a complete surprise.

Although some commissions explain the reasons for their proposals, they are not required to do so. It is therefore very difficult for a person who intends to make representations to a commission to know the reasons behind the proposal and to make objections or present alternatives in an effective and informed manner.

The criteria the commissions must use to set the boundaries may have to be rethought. These criteria are quite general. Depending on the approach taken by each commission, the rationale for drawing the boundaries for the ridings can differ considerably from one province to another.

(1210)

The continual increase in the number of members of the House of Commons after each census is another issue of concern to many. For example since Confederation the number of seats in the House of Commons has increased steadily from 181 seats in 1867 to the current level of 295. If the redistribution process had not been suspended and new rules adopted some years ago, I think back in 1985, the number of members by now would have shot up already to more than some 340. That is something we should be considering.

What I have said are only examples of areas we believe should be thoroughly reviewed by the standing committee. The government has decided to ask the House of Commons to refer the electoral boundaries readjustment process to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for review and for developing improvements to the current procedure.

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The government will create this review by proposing a motion to the House setting out the terms of reference for the committee. I would like to outline for the House what these terms of reference will be.

They will provide that the committee bring in a bill respecting the system of readjusting the boundaries of the electoral districts, the ridings.

The committee shall consider the general operation over the past 30 years of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act including: whether there should be a continual increase in the number of members of the House of Commons after each census as now provided for in section 51 of the Constitution Act; a review of the method of selection of members of electoral boundaries commissions; a review of the proceedings of the commissions, including whether they ought to make alterations to the boundaries of existing electoral districts where possible; and a review of the involvement of the public and of members of Parliament in the work of the commissions.

The terms of reference would provide that the committee is to report no later than December 16, 1994.

Using one of the new procedures adopted by the House about one month ago when it approved the government's parliamentary reform package, the committee will in effect be authorized to frame legislation implementing its proposals. This will be the first opportunity for a parliamentary committee to initiate legislation in response to a request submitted by the government under the terms of the new rules which were adopted unanimously by the House.

Again I want to express my thanks to the opposition parties and members for their support of this parliamentary reform package, of which the procedure we are going to follow is one important element. We are beginning to follow through on our commitment to strengthen the role of members of Parliament in developing legislation.

The redistribution of the boundaries of the ridings is an important matter for the whole country. Therefore we are requesting the standing committee not only study the issue but also develop and recommend legislative measures it feels may be required.

In order to allow for this thorough review of all aspects of the process, in our view the current process now under way has to be suspended. Therefore the government has presented Bill C-18 for the consideration of the House. If passed it will suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act for a period of 24 months.

I should stress the bill specifically provides that new commissions will have to be established within 60 days after the end of the 24 month period of suspension. They will follow the existing

rules unless in the meantime there is legislation establishing changes which emerge from the work of the standing committee.

(1215)

This is proposed to ensure continuity of the requirement under the Constitution to readjust the boundaries of the ridings after every decennial census.

Nothing prevents the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs from making recommendations regarding this 24 month timeframe or the method by which commissions are established when it undertakes its review of this whole subject matter and makes recommendations for new legislation.

In conclusion, the adjustment of the boundaries of the ridings, the adjustment of the electoral boundaries, touches important questions of democratic representation in the House of Commons. Now is an ideal time to have a thorough review of the process undertaken by the House of Commons while we are still at an early stage and to hear Canadians through the standing committee.

As I have said, the committee hearings will be public and obviously it will be possible for witnesses to be heard. After 30 years we believe that this is an appropriate time to review the process to see if improvements in the results of that process can be brought about.

I commend this bill to the House. I urge its early adoption so that finally after 30 years the House, which passed the current electoral boundaries readjustment law, can review that law and see how it can be brought up to date in the light of our current and future requirements, requirements of the democratic process in this country.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse):** Mr. Speaker, my comments on Bill C-18, An Act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, tabled by the Government House leader, will be brief.

First, I want to say that the Official Opposition agrees with the principles underlying Bill C-18. We agree with the principles described by the Government House leader because these are general, non-partisan principles aimed at improving a system which has now been in effect for close to 30 years in Canada.

There is no doubt that the criteria set in 1964 must be reviewed. Our response might have been less spontaneous and more reserved if this legislation had been tabled just before an election, but the government deserves to be congratulated for acting at an early stage, when there is no controversy or dispute. Indeed, the government cannot be accused of gerrymandering the electoral map by referring the issue now to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, for a review of the whole process.

While our objective remains Quebec's sovereignty, it would be irresponsible on the Official Opposition's part not to get

involved in this exercise, since we must represent the interests of Canadians from Newfoundland to Vancouver, that is from coast to coast and up to the Arctic.

Once the bill is referred to the committee, we will look, without any mental reservations and with a totally open mind, at the impact of the review and we will participate, in the most positive manner possible, in the development of new criteria regarding the philosophy exposed earlier.

The Supreme Court has already indicated some parameters which we have to follow, but parliamentarians definitely have some room to manoeuvre. There are aspects which we must review, including the continuous increase in the number of MPs. Should that trend be maintained? Should we do something about the situation? How should we go about this? To correct the situation we must first look at it, and the best way to do so is certainly by referring the issue to the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

(1220)

One aspect I find particularly interesting in connection with the readjustment process would be, of course, to review the well-known senate clause which allows Prince Edward Island its four seats, not that I am challenging that—that is not the point—and in any case, we have all lived with this provision. Everyone agrees it would be bizarre, to say the least, for a province to be represented by fewer members than the number of senators it may have, although that does happen in the United States.

Perhaps section 51, if it still applies to Quebec in the next election, could be used to cover cases like the Magdalen Islands. This is an entirely separate community which no longer has its own member of Parliament, because since the 1968 reform, it has been part of the riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. This is not a political issue. In fact, we find the same situation in the province of Newfoundland, where Labrador exists as a distinct entity only because Newfoundlanders are willing to have their electoral districts contain more voters than would normally be the case, so that residents of Labrador, on the mainland, can have their own representative. These are only two examples.

Perhaps more examples of truly distinct communities within this country will be submitted to the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs—I am not sure—but it would certainly be the proper place to make these submissions, as well as adjust other criteria.

I think the government made a wise decision to stop the train at the first opportunity, in other words, before it would be too expensive to do so. The Official Opposition is not in the habit of making frivolous compliments. However, I think the government acted sensibly by intervening in the readjustment process

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at the earliest opportunity, instead of waiting, as the previous government so often did on other occasions, until all public money was spent before stopping the train. It waited until we had paid our fare and the train had reached the station.

If the train must be stopped, and we on this side of the House believe that it should be stopped, we can at least save on the fuel and the staff we need on board that train. In any case, I do not support the argument that since a certain amount of money was authorized during the 34th Parliament, we should go ahead.

I believe that on October 25 of last year, we made a dramatic turn, at least in Quebec. We will see in the months to come whether or not this also applies to the other side. We should not feel overly bound by the decisions of the 34th Parliament, and in particular by the Lortie report already mentioned by the hon. leader of the government in this House. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform is only a small part of what we will have to study before we come to some conclusion.

The report of the Lortie Commission should not be the exclusive background or even the only basis on which to build. In fact, the mandate does not set any limits nor give strict criteria to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Therefore, the Committee will be free to act as it sees fit.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition will use all its capabilities—God and you know we have a lot—to influence the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising today on Bill C-18, an act to suspend operation of the electoral boundaries readjustment process.

(1225)

Mr. Speaker, you will know, having studied these questions, it is never a good time to adjust boundaries of sitting politicians. It is never a good time to do districting. It always causes problems and controversy. In the past these things were resolved in the House through political processes in which the powerful members of parties imposed solutions on the Chamber as they occasionally do in other aspects of debate.

Since 1964, as the government House leader has indicated, we have attempted to move toward an independent process for that. We have had an independent process. The process has actually, in my view, worked reasonably well. The problem has been the periodic interference of politicians with the operation of the process.

This motion asks the House to give its consent in principle to Bill C-18. That would be a contradiction. It is not possible to agree in principle with something entirely lacking in principles.

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This bill is an indication of what is wrong with Parliament today and what is wrong with the operations of this place and explains why many citizens have such a jaded and cynical view of what transpires here.

We have a wide range of euphemisms in describing what we are about to embark on by adopting Bill C-18. The basic pitch for Bill C-18 is that we are prepared to bring the public into a consultation in order that we can have a better process for defining electoral boundaries.

What we have is an attempt to railroad for a long time the process for redistribution that is mandated by the Constitution and specifically by this bill, which serves only to suspend the existing process which is about to enter the public hearing phase. We are asked in effect to suspend the public's right to debate the boundaries for which we have already as a Parliament and as a government authorized the expenditure of millions of dollars so that we can turn that study over to the operations of a parliamentary commission dominated by politicians.

Doug Fisher, the former member of Parliament and widely respected columnist, noted in the *Ottawa Sun* on March 18:

It's ridiculous, even beyond irony, how quickly the newly-elected become owners of their ridings.

Just as an aside, I am as guilty of that as anyone, referring to my riding. Calgary West is not my riding. It is the riding I represent in the Parliament of Canada. There is a big difference between that and my riding. However, that is the talk and is the attitude most of us have here only a few months after being elected.

Mr. Fisher goes on:

In large part our costly decennial census is to establish where the people are so electoral constituencies can be adjusted to reflect: (1) the equality of each citizen's vote; (2) the total number of MPs in the next Parliament; and (3) the number of constituencies for most provinces (not all—some have "floors" against losses).

Some weeks ago the official redistribution process produced the new riding maps required by shifts revealed in the 1991 census. At once many MPs, most of them new, particularly Ontario Liberals, began to protest the riding changes. Of course, this means an attack on the enacted formula for increasing the number of MPs.

The chief justification for sticking with what we have is the presently popular one of saving money.

Yes, stalling redistribution would probably save \$25 or \$30 million in the short run—

That is an exaggeration. It is about one-tenth of that.

—but it offends the "rep by pop" principle and stacks up some already inordinately populous ridings and leaves others small and decreasing in numbers. The electors who must be done first, of course, are those in large cities and their suburbs.

(1230)

That is Mr. Fisher's commentary. I am going to elaborate on it. It is reflective of what is wrong with Parliament today. It is very interesting how in question period and in debate, day after day a government member or government minister defending a particular position or a particular bill, no matter how ludicrous the argument, can receive not only an ovation from the side opposite but usually a standing ovation for the silliest of comments. Yet when something is brought in that affects the personal self-interest of members of Parliament, it is amazing how quickly and independently they can mobilize to get action. I am always amazed that whenever we raise questions here about issues like pay, the pension scam or the ridiculous tax-free unaccountable expense allowance, we get hoots and hollers from the other side and the independent voice rises up with all this concern.

The same is true with electoral boundaries. As soon as our own electoral fortunes are put in some jeopardy or our political plans for the future are threatened, government backbenchers can bring great pressure to bear on government members, but the rest of the time we run from committee to committee busy working, approving things, having the satisfaction of merely being present among the great men and women who form the cabinet, maybe even getting some photographs of ourselves for our householders where we can be seen with the leaders. As I say, when it concerns self-interest like electoral boundaries or pensions or some issue like this, boy does the voice of the independent member ever rise to the fore in a hurry.

This is why this is such an important issue for me and many members of my party. This is really the first time in this Parliament where members of our party are being asked to make a difficult decision between what is the right thing to do based on the principles that govern this country versus protecting our own narrow self-interest through getting together and having all party agreement on something.

Many of us in this party, and this will come out in debate and it is no different for me, are dramatically affected by the proposed changes. Many of us are unfavourably affected by the proposed changes. I am sure there are some who will even support stopping this process, and I respect that. But for the majority of us that is not a basis to interfere with a process that is independent and should be independent, is consultative and should be consultative, and by and large has been working and is necessary and mandated legally and constitutionally.

I say that is a very important issue for us. That is the reason we are going to oppose this bill. That is not to say that the process cannot be improved, not to say that there are not legitimate issues that the public wants addressed. What this party is

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looking for is some real commitment on the part of the other members of the House, particularly the government, to show that it has some real plans to address the problems that it claims are behind its decision to suddenly try and suspend this process.

Let me spend a few minutes talking about some of those things. The government House leader has today provided a number of arguments for this particular bill and this particular course of action, as did my friend from the Bloc Québécois. I want to comment on some of those things because I think it is important to say what could be improved and also to say where in very many of these instances the rationale for proceeding is simply not consistent with the actions that are being requested here.

First, there is the issue of public consultation. We, as members of Parliament, will be prepared to consult the public on a new process leading to new boundaries. As I already said, this bill blocks a public hearing process which is about to get under way and which is mandated by the bill. Some, not just myself as a member and other members, but private citizens have already contacted these commissions with the intention of making submissions. In the past it has been claimed that these boundaries are presented as a *fait accompli*. That is simply not true. It is true that the parameters of the act which are mandated under the Constitution are a *fait accompli* but the boundaries themselves are not a *fait accompli*.

(1235)

If I have time I will discuss what kind of changes commissions are generally interested in looking at. In the last process I am told by officials of Elections Canada that 20 per cent of the proposed ridings were altered in that particular public hearing process.

The second point is that we are prepared to proceed on a non-partisan basis. I take the government at its word that there is certainly no question of the committee or politicians drawing the boundaries. Yes, they want to block the independent commission and set up their own study of the process but there is no thought that politicians themselves would redraw the boundaries. I accept that. I would be shocked to believe that any party in this House would propose such a thing.

It is interesting when we are supposed to be proceeding on this question, which is one of the questions of the fundamental rules of the game and of how electoral law operates, that the government is prepared to proceed with this bill and presumably with its entire agenda on this without the consent of one of the three recognized parties of the House. From that fact alone we have every reason, and I suggest the Bloc Québécois also should have every reason, to be suspicious that this is in fact a non-partisan venture.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that one of the acts of the previous government that I supported was it changed a part of

the formula in the Constitution for redistribution that had been put into the act in the 1970s which had special discriminatory measures against Alberta and to a lesser degree British Columbia. There was a formula that talked about different kinds of provinces and treated them differently. When the Conservative Party revisited the formula and revised it and did it in a way that limited the growth of the Commons, it did away with those discriminatory provisions. That was a formula instituted by a previous Liberal government.

The government says: "It has been 30 years and we have a long time desire to study the electoral process. Furthermore, this process has not been revised in some time". I cannot say that I am an expert on everything that has transpired with the bill since it was tabled in 1964 but just looking at a copy of it I can say that it is not the case that the bill has not been amended since 1964. There is a list in the back of the present publication of the bill by Elections Canada that describes or gives a list of amendments from 1964 to 1992.

Just glancing at this I see a list of about 25 or so amendments that have occurred over that period. I suspect some of them are very small, but by and large this is a process that has been functional except for the periodic interference of politicians.

If there was this desire to study this process, if this had been a pressing matter, why did this not come to the fore before the tabling of boundary proposals that were not particularly looked upon favourably by members of this House? Why did we not undertake that process before?

In 1985 we had debate over the formula. We changed the formula in the Constitution which mandates this process. At that time we did not do a comprehensive revision of the process. There was no debate on this issue. While we set these new boundaries in place in 1987 and elected MPs in them in 1988, there was never any study throughout that time.

I was here for a large part of that time. I do not remember any call on behalf of any number of members to have a parliamentary study into this before getting into the next process. I did a quick glance of my red book. I did not find any particular mention in the government's election plan of a desire to alter the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. Last year we had the Lortie commission. We spent millions of dollars on that commission to look into all aspects of electoral law. It and the committee that studied that report deferred discussion on this set of issues.

(1240)

As my friend from the Bloc mentioned, there is no agreement on those things in the Lortie report. The government has expressed some interest but it is not bound by the Lortie report. The Bloc is not bound by the Lortie report. We have strong objections to the Lortie report. We have spent millions of dollars having a royal commission study some of these questions and none of us are prepared to move on them. Why are we now

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talking about instituting yet another study, this time by members of the House of Commons?

It is important to mention one fact here. We had a briefing by officials from Elections Canada on Friday. I would bring to the attention of the House that senior officials of Elections Canada said that far from this being an issue of discussion there had been no consultations with Elections Canada on this bill and that senior officials were not provided with a copy, a draft or otherwise until it was tabled in the House of Commons. That was only last Friday.

This is in sharp contrast with the repeated consultation detailed in the Chief Electoral Officer's report, the most recent report "Toward the 35th General Election", during previous electoral reform efforts, including for example Bill C-213 in 1991, Bill C-78 the Referendum Act and most recently Bill C-114. Members can see the details and the consultations that occurred with Elections Canada in adopting those courses of action.

Let us look at the issue of cost. This is the most interesting for me. The government with its \$40 billion deficit is now concerned with the great costs that may be incurred in proceeding with a \$2 million to \$3 million completion of work already in progress.

The claim is we are going to save money by doing this. We have budgeted \$7.8 million for this process of which more than half is already spent.

It is important to note that there is absolutely nothing in the course of action we are asked to take that could possibly save money. Even if we establish a parliamentary committee it will be travelling around the country studying these questions and racking up costs. Meanwhile people at Elections Canada will still be paid to prepare a revision to the process when it kicks in a second time. We are simply wiping out the \$5 million that has been spent. We are incurring additional costs and time here in the House and we are ultimately going back to square one on some kind of electoral boundaries readjustment process.

There is a very outside chance, if we can ever get a sense of what precisely it is any party is actually proposing we change about this process, that we may get a better act or better boundaries. What is absolutely clear is that it will cost a lot more to proceed with this course of action.

When this bill was placed on the Order Paper on March 17, it contained the standard recommendation: "His Excellency the Governor General recommends to the House of Commons the appropriation of public revenue under the circumstances and in the manner and for the purposes set out in the measure entitled Bill C-18". In other words, we already recognized in tabling this bill that it will cost more money than we have budgeted, not less. It will cost more whether we come out at the other end with absolutely nothing or whether we approve the process or change

it or anything. It will cost more money. The least costly action without doubt is to proceed in the manner we are already proceeding.

If we can get some commitment to improvements before we decide to flush \$5 million down the toilet, I guess we would be prepared to look at that. In the absence of that, we see no reason in proceeding in this manner.

(1245)

The government has talked about precedents, about previous suspensions of the process. I was here when that occurred in the 1985-87 period when we suspended the process. Ultimately the reason we suspended the process was the same and only reason we have today to suspend the process, because the public does not like the growth in the number of seats in the House of Commons.

In 1985 the government suspended the process for that reason and brought in a new amending formula under the Constitution to limit the growth of seats in the House of Commons. In the previous redistribution the seats were supposed to grow from 282 to 312. Under the act brought in by the former Conservative government we were limited to 295 and to much smaller growth in the future.

That may still be too much growth. Our party has offered the suggestion to the government that all parties get together to make a commitment to an amending formula that would permanently cap the growth of seats in the House of Commons. That could be done if we respect certain elements of the Constitution that require interprovincial agreement.

There are other requirements that would allow us to cap the growth of seats in the House of Commons and still respect the general principle of rep by pop, provided we could get agreement of the House and agreement of the Senate. If that were to be done to answer the one legitimate public demand out there at the moment, which is that we limit the growth of seats in the Commons, in all honesty it would be perfectly legitimate. The electoral boundaries adjustment commissions have no mandate to examine that question. They are simply to draw boundaries under the current formula and under the current calculations.

We can have these public hearings and it is going to surprise many people that what they think they are to talk about is not the purpose of the commission. The purpose of the commission is to change boundaries. It is a catch 22. Either we give a legitimate reason for doing it and react to public demand, or we admit that all we are concerned about is the boundaries. In fact we are concerned about them before the public has actually had any chance to speak its own mind on the issue.

I would point out that the government has an ancillary motion to the bill that looks to reviewing the issue. We will review the issue of number of seats. We will review the issue of operations. We will review the parameters of discussion and of commission deliberation on boundaries. We will review, review, review. All

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the bill really does is suspend the process and suspend public input in the interim.

That would be very interesting since the government is a master of studies and reviews. We have 15 or 18 studies or reviews of government legislation. We are reviewing foreign policy. We are reviewing defence policy. We are reviewing social policy, unemployment insurance and welfare. We are reviewing tax policy. We are to review family trust. We are reviewing the GST. We are reviewing just about everything.

Would it not be interesting if we were to take the attitude that until we finish the review of unemployment insurance we will stop paying it; or, until we finish our review of foreign policy we will shut down our embassies and suspend their operations; or, until we review our defence policy we will tell our guys in Bosnia to take a holiday and enjoy the sights?

It is a very different aspect when it comes to being not just a review. We are very anxious to review these matters. I am sure members of the House affairs and procedures committee from this party would be all the more willing to review an important question like that one. Members who are concerned with parliamentary reform and electoral reform would be happy to study some of these questions. In the absence of any sense that this is going anywhere other than suspending the process, I do not think we will take a look at that.

I would also note that there has been some hint at it. We know the real reason is that there has been political outcry from certain members about the proposed boundaries. I would call on members of Parliament, particularly Liberal members of Parliament, to play a different role on this question. I appreciate there are severe pressures.

(1250)

There are many members on the Liberal backbenches. Most of us in opposition are inexperienced members and are not aware of the process involved in these kinds of issues. Having been surprised, having tried to figure out how we were going to have some influence and suddenly having discovered that Parliament cannot vote down other than proposals because the commission is independent, we demand that Parliament can the process.

I call on members of the Liberal frontbenches to educate their backbenchers or their MPs on exactly what the issues are. I noticed the government House leader did some of that today. He informed them—and it is very important to inform members, particularly some members who have spoken in the House—about the fact that this was not an option. We do not have the option of saying that we are not going to redistribute seats in the House of Commons. This is required by the Constitution and we

have had a readjustment every census since Confederation. That is an important democratic protection.

It has its origins in the reform bill in Britain of 1832. For centuries we had virtually no redistribution in the House of Commons. We had ridings in Great Britain wherein there were two or three eligible voters. They were called rotten boroughs. Some members of the government are fond of quoting Edmund Burke who is sometimes called a conservative and proclaimed to be the father of modern conservatism. One speech Liberal members like to quote is the one in which he said he did not feel he had to represent his constituents; he was protecting something called the national interest. Of course he made most of these statements from the safety of a rotten borough because he could not get elected making statements like those.

I hope that is drawn to the attention of the frontbench so that it can provide some leadership on it that says we have a legitimate process in place, that we have already delayed it and that we should now get down to business. Our friends in the Bloc mentioned many objections today as did our friends in the government and others in the past. Many of the objections to the particular boundaries have nothing in common. What is good for myself and my riding may be bad for the person in the next riding. I said there is never going to be a good time to redraw boundaries. Other than keeping the seats pretty much as they are, there would never be any particular alignment of boundaries that would be satisfactory to the vast majority of members of Parliament. That is the one option, for reasons of protection of the public and the voter, the Constitution rules out.

I want to mention a serious concern about the intent of the act. It suspends the process for a period of 24 months, which would effectively mean it would be virtually impossible to foresee a situation where we had a redistribution prior to the next election. If there is not a redistribution prior to the next election which we expect in 1997–98, the first redistribution from the 1991 census would probably not occur until early in the next century, at which time we would likely already have the results of another census requiring redistribution.

If the bill for that reason is not in violation of the Constitution I suspect it is certainly in violation of the spirit of the Constitution and might be a very interesting reference to the Supreme Court. This has always been a question. I am not a constitutional lawyer. I would be more than happy to hear the interpretation and advice on this question from hon. members such as the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra. The Constitution requires Parliament to redistribute seats in the House of Commons and has always done so. What if it simply refused or undertook actions which amount to a refusal? What then would be the recourse of the population? Would it then be incumbent upon the Supreme

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Court to redraw the boundaries for us? In that context I think the bill raises some very substantial difficulties.

(1255)

[*Translation*]

I would also like to comment on the position taken by the Bloc Québécois on this bill. It is most interesting, but I hope the Bloc will carefully reconsider its position and its support for this measure.

It is interesting to see how a party that claims to be a party of principle, that exists for the sake of Quebec's independence, for the sake of its own ridings and the ridings of Quebec in this Parliament, it is very interesting to see how that party could be concerned about the redistribution process and the possibility that existing ridings might change in the next election.

I think the Canadian public, especially in Quebec, will take a good look at the reasons for all this. The Bloc Québécois claims to be concerned about the cost of government and the federal system, but they are prepared to support a plan that will most certainly increase those costs. The advantage of this plan is that ridings will not change in time for the next federal election.

I think this demonstrates a lack of confidence on the part of the Bloc Québécois in its ability to achieve its goal, the independence of Quebec, before the next election.

Of course I realize that in the Bloc Québécois, as in the Reform Party and the Liberal Party, there are members who for obvious reasons object to the proposals for electoral reform made by the present commissions.

We realize that. But I would ask the Bloc Québécois to think twice about giving the power to change this process to commissions appointed by the government and to committees of this House where government members have a majority. Quite frankly, I think the Bloc should take a long, hard look at this plan.

I would also like to comment on what was said about electoral redistribution and representation by the Bloc Québécois member who just spoke. For instance, in referring to the Magdalen Islands, he mentioned regional representation.

Mr. Speaker, you and I are very concerned about regional representation in this country. That is why we support a thorough and complete reform of the Canadian Senate. The real representation for Canada's less populated areas should be in that house. The Bloc Québécois has consistently opposed such reform, and now it mentions the possibility of regional representation here in the House of Commons, which works on the principle of "rep by pop". I see a contradiction here as well, a policy for parliamentary reform which needs work, and I say

this with respect, not only for the sake of the Parliament of Canada but perhaps also for the sake of the Parliament of an independent Quebec, if the Bloc is able to achieve its goals. From the Bloc's comments it is clear there are a lot of problems with their current position.

(1300)

[*English*]

I see I only have a short amount of time left. I know my party has a number of people who have asked to speak to Bill C-18. We are aware from Elections Canada that the process of looking at these boundaries is going to continue until it clears both Houses of Parliament. In the meantime we would like to use our speeches to educate the public as to the opportunities that exist here and what exactly is the state of this law and this process.

Many members will be explaining how the changes that the commission has proposed affect them. We will be explaining it in open forum here to the public. Members of the Reform Party will certainly be free to say whether they like or do not like those changes and any proposals which they would take to the independent commissions and which they would urge the independent commissions and other citizens to look at. I think we will see very quickly the number of difficulties with politicians trying to direct such a process. I believe most of our members will be indicating that getting ourselves involved in this process without a clear plan is not the method to use.

I have asked a number of members of my party to indicate to the public how both politicians and constituents can contact Elections Canada and participate in the public hearings in their ridings. There is a process being set up now. Elections Canada is already incurring the costs of setting it up and we might as well make sure the public is aware of the opportunities. We can use this particular debate to do that.

This will indicate the kinds of things that the public really would want to see before we begin to intervene and change this process or incur further costs or further delays.

The main reason is to mention that the only reason most people would really want to see this process stopped is to agree that we limit the number of seats in the House of Commons. Canadians are dramatically overgoverned. I call on the government and the Bloc Québécois to sit down with us and reach a formula very quickly that could lead to a permanent capping of the number of seats in the House of Commons.

We could introduce that through both Houses and that would suspend the process for reasons the public would support and then would allow us to get on with business in a way that would not only serve the public interest and would not have the extreme delays planned in this bill but would fulfil a legitimate public reason for doing so.

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Let me finish by moving:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following therefor:

Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

(1305)

**The Deputy Speaker:** On a point of order, the hon. member for Kamloops.

**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, I have no point of order. I am standing to speak to the debate. I do not see anybody else standing. My friend in the Reform Party is standing.

**The Deputy Speaker:** If the member for Kamloops is asking to speak on behalf of his party, I think he realizes he has to have the unanimous consent of all the members in the House. Is the hon. member asking for that?

**Mr. Riis:** No, Mr. Speaker. I was watching the government benches and I saw no one stand and I watched the Bloc benches and no one stood but I overlooked my friend in the Reform Party. I will simply wait for my appropriate moment.

**Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to and to oppose the provisions of the legislation before us in Bill C-18.

One has to ask what precipitated the government's decision to attempt to suspend the legitimate work of the federal electoral boundaries commission. Was the government responding to public concern and opinion or merely trying to circumvent for whatever reason the prescribed process? Or, heaven forbid, is the government responding to disgruntled politicians?

To British Columbians, we once again have the example of central Canada controlling the outcome before the polls have even closed on the west coast. On election night the Leader of the Official Opposition made his acceptance speech at seven o'clock Alberta time, six o'clock B.C. time, before the polls had even closed. In the case of this electoral boundary review we in B.C. had not even received our report when Ontario MPs were crying foul and wanting to throw out the process.

This process has been in effect in Canada, every decade since 1867, tied to the census. In this case the redistribution is tied to the 1991 census. One can legitimately ask how the House of Commons can cancel this mandate. I am very disappointed that apparently the government can do exactly that.

There is no precedent for this attempted action. It was not an issue in the campaign. It was not an issue after the campaign. It certainly was not in the Liberal red book.

I am led to the inescapable conclusion that some government MPs are not pleased with lines on a map as a part of the redistribution process and therefore want to throw out the whole process.

I am not 100 per cent satisfied with lines on a map either, but a part of the process is public hearings. I am already scheduled for May 26 in Nanaimo, B.C. and I am actively seeking support for my proposals. This is all part of the process. Where is the public outcry? I suggest it does not exist and that self-interest is the issue here. This is an attempt to politicize a process which should be depoliticized and tied to the census as much as possible.

We have received no commitment from the government that three party agreement will be necessary to approve a new boundaries review process. As well, there is no contingency plan to save the work done by the current commission if the procedures and House affairs committee should fail to put forward a new proposal for consideration by the House.

(1310)

Ultimately this could mean \$5 million worth of wasted work, the start of another commission and the appointment of new members. This could even kill any chance of redistribution before the next federal election—so much for redistribution every 10 years based on population shifts in the census.

The government would have us believe that it wants the procedures committee to examine the growth in the number of seats from the current 295 to the proposed 301, capping the total number as a reason to suspend the committee's work.

The government has failed to convince me that its intentions are credible. The government wants the committee to examine the merits of adding 10 new seats in Ontario, which means Toronto, three new seats for B.C. and two for Alberta. The way it is right now is for Toronto to get four new seats and B.C. two new seats.

During the negotiations for the Charlottetown accord the three old parties brought the Premier of British Columbia into the fold by assuring British Columbians that we would obtain two additional seats in the next redistribution, contrary to early negotiations. British Columbians remember this commitment. As a matter of fact, British Columbians cannot believe that Parliament is even entertaining throwing out the process this week.

Just who is upset here? I am unaware, as is the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, of any hue and cry from the public. It is another example of politically motivated interference. In this instance we have not even allowed public hearings to unfold and determine the degree of reception or opposition to the proposals. Instead, we have the government jumping to thwart the process.

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I represent a riding that includes half the coastline of Vancouver Island and half the coastline of mainland B.C. As is the case in Toronto, my riding is a fast growing region and consequently would be affected in a major way by redistribution.

Currently my riding includes the northern half of Vancouver Island, the Powell River district on the mainland of the province, territories south to the sunshine coast and the Gibsons area and north to Bella Coola and Ocean Falls. It is a vast area of territory with no logical connection at times between different parts of the riding.

With redistribution I would lose all mainland portions of the riding on the one hand and make it a pure island riding to include the top half of Vancouver Island and some islands in the northern part of Johnstone Strait.

On the other hand, it would be the coastal mainland from north of Powell River to Cape Caution, which is a land of mountains, glaciers, fiords, logging and fishing camps and Indian reserves. Their natural lines of communication are to points on Vancouver Island. Not many people are involved but this mainland coastal area should remain a part of this newly designated Vancouver Island North riding.

That is what people think and that is the subject of my presentation to the electoral boundaries commission.

(1315)

Adding this area to a redistribution population of 96,302 would mean a population of about 98,000 for Vancouver Island north. Half the population of the current North Island—Powell River riding on the mainland would predominantly amalgamate with west Vancouver to form the west Vancouver sunshine coast riding with a redistribution population of 100,265.

The north mainland coast area around Bella Coola would join the Cariboo—Chilcotin riding with a population of over 85,000. Bella Coola on the coast has a road link to the Chilcotin. It is the only road link from the mainland to the central B.C. area and the only road link between Gibsons and Kitimat.

I can assure members that my constituents have little opposition to the changes. As I said earlier the riding is a little bit of everything right now. The proposed changes represent some form of continuity. Most of all the process allows for public input at hearings to be conducted upon the receipt of representation by interested parties in this process. What could be more democratic than that?

The only time we as politicians should get involved in this process would be to ensure that seats do not increase capriciously at the whim of government and cost to the taxpayer.

The government's attempt to circumvent the legitimate redistribution process is transparent and unacceptable. What is needed is a long term look at the parliamentary requirements for

sitting members. Everyone knows Canada has too many politicians. Let us put this expensive and time consuming redistribution to bed first. Then we can deal with Canada's long term parliamentary needs without the red herring of someone's ox being gored in the current process and therefore attempting to subvert the process.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Chair assumes the Reform Party is dividing its time and that we are now on a five minute question and comment period.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech. I wonder if he could elaborate on one point.

He raised the issue of opposition to the Charlottetown accord that had occurred in most parts of Canada, but particularly in his riding. He referred to the provision in that accord which would have guaranteed the province of Quebec a minimum of 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons in perpetuity and also that the accord would have resulted in a growth of seats in the House of Commons.

He mentioned there is growth and that B.C. is getting two more seats. He also thinks most people in his riding could live with the boundaries. Therefore would he and members of his riding be concerned that the parliamentary committee composed and dominated by politicians who supported the Charlottetown accord might use the process of electoral review and reform to propose amendments to the formula and the act that would implement aspects of the Charlottetown accord through the back door? We have seen that on other issues.

**The Deputy Speaker:** To the hon. member before he replies, the Chair, as members know, recognizes a member from another party. There was none until the member for Calgary West got up and that is the only reason he was recognized.

There is a member from the Liberal Party who wishes to ask a question or make a comment. I would ask the member to be as brief as possible, please.

**Mr. Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, the collective memory on the Charlottetown accord in British Columbia is still very much there. The province voted two-thirds against the provisions of the Charlottetown accord. The collective memory on the promise and guarantees concerning redistribution is very much in the forefront.

(1320)

If in the long term the process could be brought around where this distribution is put to bed—the promises were made, let us fulfil those promises—if we could then go to a circumstance where for the greater good we either cap or even reduce the number of sitting members of Parliament for the next redistribution, then most Canadians would accept that with glee, particularly those in British Columbia.

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**Mr. Julian Reed (Halton—Peel):** Mr. Speaker, this is just for the hon. member's edification. He said he did not hear of any objection among voters to proposed redistribution. I would inform him that the riding of Halton—Peel has received objection loud and clear to the way the proposed lines are drawn.

The chamber of commerce of one of the major municipalities in the riding has expressed objection. Even a returning officer has expressed an objection to the way these lines are presently proposed. I want the member to know it is not some concocted situation; my own constituents are telling me this.

There are some other things to consider. The region of Durham is not in the riding I serve but it has now moved to reduce the number of school trustees. Here we are with a proposed redistribution that would add members to the House probably with a carrying charge of—what do we cost, a half a million dollars each per year. If we add six new members we are adding another \$3 million.

The hon. member may not consider that to be important in the scheme of things. However some of us do consider it important especially when our school boards are taking the initiative and making serious changes in the density of representation in their districts. It is something the House may well consider in the years to come.

If one looks at Australia for example there are about 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 these walls.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for North Island—Powell River briefly, please. I believe the Reform Party is dividing its time and there will be another speaker getting up in about a minute.

**Mr. Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, there will be objections whenever boundaries are redrawn. I appreciate that.

British Columbians have had knowledge of these changes for nine days. Discussions were going on in this parliamentary atmosphere on the Hill wanting to kill this process before British Columbians were even made aware of what the provincial boundary redistribution was.

What we are saying is that once again Ontario is controlling the agenda. In order to represent properly the area of the country where I come from and my views on the long term of what is good for the country, I am suggesting that we must continue with this process as has been done every decade since Confederation.

(1325)

**Mr. John Williams (St. Albert):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to record my opposition to Bill C-18 which suspends the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

There are major issues which should be examined here. Some fundamental Canadian human rights are being trampled. Let us look at some of the issues that should be considered before passing Bill C-18.

The first one is that political interference is being proposed. The principle of political interference in electoral boundaries was debated long ago. The decision was it should not be allowed and the concept of an independent drafting of the electoral boundaries was the way it should be done.

Politicians should be removed entirely from the process. Looking back to the 1960s and prior there was a great deal of political interference in the drawing of electoral boundaries. Unfortunately that led to blatant political manipulation of the whole situation.

In his book *The Election Process in Canada* Professor Terence Qualter identified four roles parliamentarians used when they were allowed to manipulate the system and redefine the boundaries of the electoral districts. Let us look at what he identified.

They were most concerned about maintaining the boundaries for the MPs sitting in the House. They wanted to protect the incumbents' districts so that another election could be fought based on the same old boundaries; if they won last time, perhaps they could win again. It was self-serving from that point of view.

And what about retiring members? They would dispense with those ridings. They would not have to protect those ridings and could use them to their advantage.

What about members of parties in the minority, the smaller parties and the independents? Some are sitting here today. Those were determined to be dispensable. They would draw the boundary to eliminate them rather than ensure fair and reasonable representation for the people across this land and rather than ensure that people who had a different point of view could be elected and their position heard in the House. When the job is left to the politicians, the minorities are left on the outside rather than just being given a seat on the backbench, which of course is the case today.

Of course given the opportunity, MPs would again respond to political pressure to create more seats in the urban ridings rather than do a realignment to ensure real representation for all Canadians.

In the 1960s the need for reform was recognized. They wanted to throw out political involvement. They wanted to get rid of it and bring in a non-partisan commission that would do the job for them.

The act established a commission in every province. The chief justice of every province was to appoint a judge to be the chairman of the commission. That seems to be a great non-partisan way to start.

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The proposal at that time was the government would put forward a member and the opposition side would put forward a member on the commission. They said no, that allowed for political involvement and therefore the power would be given to the Speaker to appoint additional members to the commission.

We want impartial non-partisanship to ensure that democracy works in this country. We are the servants of the people; we are not their masters. We are here because the people want representation. They want democracy in the House. It is not for us to take it upon ourselves to manipulate the public to ensure we protect our jobs at the expense of free debate, other positions and real representation of the people.

(1330)

The commissions were established and today we have Bill C-18 that wants to take that non-partisan, impartial situation and throw it out the window because we do not like what has been done. We established the commissions last fall with the intention that they would come forward, as they have done before, with proposals based on reasoned, rational opinions as to why boundaries should be the way they are proposing.

Once they make their decisions or proposals the whole matter is opened up to input and debate by the people who can then be heard. We could ask them what they think. Is this reasonable? Have we followed the trading boundaries of a constituency? Have we kept the historical names? Have we followed the democratic movement of people across the country? Have we made a reasonable decision? Let us hear from the people, not from the politicians. Let us hear what the people have to say.

That is what the government does not want to hear. It wants to cut the democratic process off at the pass because the proposals being made by the non-partisan, impartial commissions will now affect its ridings. Government members do not like it and hence we are back to political interference through Bill C-18.

Why does the government now wish to scrap their work? The commissions based their work on the census performed in 1991. Have the numbers changed? I do not think so. The government now wants to take these same numbers, massage them and manipulate them for its own benefit.

Have the people on the commissions been incompetent? I do not think so. These are educated, learned people on these commissions who have the country's best interest at heart. Would self-serving politicians do a better job with the same numbers? I do not think so. Do we believe that politicians are better suited than judges and ordinary Canadians to decide how they should be represented? I do not think so either.

That is what Bill C-18 proposes to do. It proposes to take the same numbers or the same figures and rework them or massage them, all for the benefit of themselves. The public would end up with the short end of the stick where the hearing process is

short-circuited and the people who are independent and impartial have been told that their work is no good.

Here we are today bringing the process under the scrutiny of the politicians. We wonder why politicians have a poor reputation in the country. I would suggest one of the real reasons our reputation is tarnished and people have no faith in us is that when we appoint an impartial inquiry to do the job and we do not like what it says, we throw it out the window and start again by doing our own.

That brings me to the second issue, the public participation issue. It was stated in 1964 as being one of the main reasons for the act that was introduced at that point in time. We wanted to hear that. We are the servants of the people of the country; we are not the masters. They should dictate to us how they ought to be represented in the House. It is their House; it is not our House. They are the ones who should decide how it should be done.

That is why we have mass distribution of material by the commission to every household in the land. Let Canadians see what is being proposed. Let them have their input. Let the impartial commission hear what they have to say and decide on the merits of the input whether there should be any real adjustments.

The government seems to have the idea that this input can be dispensed with, that it can be reviewed, and that the time and nature of public involvement should be scrutinized and set aside. That would be a bad day for democracy, a bad day for our reputations. That is why my colleagues in the Reform Party on this side of the House are vehemently opposed to the particular bill.

(1335)

We have some members on this side of the House who are supporting the bill. Of course I am talking about the Bloc. I wonder where they are coming from on this particular issue. We know what their agenda is: it is to break up the country. Nothing would give them greater satisfaction than to have a referendum tomorrow to say that Quebec wants to go its own way.

I wonder if they are supporting the bill to give them the opportunity to work up or stir up the emotions in the country about real representation by members from Quebec and about their opportunity to sit in the House and have their voices heard. There are only 75 MPs from Quebec out of a total of 295. They can argue about having a minority status, as does every other province including Ontario. Therefore I wonder what is their particular involvement in the bill.

If there is a point to be made, it should be that we capped the number of MPs in the House. We have enough MPs. To create an opportunity to continue raising that number at great expense to the taxpayer who thinks we will add to the number just to help

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ourselves to more taxpayers' dollars also tarnishes our reputation.

In conclusion, the Reform Party and I are opposed. The taxpayer is opposed. Every constituent in the country is opposed. I say let the hearings proceed and let us hear what the people have to say.

**Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the three speakers from the Reform Party and their rationale for wanting to abort the process we are proposing in the House of Commons. I am somewhat shocked at some of the things I heard. Here is a party that purports to want to save taxpayers' money. 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 in how they rationalize that.

I would like to get back to the previous speaker concerning the fact that there has not been any public input into this matter. I wonder how much public input there was into the electoral commission. If I could use the example of the province of Newfoundland, it has had a population increase in the last 10 years of something like 600 people. Yet the boundaries of every riding in the province of Newfoundland have been redistributed at great cost to the Canadian taxpayer. I wonder how much consultation there was with the people of Newfoundland.

There is no doubt in my mind that British Columbia needs a redistribution of its boundaries so that the ones with the heavily populated areas are shifting some over to the less populated areas. My colleagues in the city of Toronto will probably have by the next election 300,000 electors in their ridings. That is an incredible burden for those members of Parliament.

If we look at the ridings in the national capital region how can we justify this shifting? They are not increasing anything. They are not doing anything. They are just shifting and creating additional costs.

How can the previous speaker, as a member of the Reform Party who is constantly and consistently preaching restraint to this side of the House, talk about expending millions and millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars because of recommendations by a commission that never consulted in the first place?

(1340)

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's question, she is accusing us of aborting the process. Bill C-18 is designed to abort the process that has been in place and has worked for the last 30 years. I find it quite incredible that the hon. member would accuse us of trying to abort the process when the bill is designed to do exactly that.

Then the member made the point about the extra costs of more MPs. We are saying let us cap it. We have more than enough today. Let us put in motion a serious commitment from the House saying that 300 members are surely enough to get an informed debate in the House. That would be quite sufficient.

I address her last point about how the commissions are redrawing the boundaries even though there has been no increase in population. These people had the 1991 census figures to work from. Those are exactly the same figures the government would work from if it proposed to go ahead with Bill C-18. There may have been a population shift from one end of a city to another. I do not know, but that is what we paid these people to determine.

In her final point she mentioned the public hearing process. The public hearing process was about to start. They cut it right off before the public had an opportunity to say that it seemed a bit strange to redefine boundaries strictly for the sake of redefining them. Let us give the public the opportunity to say that. Maybe it will say that the recommendation by the commission is wonderful. If that is the case then let the public say it. Let us hear what the public has to say. That is the whole purpose of public hearings.

**Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have an opportunity to say a few words regarding Bill C-18. I want to acknowledge the co-operation of our friends in the Reform Party for providing this opportunity.

I must say I come at this matter with some mixed feelings. On the one hand I have to ask what motivated this particular Bill C-18. I remember an effort a few days ago when I suspect all of us were trying to get some understanding of what the parliamentary agenda would be for the next number of days. We asked what the legislative program was and Bill C-18 was not mentioned. Then some time last week the formal indication from the government was that Bill C-18 was considered to be a priority and ideally would have to be dealt with expeditiously and with all-party agreement to move it through all stages in one day.

Perhaps two weeks ago, before the electoral boundary maps for British Columbia were made public, rumours about Parliament Hill had it that the government was contemplating this initiative. At that time I was curious about what motivated it, where it came from, what was behind the suggestion. It was new to me. I have been here for many years and I had not heard there was a serious concern regarding the legislation as it was presented.

Like everyone else in my constituency I received the maps of changes to the electoral boundaries in British Columbia. I must say that on looking at the maps of the new boundaries I was totally mystified. As a professional geographer who has some background in cartography, map making, map reading and constructing maps, I was told that the mapped boundaries

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regarding new constituencies were to recognize geography, were to recognize history, were to acknowledge the flows of commerce, and were to represent social realities that existed on the landscape of Canada.

I studied all of them and I could find no correlation between an interest in geography and the boundaries on the maps. Historically the boundaries made no sense. As a matter of fact I can only assume it was some sort of creative artistry on behalf of the commissioners who decided on the boundaries in the central interior of British Columbia. I can only assume that whoever they were, and I say this with all due respect, they must have visualised the interior mountains of British Columbia as a flat plain with no topographical variation at all because the reaction was immediate.

(1345)

The next morning, after Canada Post had delivered all of these proposals, there was a hue and cry that went up in the communities around Kamloops. People who normally would never say anything positive about their member of Parliament because of their political affiliation rose up and said that they must rally around their member of Parliament and stop this process before this lunacy continues any further.

It was interesting. The talk shows and the editorials were not only negative, but viciously negative about who would be perpetuating these changes on behalf of the constituents of central British Columbia, suggesting that the whole process was extremely undemocratic, that it had no relationship with the real world in which people lived.

That was the first clue that something was up. Very quickly I understood why these changes were being contemplated. It was because members of Parliament were obviously going to be quite upset. As my friend in the Reform Party indicated earlier, we perhaps do take some ownership of these constituencies. We find that this particular change of boundaries would certainly not represent in any way, shape or form the democratic future of the electors of the Kamloops constituency, to say nothing about all of the surrounding constituencies as well. I am sure that my colleagues who represent those constituencies will be participating in this debate later.

Therein lies a dilemma. On the one hand to proceed with these changes would be folly. I know there are changes made from time to time by the electoral commission. In my experience I have never seen any. I have been involved in this process over the years and have argued in favour of changes and there has been virtual unanimity by all of the interveners that a particular part of the boundary should change or shift and so on to represent the reality of that area, but I have yet to see any changes ever made. However, I will assume that some are. Again, I think there almost is this impression that these borders are written in stone. By the time the public process begins it is

perhaps at best a time for some tinkering or some minor alternations. Essentially the parameters of the boundaries remain.

When looking at the process today, I think to most Canadians this comes as a shock. They receive the map, which is probably the first they have ever heard of this process, and they are surprised. They have had absolutely no input. Members of Parliament and others who are interested in electoral boundaries also have had absolutely no input up to that point. The rationale itself in terms of creating the boundaries can differ from one area of the country to another. While cultural relations, social patterns or commercial flows might influence the boundaries in one part of Canada, perhaps only geography would influence them in another part.

The whole process seems a little odd. If we are serious about changing the boundaries of federal constituencies to reflect the electoral and demographic realities of the country, this seems to be a rather outmoded process to do it in a positive way. Therefore, I suggest that there is some need for change.

On the other hand I question the motive at this point. What is behind this? I listened with interest to the government House leader who indicated that the government would study the operations in terms of how the act is utilized. The government will examine whether it will increase the members as we automatically do now after each census. It will examine how the members of the commission are selected and review how the public and perhaps members of Parliament and others ought to be involved in the process.

This sounds laudable, but surely the most fundamental question that has been side-stepped or perhaps almost ignored is the number of members of Parliament. There is probably a fairly clear indication that the people of Canada do not want these Chambers just to continue to mushroom census after census until we get—I do not know what the limit would be—hundreds and hundreds of members of Parliament.

The question would be what size of a constituency can a single member of Parliament serve well. Of course that would largely be determined on the resources made available to that individual.

(1350)

I recall a few years ago discussing with a member of Parliament from India at the Lok Sabha the size of constituency they had. She replied that she was not really certain but it was something in the neighbourhood of four million to five million in the constituency.

I thought that if we have problems, they certainly have theirs as well in terms of communicating with their constituents. We do not have two million or three million but again, the numbers of 85,000 or 95,000 are not necessarily written in stone. I suspect that if one looks at other jurisdictions one would find

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areas with smaller constituencies in terms of numbers and others with larger.

Perhaps we ought to consider seriously whether there should be any increases in the number of members of Parliament at this point. We have all heard from our constituents that this at best would be something that we would move on very cautiously and perhaps we ought not to move on it at all other than simply cap it with the present levels for now.

We have to look carefully at why we are doing this. One of the ways that we have protected ourselves in the past is to have a process as a result of section 51 of the Constitution and associated with the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act first introduced in 1964.

It is very appropriate for us to remember that this process was set up as an arm's length process away from members of Parliament. The assumption presumably was that MPs might have a vested interest in how the boundaries might be reallocated in their area of the country.

Therefore an independent process, a commission, was set up that would proceed and make these recommendations quite apart from the House of Commons or from the Parliament of Canada but at least providing input at the last stage of the process, which we have just been notified of recently.

We ought to move very cautiously now. The government has indicated that it has concerns about these maps as do I. Because it has concerns about these maps and because it has concerns about the boundaries, we should now curtail this arm's length process, this independent process, stop it in its tracks and send the whole matter to the appropriate parliamentary committee for discussion.

We have to be very cautious of this. I have been here through a number of governments. I know that because the government has the large majority in the House that it is going to do what it decides to do anyway. Our purpose as members of the opposition is to point out some of the concerns that exist if the government is to proceed this way.

The government is saying that it does not like the way this independent commission is working. Therefore it is going to change the rules. If necessary, it will even change the Constitution of Canada to get its way.

We must be careful. When we start indicating a possible change to the Constitution, when we start involving ourselves in what is a very independent process from Parliament because the government in this case does not like the process, what problems does this open up? What problems could this present?

I have very mixed feelings about this initiative. I question the motive behind this initiative. I certainly say that the present process could use some improving. As someone from a province like British Columbia I also have concerns about representation.

I recognize that the proposal would indicate that British Columbia would be allocated two additional seats in the House of Commons. This is under the old formula and would recognize the tremendous population growth that is occurring throughout the province and particularly in some of the urban areas. Obviously there is a need for changes in order to have a better reflection of representation by population.

I cannot go without making two observations. If we are going to be discussing these kinds of changes, is there not some way that we can do this and also examine senatorial reform? There is a need, I think we would all agree, to reform the upper House. Some would suggest that we eliminate the upper House and others would say we should reform it in a variety of ways. There is general agreement that the Senate ought to be reformed and become much more of a democratic institution.

(1355)

I also have to draw attention to my friend in the Bloc who represented the Bloc Québécois in its review of this legislation and to indicate as others have that I find it somewhat curious that the Bloc is facilitating or is prepared to facilitate this legislation to redraft and redraw the federal boundaries in the province of Quebec.

I have listened carefully to almost all the speeches the members have made. There is a theme throughout these speeches that within two or three years there will be no need for the Bloc, that the process of change in Canada will occur as per their plan and therefore there is little need to concern themselves as members of the Bloc Québécois as to how this place will operate two or three years from now.

There is some inconsistency I might say by the suggestion that we need now to examine the new electoral boundaries in the province of Quebec to see if they make sense in time for the next general election, particularly in terms of some of the comments made in the House over the last few weeks.

I want to say with regard to the process proposed by the government, recognizing the need for change and ensuring a more democratic process in the next general election, certainly I have some concerns about the way the boundaries have been drafted particularly in central British Columbia.

I think we have to discuss this very thoroughly and not rush the legislation to ensure that the process being proposed by the government is not by itself undemocratic, that the process being proposed by the government is not behaviour that we saw too often in the past nine years where the government, if it did not

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like a particular regulation or law, as important as it was, simply used its overwhelming number in the House of Commons, its muscle in Parliament, to push legislation through.

We can take some comfort that this matter would go before the Senate before changes would be made and again, with the different political relationships in the Senate compared to the House of Commons, there might be some safeguard there.

In closing I want to say that the process is of deep concern. The need for reform is certainly there. Whether this is the most appropriate way however is still a requirement of the debate.

**The Speaker:** It being two o'clock p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(5) the House will now proceed to statements by members, pursuant to Standing Order 31.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

**Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport):** Mr. Speaker, today, March 21, the United Nations Convention on Climate Change comes into effect.

This agreement among nations represents the first international step in support of the reduction of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide as we all know is produced when we burn natural gas, oil and coal.

Today we must remind the government and the Minister of Energy to act on the promise to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by the year 2005. Federal, provincial and municipal governments all have a role to play but the Government of Canada has to lead at the national and international levels.

The problem of climate change can only be resolved if every nation pulls its weight.

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[*Translation*]

### SEMAINE NATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu):** Mr. Speaker, this week is the Semaine nationale de la Francophonie, which provides francophones all over the world an opportunity to stop and think of the role played by the French language in the development of our communities. This week-long event aimed at making this international forum know will allow us this year to emphasize the key role of Quebec within la Francophonie in North America.

I wish this week will also be a time to develop a certain level of open-mindedness with regard to Quebec's linguistic specificity, reinforce ties between francophones in America and elsewhere, and bridge gaps between linguistic communities in Canada.

I certainly hope that la Francophonie will be celebrated in the workplace, schools and businesses, and by all Quebeckers.

I call upon my colleagues from across Canada to practice this year's theme, which is: "En français, bien sûr", or "In French, of course".

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

**Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, a couple living in my riding of Calgary Southeast were victims of a senseless crime. They had their car stolen, taken for a joy ride and then vandalized. These citizens had done their part to protect themselves from crime. They had locked their car. They parked in a lot under a street light.

The police believe that young offenders were responsible for this crime. This is a growing problem not only in Calgary but everywhere. Stealing cars is becoming fun for young offenders. They know they can get away with it. If they are caught they know that the Young Offenders Act will protect them. Young vandals in one instance even spray painted a car with the words: "Thanks, Young Offenders Act".

We have to make young people more accountable for their crimes and protect the rights of victims. Restitution can be a pretty major deterrent if given due consideration.

We need to change the Young Offenders Act to make Canada a safer place; safer for you, Mr. Speaker, safer for people in my riding of Calgary Southeast and safer for all of us who care.

\* \* \*

### NEW BRUNSWICK YOUTH DAY

**Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury):** Mr. Speaker, today, March 21, is New Brunswick Youth Day.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to New Brunswick youth as valuable members of our present communities and an important consideration in all that we decide and do.

Young New Brunswickers and our young people across Canada are faced with peculiar challenges and need our support. Government services targeted for youth are improving. We need only look to the national youth services corps as an example of the kind of creative, youth specific programming necessary to assist young New Brunswickers and Canadians through tough and changing times. As we attempt to make change we must all realize that young people need to be involved in designing the programs and policies that affect them.

In honour of this special day I salute New Brunswick's youth and remind us all of the valuable contributions made by young people across Canada each and every day.

\* \* \*

### RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhon (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, today is the United Nations International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which persists whenever the principle of merit is undermined by prejudice.

We must safeguard against reverse discrimination, the antithesis of the principle being defended, as we work to meet our hiring targets for qualified minorities and tearing down the barriers to their full participation.

Tolerance and respect are put to a greater test during harsh economic times. Witness the views of those who see immigrants as stealing jobs from other Canadians, who see only their difficulties, forgetting that there are others who are worse off.

Today we are challenged to work together to foster economic growth and rededicate ourselves to our nation's reality.

Canadians are a people of many colours and races, all of whom heighten the intellectual, social, cultural and economic standing of Canada in the eyes of the world.

\* \* \*

### FORUM FOR YOUNG CANADIANS

**Mr. Wayne Easter (Malpeque):** Mr. Speaker, I and many other MPs had the opportunity to have a dinner with a group of youths visiting Parliament last week. The group was here under the Forum for Young Canadians program.

In my opinion the Forum for Young Canadians is a valuable educational program that brings young people from all parts of this great nation together to learn about our political process. The forum allows young people to learn about our political system through participation and workshops, presentations and a mock Parliament. It gives students real, hands-on experience. It is also valuable because it allows friendships to form between the participants from all provinces of Canada, friendships that last a lifetime.

It is programs like the Forum for Young Canadians that we as members of Parliament must continue to support and expand because their benefits are enormous. These youths are the leaders of tomorrow and their individual and collective experience will lead to the development of a greater nation.

[Translation]

### RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that fewer racial discrimination complaints were received by the Quebec human rights commission last year. We all know that racist behaviour has not been eliminated and that making other cultures known is one of the best ways to stop this behaviour.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the members of the Official Opposition associate themselves with the thousands of Quebeckers and Canadians for whom racial discrimination is a social evil which must be fought at all cost.

We must strive daily to eliminate any form of intolerance toward people with a difference. We must promote a society where nobody feels out of place because of the colour of their skin, their religion or their country of birth. That is the challenge facing us all at the turn of this century.

\* \* \*

(1405)

[English]

### CALGARY NORTH

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North):** Mr. Speaker, several of my Calgary North constituents have raised concerns about a member of the other place and his work on behalf of a developer in Calgary.

Since his appointment this individual has acted for the developer in public hearings and has also very actively lobbied city officials to advance the developer's interests.

Calgary North constituents are particularly outraged that someone they are paying to represent Albertans should use his influence in this manner and by the fact that he is doing so at the expense of his attendance in the other place which is now sitting.

I call on the Prime Minister to ask the government leader in the other place to investigate the ethics involved when a member of that place lobbies—

**The Speaker:** Order. The Chair is having a little bit of difficulty about one member attacking another member in the House. I believe that the tradition has been in the House to extend this to the other House.

Although the hon. member has not mentioned a specific person or a specific riding, I think the hon. member is probably leaving very little leeway for misinterpretation.

I would encourage the hon. member to reconsider and perhaps tomorrow we could have another try at it if it is not quite that specific, if the hon. member would not mind.

*S. O. 31*

### RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan):** Mr. Speaker, many of our colleagues in the House are wearing the multicoloured bow which was conceived and created in Thunder Bay.

The bow is a symbol for March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

This day was declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966 and in 1988 federal and provincial ministers agreed to commemorate March 21 in Canada.

The multicoloured bow is a visible symbol of our commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination as the poppy is to Remembrance Day.

The red, yellow, black and white ribbons represent the colours of the human race. They also signify the beauty and harmony created when the diverse people of the world unite.

We wear the bow today to show support for the elimination of racism in Canada.

\* \* \*

### CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

**Mrs. Marlene Cowling (Dauphin—Swan River):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the House briefly about the Canadian Wheat Board.

As some members of the House will know, the Canadian Wheat Board is western Canada's single desk selling agency for the export sale of wheat and barley.

There are some presently advocating that the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board should be fragmented and weakened. This is not the time to weaken the Canadian Wheat Board, our single desk selling agency. Rather it is exactly the right time to strengthen it and expand its role in the international grain market.

The Canadian Wheat Board has served the interests of western Canadian farmers superbly over the years and continues to do so.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### SEMAINE NATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface):** The President of the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française, Mr. Normand Boisvert from my constituency, recently announced the second Semaine nationale de la Francophonie, from March 20 to 26, 1994, under the theme "En français, bien sûr".

The primary objective of the Semaine nationale de la Francophonie is to heighten Canadians' awareness from every region in

the country. The Association emphasizes the following: On top of the benefits flowing from an increased use of French in all lines of activity, it also wants to generate initiatives promoting an interest in reading and writing, improve the quality of the spoken and written language, and also create and maintain opportunities for positive dialogue between francophones, francophiles and other Canadians of good will.

I invite everyone to fully benefit from this second Semaine nationale de la Francophonie.

\* \* \*

### CANADA EXPO 1994 TRADE FAIR

**Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières):** Mr. Speaker, the Canada Expo 1994 trade fair opens tomorrow in Mexico City. Over 400 companies and 1,000 business people will participate in this event.

(1410)

Today, we want to make up for an oversight by the Prime Minister's Office. Indeed, it is unfortunate to see that, in its documentation prepared for the media, the Prime Minister's Office did not mention one single example of successful Quebec company in Mexico, while it does name several companies from elsewhere in Canada.

Consequently, we want to mention the success, in Mexico, of Quebec companies such as Bombardier, Canam-Manac, SNC, Roche and several dozen others.

We also take this opportunity to wish the best of luck to all Quebec companies participating in this important trade fair.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### HEALTH

**Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops):** Mr. Speaker, I noticed in *La Presse* that the Minister of Health has indicated the federal government will soon decriminalize the growing of cannabis or hemp for commercial purposes. She has indicated that Parliament will be asked to pass a law to enable her department to issue licences to grow marijuana depending on the level of THC, the hallucinogenic agent in cannabis.

Perhaps the minister sees us as a country in which people will live in houses made of hemp particle board, read hemp newspapers, wear hemp clothing, drive cars powered by hemp based methanol, dine on hemp seed tofu or enjoy THC free marijuana candy bars.

While many Canadians support this initiative, I wonder if the whole issue of hemp cultivation and decriminalization ought not to be referred to the appropriate committee of the House to prepare legislative recommendations for Parliament rather than dealing with this critical issue in such an ad hoc fashion.

*Oral Questions***RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

**Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West):** In 1966 the United Nations declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in commemoration of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa.

Since 1989 the Government of Canada has sponsored a national anti-racism public education program. This campaign works with key institutions and organizations to raise awareness of the existence of racial discrimination and to promote effective means to combat racism.

There is no justification for racial discrimination. Any doctrine of racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally reprehensible and socially unjust. We should recognize that prejudice and discrimination are problems that must be acknowledged and addressed.

As individuals in one of the great democracies of the world we must all bear a personal responsibility in the elimination of racism and racial discrimination. Only then will Canadians be able to participate fully and equally in our society.

\* \* \*

**HYUNDAI AUTO CANADA**

**Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York—Simcoe):** Mr. Speaker, Hyundai Auto Canada has recently made a corporate decision to close its aluminum wheel plant in Newmarket, Ontario. Seventy people in my riding of York—Simcoe will lose their jobs.

I stand here to pressure Hyundai Auto Canada to ensure that these 70 individuals receive all of the benefits and entitlements they are owed.

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Last week, the Minister of Finance took part in the G-7 jobs summit, where he proposed a tax credit for companies that create jobs or that maintain jobs in spite of technological change. Furthermore, the G-7 countries agreed to make employment their priority in 1994.

Now that he is back from the summit, does the minister intend to implement a real job recovery strategy based on concrete measures in order to give back some hope to the million and a half people who are now unemployed in Canada?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, yes, when we were in Detroit, the issue of a tax credit for hiring workers was raised. A suggestion was made by Mr. Reich, the U.S. Secretary of Labour. It was also a suggestion made in Canada at hearings held by the human resources minister. We are prepared to consider this suggestion along with many others.

But one thing is very clear, and I was delighted to see that the measures we took in our budget—that is, our approach to job creation, lower payroll taxes, unemployment insurance reform—are exactly the same as those recommended by the OECD. That is also the conclusion that was reached at the meeting. We must say that even the G-7 supported us.

(1415)

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, if these words are not followed by concrete action, we can only conclude that it was hot air. When the minister boasts that his own proposals were supported, if no action follows, I do not see how he can talk about support.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we must ask him today to tell us clearly if he intends to establish this kind of tax credit for companies that create or maintain jobs. Can we expect a ministerial statement on this and not just hot air?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, in the budget, we took what is perhaps the most important step, namely the lowering of payroll taxes. Not only was the unemployment insurance premium rate reduced to \$3 but we also showed that we intend to continue in the same direction when the minister's reform is completed.

At the same time, we said that we will really look at our whole taxation system to see if there are obstacles to job creation or, better yet, to see what could be done to encourage employment. We clearly intend to do that. It is not hot air but very specific action.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether he admits that his budget is going the wrong way on employment by attacking the unemployed rather than unemployment and its structural causes. I would ask him to admit that he will not stimulate employment by reducing 85 per cent of the benefits for unemployed people.

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, we clearly stated that this government's priority was job creation. We adapted our budget policies accordingly. In the past few months, we have already seen the situation improve. It will take some time, but I am convinced that the finance minister's budget has put the country on the right track for job creation.

## Oral Questions

## PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. In the Ginn Publishing affair, today's *Toronto Star*, quoting sources in the Prime Minister's Office, made surprising revelations on the heritage minister's behaviour.

In particular, we learned that the minister did not see fit, before authorizing the deal, to read the legal advice on which he bases his own authorization.

How does the minister explain the thoughtless and irresponsible way he acted in authorizing this bad deal without first reading the legal advice in question?

**Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Speaker, I see that the favourite soap opera of the hon. member for Rimouski—Témiscouata is also watched by her colleagues. But soap operas are works of fiction and not fact.

I gave the facts to this House. I said that I had read and studied the recommendations made by the Department of Justice and I think that the decision that was made was explained and understood; the hon. member only has to read *Hansard* to know where we stand.

I hasten to say that the alternative would have been to use taxpayers' money to finance questionable legal proceedings. I prefer to see this money support the publishing industry I deeply care about.

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, does the minister also admit that, after reading the legal advice prepared for the previous Conservative government in 1990, he realized this advice was far from definite regarding the government's obligation to honour the so-called verbal promise it is now invoking? And would he agree to table the legal advice on which he is now trying to base his position?

**Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to see that the hon. member has started to read English-language newspapers. They do not necessarily cover all that goes on in the minister's office. After reading and studying the advice, I came to the conclusions I stated on several occasions in this House. I think I cannot tell him much more than the truth.

\* \* \*

(1420)

[English]

## JOB CREATION

**Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister who again today reiterated his government's first priority is job creation. It is

becoming increasingly clear to Canadians that the government does not have any coherent strategy for the creation of sustainable jobs.

Past experience proves that government financed projects usually fail on two accounts. First, they do not create sustainable jobs and, second, they rob millions of tax dollars that could be used to prepare workers wishing to enter the new economy or could be used to assist the most vulnerable members of our society.

When will the Prime Minister abandon his contradictory approach to job creation to increase spending on one hand and decrease spending on the other? When will he commit his government to reduce overall public spending so that taxes can be cut and the private sector can create real jobs for 1.6 million Canadians?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, as was indicated in the earlier question, I have just returned from a meeting of the G-7 on jobs in Detroit and over the weekend a meeting of APEC, the fastest growing segment of the world's economy at the present time, dealing with many of the same issues.

It was fascinating. The measures those fast growing countries are taking are exactly the ones that we outlined in our budget.

What are they? They are a reduction of the cancer killing taxes on jobs such as unemployment insurance premiums. They are an encouragement to small and medium sized business, the major creator of jobs not only in this country but in all other countries. They are an encouragement of the newer technologies, networks for small businesses, access to new technologies, matching grants between universities and the private sector.

We have set out a very clear jobs plan and that jobs plan is going to make this a much stronger country for Canadians.

**Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the minister recognizes some of these cancers but one cancer he did not mention was funding for regional development.

Last week Hyundai announced that its assembly plant in Bromont, Quebec, would remain closed indefinitely. This is a perfect example of a regional development project gone bad.

Does the minister agree that the most effective and efficient way his government can create jobs is to stop influencing business decisions with short term public subsidies and instead encourage the private sector to get Canada back to work by getting public sector spending under control?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that getting public sector spending under control is a very important ob-

jective of any government. It certainly is of this government and our budget demonstrates that.

In terms of subsidies to business, we undertook in the budget a very large reduction in subsidies to business that we deem to be counter-productive. It is in the budget. We have also said that we are continuing to look at the wide range of other ways in which government and business interact to make sure that there are no obstacles placed in the way of business.

On the one issue that the member raised, all members in the House and certainly the members opposite feel very badly and are very disappointed by the decision of Hyundai to delay the reopening of its plant.

The minister of human resources has already begun discussions with the laid-off workers at that plant to see what can be done. We as a government have begun discussions with Hyundai to see if there are other alternatives for the plant.

When I was in a meeting with the APEC members, I had the opportunity to discuss that subject with the Minister of Finance of Korea. We are going to continue to watch it very closely.

**Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster):** Mr. Speaker, the point we are trying to get across is that a little cutting of regional development grants is not the answer. We need to scrap the whole concept because it is not working.

Let me illustrate with another example. This is out west and not in Quebec. A perfect example is the almost \$4 million loaned to Myrias Research Corporation by Western Diversification to an Edmonton group in 1990. The final loan of more than \$500,000 was made just two weeks before the company went into receivership, creating no jobs. Has the minister learned from the past administration that regional development is a huge waste of tax dollars and will he take steps to eliminate all federal regional development spending from our unbalanced budget?

(1425)

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, members of the Reform Party cannot have it both ways. They cannot stand up at one time and talk to the Minister of National Defence when certain base closures are occurring and then ask what is going to be done for that particular area, whether there is going to be regional development. Then they turn around and say we cannot do it generally.

The fact is that this political party in opposition and now in government has said that we think a lot of regional development in this country has been applied to pork barrel grants to industry,

### Oral Questions

grants to companies that do not need it, which simply makes no sense.

That is why, and any one of the ministers can tell you that, the minister responsible for ACOA, the minister responsible for the western diversification fund, and the minister responsible for FORD-Q have completed a thorough re-evaluation of the way regional development was taking place, and we are not going to repeat the mistakes of the past.

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### GINN PUBLISHING

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

In this same article on Ginn Publishing in the *Toronto Star* we read: "This was a deal cooked behind the scenes by lobbyists and officials". We are told that it was lobbyists who threw the deal together on behalf of Paramount at a meeting with government representatives.

Can the minister confirm that this infamous deal, partly written, partly verbal, which the government refuses to make public was made by a lobbyist acting on behalf of Paramount?

**Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Speaker, on this account I have to go by hearsay.

This government was not in office and therefore we cannot give information which we ourselves do not have. I have of course retraced the statements which are to me, as I said, hearsay.

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf):** Mr. Speaker I thank the minister for his answer. My additional question is directed to the Prime Minister.

Since the *Toronto Star* is quoting sources from the Prime Minister's office to the effect that the Ginn Publishing mess is the result of secret dealings of lobbyists acting on behalf of private interests, does the Prime Minister recognize the urgent need to ensure through legislative action full openness with regard to the activities of such lobbyists?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker I do not know if there is a source like that. Senior staff in my office talk to me but nobody has talked to me about this problem.

If that so-called very close source is one of mine, I would like to know the name. If the member has the name I ask him to give it to me. What is a source? I need a name.

I would be surprised if somebody is afraid to talk to me but will talk to the press. If there is such a person I would like to have the name. He will have a lot of occasions to talk to the press for the rest of his life.

*Oral Questions***CHILD CARE**

**Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal campaign promises and the recent budget indicated that the government will increase the number of child care spaces once the real economic growth exceeds 3 per cent. The estimated cost to the Canadian taxpayer that I have seen for this is about \$1.5 billion. I might add that expenditure amounts do not even reflect an increase in the estimates for 1995–1996.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Since the budget projects a 3 per cent growth rate, will the minister confirm the government's commitment to this \$1.5 billion program?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, the budget contains a projection for the expenditure on the day care spaces on the basis that we do expect growth will be 3 per cent or in excess thereof.

(1430)

Although we have provided for it, the spending on day care spaces is of course dependent upon agreement with the provinces. The spending on day care fulfils a multitude of purposes. Not only is it in itself an important creator of jobs, but it also permits a substantial segment of our society desirous of working the opportunity to do so.

**Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, just about anything can be spent in the name of jobs, jobs, jobs.

The investors, small businessmen and Canadian taxpayers would be more interested in understanding if our economy should grow at 3 per cent why the government would not prefer to pay down the deficit and pay some of the bills rather than create more child care spaces and spending \$1.5 billion of taxpayers' money.

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, there are substantial expenditure cuts within our budget.

It does not take a close observation of the numbers to understand that we are not going to eliminate the deficit unless at the same time that we are cutting we are getting the economy going, creating jobs and getting some growth.

Let me say one thing. We as a government have said that the major element of job creation is the private sector. The element of the private sector which is going to do that is small and medium sized business. The member opposite ought to realize that women entrepreneurs do the majority of successful start-

ups in small and medium sized businesses. They are the ones who want the child care.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HYUNDAI CAR PLANT**

**Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Over the weekend, we learned that the Hyundai plant in Bromont would be suspending its operations indefinitely in the Eastern Townships. Hyundai will be laying off more than 800 highly skilled workers whose average age is between 25 and 30.

Given the scope of the federal grants awarded to the Hyundai automobile plant, what conditions did the government impose on the company to guarantee that it would reopen the Bromont facilities, thus preserving jobs?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, this is a very valid question. As I stated in an earlier answer, we are extremely disappointed that Hyundai has delayed the reopening of its plant. The federal office has already begun discussions with Hyundai and the Minister of Industry also plans to take up this matter with the company. With respect to grants—and the question is perfectly relevant—we are now in the process of determining, along with the Government of Quebec, what our exact position on this matter will be.

**Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford):** Mr. Speaker, the minister says he is disappointed. Well, the people in my region are disappointed as well. Should Hyundai refuse to reopen its plant in Bromont, has the government considered another alternative which would at least preserve the 825 high-tech jobs now in Bromont?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, this would certainly be the objective of our government and of the Government of Quebec. This is why we have begun discussions with the provincial government and with the company, to see whether we can come up with an alternative proposal should the plant remain closed.

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[English]

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Herb Grubel (Capilano—Howe Sound):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

In 1974 the Ministry of the Environment leased a parcel of land in my riding for the construction of the Pacific environment

centre. The centre was never built, but the lease payment on the empty land is now \$3.1 million annually and is likely to rise during the remaining 51 years of the lease.

(1435)

Would the minister please tell the House what steps have been taken to end this wasteful spending?

**Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, I take the question under advisement and will give a full report to the hon. member as soon as possible.

**Mr. Herb Grubel (Capilano—Howe Sound):** Mr. Speaker, it is well known by the media that this contract is up for renewal as of April 1. It is very disappointing that the government is not informed about this important matter.

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[Translation]

#### HEALTH CARE

**Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health indicated clearly to the Canadian Hospital Association that the federal government intended to play a greater role in the health field, although health care comes under exclusive provincial jurisdiction. In so doing, the minister was warning the provinces against ending insurance coverage for health care services.

Does the Minister of Health not recognize that it is totally illogical to warn the provinces against ending insurance coverage for health care services when at the same time her government is forcing the provinces to review insured services in view of the shortfall resulting from the freeze on transfer payments in respect of health care?

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, it is high time to reassure Canadians, including those living in Quebec, that this government is deeply committed to health care and will continue to maintain the system which Canadians have long enjoyed. It is high time for the government and for me to give them this assurance.

**Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond):** Mr. Speaker, does the minister not recognize that the best way for the federal government to maintain health care in Canada is first and foremost by maintaining the growth of transfer payments and respecting provincial areas of jurisdiction?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, while I do believe there is a role for the federal government in health care, I still believe we must work in co-operation with provincial governments and this I intend to do.

#### Oral Questions

I have met with provincial ministers of health. We are very much in agreement it is not additional money that is needed in health care but how to do things better. It is a question of creating value while maintaining values.

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#### VIA RAIL

**Mrs. Jane Stewart (Brant):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

The people in my riding of Brant are very concerned about the future of VIA Rail particularly the service as it passes through London to Brantford and then on to Toronto.

Can the parliamentary secretary please assure the House and my constituents that despite the \$50 million in planned cuts to VIA Rail in 1994–95, the service through my riding will not be curtailed?

**Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, first let me thank the member for Brant for her question and her great interest in this matter.

As the Minister of Transport stated in the House, VIA Rail is another entity for which our department is responsible and which faces a very troubled future.

Members of the House know that VIA has known of its budgetary parameters and responsibilities for quite some time. VIA has made some efficiency gains but is a long way from achieving what it must.

VIA Corporation, its 3.7 million passengers and especially its workers all must be part of the solution if we are to achieve a national, sustainable, efficient and affordable passenger rail system. Taxpayers not only expect this but demand it of government.

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#### PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

**Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The sale of Ginn Publishing continues to bring with it contradictions and denials.

(1440)

Both the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Industry have stated repeatedly that there were no potential buyers for Ginn. I have documentary proof there were Canadian companies interested in purchasing Ginn and I would like to table these documents.

I have only one question. Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage stand in the House today and admit to a bungled process and commit to a thorough investigation of this scandalous sale of Ginn Publishing?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that this subject is generating so much interest. There is always the possibility of putting questions before the standing parliamentary committees. We see no good reason for putting a lot of effort and work into an investigation, the effect of which would be to honour previous government ministers who are politically dead, thank God.

**The Speaker:** I understood the hon. member to say she only had one question.

**Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast):** I also have documents that I wish to table in the House today.

**The Speaker:** We will leave that until three o'clock and see if there is unanimous consent to do so.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE**

**Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé):** Mr. Speaker, when he went to the UN, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans strongly condemned foreign companies from NAFO countries that use flags of convenience to get around the moratorium on cod fishing.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans: What concrete measures does the minister intend to take to make NAFO countries prevent their shipowners from using flags of convenience?

[English]

**Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada asked NAFO members back in November to convene a joint meeting or démarche with Canada and some of the countries that provide flags of convenience.

In fact Japan, the European union, Russia and Canada made a joint démarche to Honduras and to Panama within the last few weeks. These nations have been asked to quit providing flags of convenience to vessels that intend to ignore international conservation rules.

I am pleased to report not only have we made such a request, but we have also had a meeting with two of the four countries that are providing flags of convenience. They have committed to action in legislation by May.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a supplementary question. In order to act with more credibility on this issue, did the minister check if Canadian shipowners use flags of convenience and, if such is the case, what measures does the government intend to take to convince them not to do so?

[English]

**Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, I assure the hon. member once the issue of flags of

convenience has been fully considered and authorization has been given both by cabinet and Parliament, because ultimately Parliament will be consulted on this matter, Canada will make no distinction on the origin of the flag of convenience no matter what country it comes from.

Those vessels and ship owners ignoring Canadian conservation rules and multilateral arranged conservation rules merely to exploit the stocks down to the last fish, thus destroying a good part of the economy of Quebec and the four Atlantic provinces, will be treated in identical fashion. The fishing activity will be stopped and the vessels will be taken off the nose or tail.

(1445)

I have one final comment. I personally have no knowledge, as I stand here and speak, of any Canadian involvement in this kind of measure. However I want to assure the member that were a Canadian company involved it would be my instinct to name such a company and to bring the entire shame and anger of the nation down on that kind of activity.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Thousands of Canadians worry about their chances of contracting AIDS from transfusions received prior to 1985. What progress can the minister report in identifying those at risk?

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, we are all very concerned with the threat people have of living with HIV-AIDS, especially those who contracted it through blood transfusions in the early eighties.

One of the things that is happening right now is an inquiry under the auspices of Judge Krever. We are co-operating and collaborating very closely at making sure that all information is brought forward so that this kind of tragedy never happens again.

**Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod):** I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

Blood samples kept by the Red Cross are identifiable as to donors and recipients. Why else would they be kept? This may be a difficult problem but lives are at stake. Will the minister commit today to seek out the recipients of this tainted blood?

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to a number of samples which we have just found out exist in Toronto.

Today Dr. Doug Kennedy from the Department of Health is in Toronto looking at these samples to see exactly what can be done with them. We will take action as soon as we have had a report from Dr. Kennedy.

*Oral Questions***ETHANOL**

**Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Canada's farmers and others appreciate the minister's decision to leave the excise tax off ethanol. This method of encouraging the use of ethanol blended fuel is good for the environment, for agriculture and for the ethanol industry.

I noted in the budget documents that the minister did not put any time limit on this tax break. Could the minister speculate a bit on the permanence of this waiver of the excise tax on ethanol?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, every time this particular Minister of Finance has speculated he has got himself into a lot of trouble. Let me say to the member for Leeds—Grenville and indeed to all members of the House—I see the member for Kent, as an example—who have spoken to me about this very important issue that we recognize, both in terms of its contribution to the environment and its contribution to agriculture, the tremendous potential that exists in ethanol as a fuel.

Given that and because of the representations made we certainly have no intention of reinstating any kind of an excise tax on ethanol. That was said in the budget. I can tell the member unequivocally that is our current intention and will be so certainly for the duration of this particular government, at least as long as I am the Minister of Finance, but I do not know how long that is going to be.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**MIL DAVIE SHIPYARDS**

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for Regional Development in Quebec.

About two months ago, I asked the Minister of Transport what the government intended to do about the plan to have MIL Davie shipyards, in Lauzon, build the Magdalen Islands ferryboat.

Will the minister press his colleague the Minister of Transport to award MIL Davie the contract for the construction of the ferry, thus allowing the largest private employer in the Greater Quebec City region to survive?

(1450)

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Develop-**

**ment—Quebec):** As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec has decided, not only because resources were scarce but also to focus more on those areas which create the most jobs, to concentrate its efforts on small business and new technologies.

Therefore, as the Minister responsible for the Federal Office, I will concentrate on small business and new technologies, and let other ministers deal with shipyards and transportation issues.

Let the hon. member have no fear. There are 19 of us from Quebec in our caucus, including the acting Minister of Regional Development, Mr. Massé, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Prime Minister. All of us are here to take care of Quebec's interests.

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans):** Mr. Speaker, I will direct my question to the Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance is clearly unable or unwilling to discuss transportation issues.

Can the Prime Minister tell us who, in Cabinet, is defending the interests of the MIL Davie workers if his Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development does not want to discuss transportation issues and his Minister of Transport, who is from New Brunswick, is bound to favour the St. John Shipbuilding shipyards?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, everyone knows full well that these problems are discussed in Cabinet and that we are committed to the workers in Quebec as we are to those in the rest of the country. Now, in this particular case, we must determine first whether or not we really need a new ferry and second, if the price is right. That is precisely what the Minister of Transport is doing now. Once his decision is known, the House will be informed.

\* \* \*

[English]

**TARIFFS**

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The U.S. government is threatening to impose high tariffs on Canadian grain and is saying that it might compensate Canada for this action by making concessions on the protection of Canadian poultry, eggs and dairy products.

This kind of bargaining, pitting Canadian farmers against Canadian farmers, is unacceptable.

Will the Prime Minister assure the House that the government will not accept a deal that sacrifices the interest of one agricultural sector for the interest of another?

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I have already discussed the problem with the American authorities. I have mentioned it to the President of the United States.

In the case of the products covered by article XI of the GATT, we know the proposed tariffication levels are protected by the GATT rules. There is no concession to be received from the Americans. We are just playing by the rules of the GATT.

On the question of the level of imports in the United States of Canadian wheat, this is something that is being discussed. There will be no tradeoff between one part of the farming community against the other.

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his assurances and I ask for a further clarification.

If American negotiators attempt in these negotiations, in this bargaining, to pit Canadian grain farmers against Canadian producers of poultry, eggs and dairy products, will the government tell the Americans to take a flying leap?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I said that the two cannot be bargained one against the other.

Egg, milk and butter producers in Canada are protected by the GATT rules. We have changed the rules and the proposed tariffication that exists today has been established under the rules of the GATT. We insist that we are following the international rules.

The question of the Americans importing more wheat for their market is another question. There was an increase in the export of wheat to the United States over the last few years. One part was caused by the flood there and the second was because we produce better wheat than it does when we talk about durum wheat. There is a conflict within American society: those who want good pasta want Canadian wheat and we are on their side.

(1455)

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**The Speaker:** The Chair is ever so thankful that you did not address yourself to the flying leap.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HEALTH CARE**

**Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Health. Public hearings on the marketing of somatotropin have recommended that the introduction of this controversial hormone be delayed.

In view of this recommendation, does the Minister of Health intend to allow this hormone to be marketed in Canada?

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that my department has not yet completed its studies of this hormone. Once these studies are completed, if the health of Canadians is not at risk, I will have no choice but to allow this hormone to be marketed.

\* \* \*

[English]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development and was inspired by businessman Brian Burge of Ottawa.

Recently Mr. Burge spent more than \$1,000 advertising commission sales jobs in Ottawa and Toronto. From this effort Mr. Burge discovered that many respondents were unwilling to give up guaranteed unemployment insurance benefits and risk the uncertainty of a commission sales job. Many jobs in the new economy will be commission or performance based.

In view of what the government said at the G-7 meeting, will the minister respond to the evidence that the UI system discourages recipients from taking commission jobs? Could he tell the House what he intends to do to fix UI in this regard?

**Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

As the hon. member would recall, last January we initiated a process of social security review to better, improve and modernize the present system. Among the areas we are presently reviewing is the Unemployment Insurance Act. Toward this end the representation made by the hon. member will be taken under consideration.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN**

**Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister and it pertains to the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean.

It is now obvious that the decision to close this college was misguided. However, we recognize that the closure is part of a budget decision and that the government finds itself in an extremely difficult financial situation. That is why many of us, including the Government of Quebec, have called for a moratorium.

Under the circumstances, we think it would be reasonable for the government to take the time to examine this question thoroughly before making an irrevocable decision. This is not, in our view, an unreasonable request.

Therefore, my question for the Prime Minister is as follows: Under the circumstances, would he not be willing to take the time to review this matter thoroughly before making such a final decision?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, the military college in Saint-Jean will not be closed until the end of the next school year. Therefore, we have over one year to find a use for these facilities which are extremely valuable.

We are currently discussing with Quebec government officials to find a way to put this facility to good use and we are prepared to provide assistance. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is currently conducting the discussions in this regard.

\* \* \*

[English]

### FISHERIES

**Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of fisheries.

Pending conclusion of his proposed new high seas fisheries convention prohibiting overfishing by foreign vessels operating just outside Canada's 200-mile fishing zone, will the minister of fisheries remind states that Canada has the legal right under already existing international law to apply stringent fisheries conservation measures and penal sanctions where necessary against delinquent foreign vessels and their crews?

(1500)

**Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, acknowledge his great expertise in the area of international law and take this opportunity to say yes, indeed we are taking every opportunity through every forum available to us, most recently at the UN conference on high seas fishing and at the FAO in Rome.

We are taking every measure to try to ensure that international law is binding, that we can develop binding dispute settlement mechanisms, and that Canada can through agreement put an end to the problem of foreign overfishing.

Let no one believe otherwise. If we cannot resolve this problem by agreement we will resolve it by unilateral action by Canada.

\* \* \*

### PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

**The Speaker:** I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Mr. Fritz Verzetnitsch and Mr. Rudolf Nurnberger, members of the Austrian Parliament.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

### Routine Proceedings

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

**The Speaker:** With regard to the hon. member's request to table a document, Beauchesne's sixth edition in citation 495(6) precludes the private member from tabling documents. Therefore it would require the unanimous consent of the House.

The hon. member has made the request. Is it the pleasure of the House to give unanimous consent for the tabling of this document?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

### POINTS OF ORDER

#### CORRECTION OF COMMENTS

**Hon. David Michael Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to correct the *Hansard* record.

Last Thursday, March 17, I made a statement on the Somalian incident and I would like the record to reflect that several military police investigations were ordered into the significant incidents experienced by the Canadian Airborne Regiment battle group in Somalia and that the first one commenced on March 19, 1993, not on April 15, 1993 as stated in the House.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

\* \* \*

### SEMAINE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

**Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, on the initiative of the Association of French-speaking Parliamentarians, a reception was held here on Parliament Hill to mark the beginning of the Semaine de la Francophonie. Representatives of various Canadian organizations dealing with the Francophonie came from across Canada.

A number of Canadian personalities who have distinguished themselves in this country by working in different ways and in different communities to promote the French fact were honoured. We were especially happy to have among us at this

*Routine Proceedings*

ceremony the Prime Minister of Canada, who received the honorary award of the Francophonie and who is a proud representative of Canada's French-speaking community.

Allow me today in this House, at the first opportunity I have had since the beginning of this Semaine de la Francophonie, to remind members of some interesting historic facts.

(1505)

As hon. members know, the heads of state and government summit held at Chaillot Palace in Paris in 1991 ratified the proposal for an international Francophonie day and expressed the wish that each of the 47 states and governments forming the so-called Francophone community celebrate this day individually and at their convenience. It was officially set for March 20, the date on which was founded the Cultural and Technical Co-operation Agency, the first francophone intergovernmental organization, whose secretary general in the last few years has been a distinguished Canadian, Jean-Louis Roy.

We are very proud to take part in this day and thus show that we belong to the Francophonie. As active members of this multilateral group, we will continue to promote the basic values dear to all Canadians such as democracy, human rights, women's equality, child welfare, education and training. The francophone community includes over 400 million men and women scattered all over the globe.

The Francophonie is an integral part of Canada's foreign policy. We intend to continue playing an active role and contributing in various ways, so that all francophone and francophile Canadians continue to benefit from this window on the world and the fruitful contacts we maintain in many French-speaking countries throughout the world.

By being a member of the Francophonie, Canada also shows the rest of the world the unique features of Canadian reality. The Canadian Francophonie speaks with many accents. It starts out in the sandy dunes of New Brunswick, goes up the St. Lawrence River, and ends up in the western plains. During their travels, our francophones took on the accents of Antonine Maillet, Anne Hébert, and Gabrielle Roy. Far from resting on their laurels, our francophones now speak with new accents such as the Creole intonations of those who found refuge on these North American shores.

Canadians show solidarity with all the people of the world who use French to communicate, exchange ideas and better understand one another.

It is in this spirit that I invite all Canadians and their elected representatives in this House and in legislatures with a large number of francophones, be it in Quebec, New Brunswick,

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, or even British Columbia, for there are many francophones on Canada's West Coast.

So, on this day and week celebrating the Francophonie, I would urge all my colleagues in the House of Commons, particularly the members of the Bloc Québécois, to realize that the French language is alive and well in Canada. It is not endangered as some members opposite would like us to believe. On the contrary! The French fact is strongly and brilliantly defended throughout Canada and reaches out around the world.

(1510)

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Quebec):** Mr. Speaker, today it is a great honour and a great source of pride for the Bloc Québécois to draw the attention of the House to la Journée mondiale de la Francophonie.

For Quebec and for all francophones in the rest of Canada, whose common destiny is necessarily linked to that of the Francophonie, this is a particularly memorable day.

Incidentally, this anniversary coincides with that of the founding of the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique, the first francophone intergovernmental organization.

Quebec's participation in this international body illustrates that in matters concerning the Francophonie, as in all other matters, especially when they concern our identity and cultural ambience, as the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned earlier, it is important to run our own affairs.

Promoting the French fact also means promoting our viability as a community, and in this respect, we have no outside allies other than the solidarity of francophone countries.

We must remember that the destiny of francophones outside Quebec should not be dissociated from the affirmation of Quebec's identity, because our community owes its survival to its will to endure as a people. This solidarity among francophones in Canada must be strengthened.

Canada's francophone communities must not only survive, they must also be able to develop their cultural, economic and social potential in their own language.

The situation is not reassuring. Everywhere in Canada and even in Quebec, the position of French is precarious. Twenty-five years of official and individual bilingualism have not been able to stop the assimilation of francophones. Bilingualism is still too often a Francophone that speaks English.

It is also a fact that Canada's provinces have ignored the rights of their francophone minorities. Even worse, in a number of provinces, francophone communities are considered just

another ethnic community, a situation that was aggravated by the federal government's support for multiculturalism.

The closing of Collège militaire in Saint-Jean also brought to the fore the case of the French high school in Kingston, which is located in a building without washrooms or running water. Reality can be pretty grim!

When the Minister of Foreign Affairs says that to Canada, belonging to the Francophonie also means revealing to the rest of the world what is unique about Canada's situation, one wonders what situation he is talking about!

The Forum international de la Francophonie, which includes 47 countries from all continents, must continue to develop and make itself heard. This applies to all areas, including education, for instance, where the association of partially or fully French language universities, whose headquarters is in Montreal, does remarkable work, and also to the information technology sector and all other economic and cultural sectors.

I think that although it is appropriate to celebrate this international day of the Francophonie, we must not forget that we still have a long way to go, especially here in Canada.

**Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan):** Mr. Speaker, the Reform Party of Canada recognizes the Journée internationale de la Francophonie, that was officially celebrated yesterday, March 20.

Our party, being a party of the people, recognizes on this day that 23 per cent of Canadians are francophones.

At the same time, we realize that Canadians are part of la Francophonie, a worldwide group of 400 million people.

(1515)

Canada is a fortunate country. Despite our financial problems, we continue to provide assistance to other countries, but our help does not necessarily involve money.

We agree with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who just said that Canada will continue to promote the fundamental values dear to all Canadians such as democracy, human rights, women's equality, child welfare, education and training. By supporting these values in other countries, we hope to reinforce them at home.

We congratulate francophones from Canada and other countries around the world on this international day of la Francophonie.

*Routine Proceedings*

**INTEREST ACT**

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-227, an Act to amend the Interest Act (calculation of credit card interest).

He said: Mr. Speaker, as you know, our contemporary society makes heavy use of credit cards and I am the first to admit that these financial instruments are very useful.

Nevertheless, I believe that consumers are poorly informed about the cost of the services provided by the issuing companies. I would even add that many consumers are charged what I would call an excessive rate of interest.

This bill proposes an amendment to the Interest Act, so that the consumer can better judge the costs of various credit cards by standardizing the calculation of interest.

I am tabling today not one but two bills concerning this matter. You no doubt have both of them before you.

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

\* \* \*

**ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE LIMITATION OF INTEREST RATES AND FEES IN RELATION TO CREDIT CARD ACCOUNTS**

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-228, an Act to provide for the limitation of interest rates and fees in relation to credit card accounts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the second bill seeks to provide for the limitation of interest rates and fees in relation to credit card accounts, by means of a floating ceiling that would follow fluctuations in the bank rate.

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

\* \* \*

(1520)

[English]

**PETITIONS**

TOBACCO TAXES

**Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough):** Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions from citizens of the riding of Peterborough. All of them deal with the lowering of taxes on tobacco. Each makes a different point.

The first petition from 47 people of Peterborough stresses that the government should deal with smuggling in some other way.

The second petition which has 25 signatures says that the tax will cause between 175,000 and 350,000 more teenagers to smoke in Canada.

*Government Orders*

The third petition which also has 25 signatures stresses that the tobacco industry knows that lower taxes simply mean higher profits for it.

I present these petitions under Standing Order 36.

\* \* \*

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Shall all questions stand?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I wish to inform the House that, pursuant to Standing Order 33(2)(b), because of the ministerial statement, Government Orders will be extended by 12 minutes.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT  
SUSPENSION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I believe the hon. member for Kamloops had the floor prior to question period. We will go directly to questions and comments.

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services):** Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for my hon. colleague.

I was disappointed, assuming that I heard or interpreted the comments attributed to the Bloc Quebecois correctly, that it sort of washed its hands of this. It really did not matter because the Bloc did not expect to around the next time.

I have told the Bloc on several occasions that it has a responsibility to represent all Canadians. This bill is coming forward now and I would argue, and I would like my colleague's comments on this, that it has a responsibility to treat this seriously and not take its own myopic view and simply say it may not be around. It could go poof by the next election. That is my first comment.

My second is a question which is very simple and precise. In the 34th Parliament I had suggested that perhaps this Parliament, that is, l'ensemble des députés, should look at the possibility of significantly reducing the number of MPs. Would

this not be a wonderful opportunity to see whether we could do with one-quarter or perhaps one-third fewer MPs?

I would like to get my colleague's reaction. I think that Canadians would applaud such a move. It would mean a significant saving. For the record, I did make that request in the 34th Parliament. Perhaps it will be more easily supported in this, the 35th Parliament.

**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, I will answer my colleague's second question first.

I believe there is some merit in the proposal he raised in the last Parliament. It brings to mind a private member's bill that was put forward by my colleague then, the member for Yorkton—Melville. My colleague for Regina—Lumsden spoke to me about that earlier. It would have reduced the number of seats by about 60, I believe, about 20 per cent.

Again, this idea of a political party open to at least the suggestion of not only capping the seats in the House of Commons but actually reducing the number is something that we pursued in the past. It is the kind of thing that we would certainly be open to now in the discussions, assuming that this bill goes on to committee.

(1525)

In terms of the hon. member's comment regarding my friends in the Bloc, it was a good point. Over the past few weeks as this Parliament has unfolded one of the points I have noticed is there seemed to be a rather restricted geographic base of interest from my friends in the Bloc, tending to focus on issues that were more related to Quebec than perhaps to other parts of Canada. That seems to be a theme that has developed over a period of time.

The speaker from the Bloc made his points earlier and there seems to be almost a preoccupation with Quebec issues. It is not surprising for me, recognizing the mandate that the members have interpreted for themselves. I assumed that there was some inconsistency.

I take the suggestion by my hon. friend from St. Boniface seriously. Perhaps it is a reflection that the Bloc is widening its terms of reference as it interprets being the Official Opposition to represent issues far beyond the borders of Quebec.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse):** Mr. Speaker, following the comments made by the hon. member for Kamloops, I want to say that we made no secret of our sovereignist option and of the fact that we constantly promote that option for Quebec. Also, we will never resort to the scorched-earth policy. The seats we occupy do not belong to us: we are trustees. I fully agree with that observation made by the hon. member for Calgary West. Until last October 25, we had a government which thought that the whole country belonged to it. Look at what is left of that government now.

*Government Orders*

It is in this responsible fashion that the Official Opposition intends to continue to work on Bill C-18, which deals with electoral boundaries readjustment. This legislation might be in effect for the next general election, whether Quebec is still present or not.

I think it is a matter of responsibility for parliamentarians, regardless of their political affiliation, to participate in the business of the House. In my opinion, given this notion of responsibility, a party which would sit back and refuse to take part in the work of the House because of a political option or some bias, would certainly deserve to be blamed.

As I said earlier, as long as we are here, we intend to defend the interests of Canadians from coast to coast, all the way up to the Arctic. This must be very clear, and if we have to repeat it, we will constantly repeat it, being understood of course that our primary objective is Quebec's sovereignty.

However, we are not the ones who will decide; the decision rests with Quebecers. It is Quebec voters who, on referendum day, will decide their future, in the polling booth.

Whatever their decision, we must respect it. We believe and we hope that they will say yes, and in fact we will work for a yes vote for sovereignty, for empowerment, for the opening of Quebec to the world, to the francophonie and to the English-speaking world and all other cultures of course. If, unfortunately, we cannot reach our goal from the seat we occupy here and if others take over, we will have to work to ensure that it happens later, in the best possible manner.

We are here to promote Quebec's evolution in the context of a mature political context, and it makes me very sad every time I hear expressions such as "break up" or "collapse" in reference to Canada. We do not want to break anything other than political structures. Does the redefinition of Canada's political structures mean the breaking up of anything? Was there any mention of a "collapse" when the Canadian Constitution was rewritten in 1840, then in 1867, in 1931, and finally in 1982? No, rather we talked about affirmation. When Canada became sovereign, we celebrated. When Quebec becomes sovereign, we should also celebrate.

(1530)

[*English*]

**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend with some interest. First of all he says he is a separatist and that he is promoting separatism or sovereignty association or whatever. That is fine. I think it is a moot point.

He says that he wants his party to act as the Official Opposition. I do not think there is any question that if we did a content analysis of the questions asked by my friends in the Bloc we

would find overwhelmingly that those questions are focused geographically.

I do not recall many questions being raised about the west coast fishery, about the problems in the Arctic region, about agriculture on the prairies, about the Atlantic fishery, the fixed link with P.E.I, energy and mines. I hope this is a new trend that we will see. I would encourage my colleagues to take up the role of Official Opposition in a more appropriate way than they have in the past.

However, to listen to my friend talk about dismembering Canada as we know it and to say that this is not breaking up the country is mixing up our words somewhat. In a family when a piece of the family leaves, we talk about breaking up the family. When one loses a limb, one is obviously breaking up one's body somewhat.

To take a major part of Canada and separate it into a sovereign nation and say that is not breaking up Canada is a misuse of the term.

We should recognize that the fundamental purpose, as my colleague has indicated, of the Bloc in the House is to separate the province of Quebec from Canada, which in my terminology would be breaking up the country that we have known for the past 126 years in a formal sense.

It is a mixture of terminology. Perhaps some of it gets mixed up in the translation, but in my mind it is very clear what is going on. I do not support the Bloc in its fundamental mandate, but I do find encouragement in the fact that it says it is going to take on the role of Official Opposition in a more generous way in the future.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the thoughtful remarks of the hon. member for Kamloops on this subject.

I want to raise a couple of points with him. I appreciate the dissatisfaction that exists in interior British Columbia. I have had the opportunity, not in a great deal of detail, to review some of the proposed maps from the commission and certainly interior British Columbia has some of the stranger proposals. Some of them are unusual. Most are fairly standard types of proposals.

I am sure the hon. member for Kamloops would agree it would be appropriate in the interim to point his constituents toward the fact that the commission will be holding hearings in Kamloops on May 24. I am sure he will do that.

One thing he raised in his speech that I want to bring forward concerns the legislative program of the government. Does he find it unusual that we are discussing electoral boundaries when the budget is yet to be discussed, the omnibus budget bill, unemployment insurance concerns? Does he find that this is a strange example of parliamentary priorities in his long experience here?

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**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, to my colleague from Calgary West I want to say that one of the very first things I did when I saw the map was call a press conference and urge my constituents to write, serve notice that they would want to be interveners during the hearings on the new boundaries because they were so odd and so peculiar.

In terms of priority, my hon. colleague from Calgary West pointed out that part of the theme of this new government is to consult, to discuss, to study, to examine and to review. As a matter of fact, all we have really done so far is initiate reviews, studies and examinations of just about every conceivable area of responsibility for the federal government.

I suspect this is part of that thesis, although when we consider the priorities of the country we would have to look long and hard to find Canadians that would say the process we use for determining the boundaries of federal electoral districts is something that ought to be reviewed and given some priority.

I find myself in agreement with my friend that this is an odd priority. What is perhaps more odd is that it has come so quickly and out of nowhere.

(1535)

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to add some fresh thoughts on our debate about the proposed suspension of the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

I wonder if we should consider starting from the premise that this Parliament ought to interfere in due process set up by Parliament only for some clearly stated public policy purpose.

What concerns some of us in the House very much is that the purpose of this interference has not at all been stated. There is absolutely nothing in the bill that says what we are hoping to achieve by suspension of the process that has been in effect now for many months.

The proposed bill is entirely silent on important elements that would provide some direction and also that would allow the citizens we serve to evaluate the merits of the process. Other speakers have stated clearly, and I would agree, that the effects of the present process are somewhat undesirable.

I represent the riding of Calgary North. It is the largest riding in terms of voter population in the province of Alberta, with over 94,000 electors. It is growing very quickly. New communities are being built up rapidly and the boundaries of the riding are expanding.

This commission in its initial proposal which was mailed to the electors in my riding did not just take away a portion of the riding, which is the largest riding in Alberta and growing. Obviously part of it will have to go somewhere else. The commission ripped the thing in half and gave me a chunk of

someone else's riding. Not only did this disrupt the sense of community that the riding has enjoyed for a while but it also took away a part of another sense of community that has been built up in another riding.

There would not be any problem with taking away from the largest riding in Alberta, but to do that on one hand and then give me part of another one does not make a whole lot of sense in my view and in the view of many of my constituents. The concern that has been stated on all sides of the House is the tendency of the commission to violate the sense of community that has been built up. I would suggest that this is a valid concern.

If we are going to have our citizens participating in the political process in a meaningful way then the provisions of the act that instruct the commission to respect the community of interest, to look at geographic criteria should have been more closely followed by the commission. I think that is a valid criticism.

The problem is that we have identified the problem but not the solution. What we are doing in this case is taking away an important element that would help us to identify solutions. That would be to proceed with the public hearings which have been scheduled to begin in a couple of weeks across the country for which many of our citizens are preparing.

The hon. member for Kamloops has just stated that in his riding citizens have already been preparing for those hearings. Here we are at the very last second pulling the rug out from under this process and not allowing the citizens of the country to help us move in better directions if we are agreed that we do need different directions.

I believe there is some real virtue in moving on to permit these public views to be heard, to assist parliamentarians who represent the citizens of the country, to look at the process, to adjust it so that the results are more desirable for all of us and to open the process up to that kind of input.

(1540)

It could be very beneficial for us as parliamentarians to have the views of other citizens in the country who are directly affected by the work of the commission. It would also ensure that any future rules that were proposed were not open to the charge that has been made by other speakers in today's debate that the process has been interfered with in a partisan, unfair or inappropriate manner.

I believe that if we let the public speak on this situation the public would bring up the very same concerns that we in Parliament have, perhaps with an added perspective, definitely with a different credibility. I would urge the government to consider seriously whether this process should go ahead. I recommend that it does.

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The process that is set up under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act is represented as being independent of political influence, and so it should be. Some speakers today have registered a concern that in stopping this present process and not putting in a clear process today that could be evaluated, political influence is a definite possibility in the future.

I would suggest that the House, if it wishes to maintain the confidence of the Canadian public, should protect that principle of independence by commissions that are engaged in these types of exercises and that we ought to affirm that principle of independence. Whatever we do in the House or whatever the government does to affect the process must clearly protect the integrity of the process rather than leave it open to even a suspicion that there can be partisan tinkering with it.

Unfortunately no safeguards are proposed in the legislation to address this very legitimate concern. That is one of the reasons, in spite of the disagreement that members of the House have with the commission's initial proposals, we feel that the present action of the government in simply putting a stop to the whole process without safeguards, without any clear direction, is inappropriate and why we do not support the bill that is before us today.

In Calgary hearings by the commission have been scheduled for April 20. We have urged citizens there to make their proposals known. We hope that this kind of participation can still take place. If the government, after today's debate, after hearing some of the concerns and suggestions from other members of the House, will allow those hearings to proceed it will encourage participation of the public in what is happening with redistribution.

There have been many suggestions made today that the people of Canada do not want to pay more members of Parliament. Some people have been so unkind as to suggest that some members of the public feel that the 295 we have today are not entirely worth their pay. I am sure that is not true but it has been suggested by some.

If it is true that the people of Canada do not want to see an increase in the number of members of the House, the number of members representing and governing them, we ought to give them an opportunity to air this concern. That would be another purpose of the public hearings that we feel should not be stopped but should go ahead.

The suggestion has been made in the House but there really has been no opportunity for the members of the public to make this suggestion. Perhaps if they were allowed to speak they would be happy to have more of us doing the fine job that we are doing. However, if they do not feel that way they should be allowed to say so clearly and to the proper body.

I want to emphasize that this exercise of electoral redistribution and the public hearings that accompany it really go to the

root of the democratic principle of representation. In a democracy we abide by the principle of one person, one vote. That is a very important principle of democracy. That means that our proportional representation has to be unified across the country.

(1545)

The redistribution that is necessary because of fluctuations in population is important and the exercise that surrounds this redistribution is important because it touches this very fundamental proposition of one person, one vote, a proportional representation.

I would emphasize that we ought not to interfere with this exercise lightly because of the very fundamental principles that it speaks to. I think the people of Canada would have a right to be concerned if a government used its majority against the wishes of all members of the House, of all representatives of the people, to interfere in a very fundamental democratic exercise without having the opportunity for people to speak themselves.

I would suggest that rather than exercising our power as legislators to pass judgment on the proposals of the commission, although we are certainly entitled to state our concerns and opinions and would be free to do so in the commission hearings, that instead we use our responsibilities as leaders to ensure full and fair public debate and review of the commission's proposals.

I think that would be the service that we should render to the public rather than simply using our own unilateral judgment to put a stop to the exercise of the commission's jurisdiction.

I think that we as legislators also have a responsibility to ensure that the commission respects the provisions of section 15 of the present Electoral Boundaries Redistribution Act which mandates that they look at community and geographic considerations and some of the things that we could argue have been violated in the initial proposals of the commission.

However, I would emphasize that these are initial proposals only, that they are not written in stone. They are, presumably and certainly ostensibly, open to public input and public influence. I would suggest that we allow that process to go ahead.

In summary I believe there are public policy reasons to re-examine the present process. It is clear that there is a lot of unhappiness both in terms of the growing numbers of MPs that have been suggested and in terms of the violation of community and the sense of cohesion that has been built up in many areas through political involvement.

However, I believe that this process should be carefully and thoughtfully considered and rather than just throwing out \$5 million worth of work today that we give some clear direction when we do change the process and that the changes be proposed only when they have been properly framed and not just on "we don't like this, we don't know what we like, but we are not going

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to go ahead with this”, especially without the public being able to speak on this.

With that recommendation I urge members of the House to support our proposed amendment to this bill.

[Translation]

**Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Calgary North has made an interesting speech based on the principle of public representation, arguing that the people should be able to make representations on how the new federal ridings would be redistributed.

I think this is an excellent point and it would be great if all the various communities within a riding were homogenous instead of having totally divergent interests as is often the case at present.

(1550)

I would like to ask the hon. member for Calgary North the following question. You can see the size of this chamber. A few years ago, ten, fifty, a hundred years ago, there certainly were not 295 members sitting here. Not so long ago, there were about 250. There used to be 200 and, before that, perhaps 150. Today, we are 295 and we are about to add another six, at a cost of approximately \$9 million, \$10 million or \$12 million.

So, I can see two problems. One is that, at this rate, there will come a point, in 2050 or 2090, where this chamber will no longer be large enough to hold all the new members. Walls will have to be moved back to make room for the extra seats that will have to be made. If you look to the south, in the United States, they have only 100 senators for a total population of about 250 million.

My riding is huge. It is currently the fourth largest of all urban and rural ridings in Canada, and I am not complaining. I am rather proud of it. I think that there is a way, when you how, to represent your riding well and not lose touch with the community.

I am sure that the hon. member has noticed that in Prince Edward Island, they have ridings—and I do not mean any disrespect; I am merely stating a fact—which are no larger than certain neighbourhoods in cities like Calgary or here, in the Ottawa area. They have four members of Parliament representing 135,000 people, and I do mean people as opposed to voters. There are probably no more than 20,000 to 25,000 voters in some of these ridings, and even that is generous. Now, there is a problem there, but the province and its right to be represented have to be respected. This is a case where we would have to refer to the Constitution.

For those of us from other parts of the country where there are no such guarantees, is this room not getting a little crowded? And have our national debt and public debt not grown so much that we should act to curb the growth of the number of elected members?

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Before I give the floor to the hon. member for Calgary North, I know it is the beginning of the week and possibly I have been a little more generous with the time than I should be, but I do want to give the opportunity to each and every member who wishes to speak to this issue that opportunity in the next few hours or however long the debate might go on. I understood that members are sharing time in tens and fives and I think if we were to check the times we would find that we have rather extended those quite generously.

In all fairness to the very good question following an interesting intervention by the member for Calgary North, I would ask the member for Calgary North if she would not mind just giving the House at this moment the short version and possibly she may want to discuss the matter more fully with her colleague at a later time so that we can get the debate back on track within the confines of the time limitations we put on one another.

**Mr. Harper (Calgary West):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should have indicated to you a few minutes ago that Reform members are not presently sharing their time. I had indicated that in a discussion with your predecessor and I guess that information was not passed on. There was some lack of clarity on that.

I do not know how you want to proceed with this particular speaker, but after this speaker I do not think for the time being we will be sharing our time. We will not be sharing our time.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I apologize to all members in the House, and particularly to the member for Calgary North and the member for Carleton—Gloucester.

I understand now very clearly from the member for Calgary West that Reform members participating in the debate will not be sharing their time but in fact will take the full 20 minute complement followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments. Is that correct?

The member for Calgary North has more time than I had first indicated.

(1555)

**Mrs. Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, we probably owe you an apology for not communicating directly to you on that point. I am sure that members of the House will be absolutely delighted to know that I can now give them the long answer to the hon. member's question rather than the short answer.

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I believe his points were well taken. With respect to Prince Edward Island, now that the causeway is going ahead perhaps the population of that area of the country will increase to justify more representation.

I believe his comment with respect to other countries, particularly our neighbour to the south, is very interesting and very appropriate where a much larger population appears to be well served. In fact, some people think it is still over-served by a much lesser number of representatives than we have here in Canada. I believe that their Congress is not a whole lot bigger than our House of Commons even though they have 10 times the population. That is one argument I have certainly heard advanced by many Canadians against expanding the membership of this Chamber.

I would like to touch on another aspect of this in response to the hon. member's question as to whether we really need more representatives. I think this goes to the root and scope of our representation here in the Canadian Parliament. On this side of the House we have argued rather strenuously and will continue to argue that the scope of our representation in this Chamber is very circumscribed. In other words, we really do not have the freedom we think is necessary to represent the wishes and directives of our constituents as should be available in a representative democracy through things like free votes. Quite often we find in the House members are voting and acting in accordance with strict directives from their party.

If that is going to continue to be the case, I would suggest that indeed there could be fewer of us simply responding to directives from the executive portion of our party. If we are going to truly solicit and actively represent the concerns and wishes and directives of our constituents then we would have much more legitimacy, especially with respect to numbers than we do today.

Last, I would like to point out to the hon. member that although I agree with his contention that we ought not to increase the numbers in this Chamber, and as he rightly points out there are even physical limitations on that today, this bill makes absolutely no commitment to do that. There is nothing in this bill that says we are going to turn this back to committee with a view to ensuring that the number of members in this Chamber does not increase.

That is a real concern. I would say to the hon. member that for that reason I would urge him to support the amendment we have made to give a period of time so that those very specific directions can be built into the bill and then the bill can be brought back. We know where we are going and we know what we want to achieve. It is clearly stated and we can go forward on a much more solid basis that is open to evaluation and debate rather than just throwing the thing wide open again.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Calgary North for her comments. The hon. member for Calgary North and I and other members of the Reform caucus from Calgary have been co-operating on a submission to be made to the public hearings in Calgary on April 20. We certainly appreciate her efforts in that regard and also the fact that she has really been in the forefront of making sure that her constituents are aware of this and are able to participate in the process.

The question I would like to ask the hon. member for Calgary North flows from the previous comment from the hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester. So far today every speaker has indicated a desire to see the number of MPs capped or even reduced. Certainly nobody seems to be saying they want the number of MPs increased.

Blocking the public hearing process will not accomplish that. In fact, having the public hearing process will not accomplish it either because it is not a matter of the boundaries commission. It is a matter of the formula to which the House in conjunction with the Senate could make some alterations.

(1600)

This whole process could be facilitated if we could agree on the issue of capping the number of MPs. I am curious as to whether the hon. member has observed the same thing in debate. Why does she believe the government is so reluctant to make this commitment if there seems to be support for this kind of measure from all sides of the House. I am sure she is hearing the same thing from some of her constituents.

**Mrs. Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, one of the points we have been making is that we want a commitment in this bill to cap the number of members of Parliament.

As the hon. member for Calgary West rightly points out this would be within the purview of the House of Commons through an amendment to section 51 of the Constitution. This House has the jurisdiction to make that amendment because it pertains to a federal matter.

In speaking with other members and particularly government members, we have urged a commitment like that to be built into this process or a review of the process. I want to emphasize that this has not been done. This is very disturbing to me as a representative of electors. I have no idea why this could not have been done and was not done.

It does raise the question as to how serious the government is about capping or committing not to increase the number of members. Rather than just taking a chance on a proper proposal or a commitment coming out of a new process, it would be far better to make that commitment right up front as a condition of going in a different direction with the process rather than hoping that somehow it comes out of talks within the House or in committees in the next few months.

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**Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, in the 1993 election Canadians from small rural towns to large urban centres told whoever would listen they wanted a reduction in the size and cost of government. They continue to expect their elected representatives to provide leadership on this issue. By not listening the government is failing yet again to provide that leadership Canadians are seeking.

The government as a minimum must review the process by which representation takes place if it is to demonstrate it takes the wishes of the electorate seriously. Most certainly the number of seats in this House must be capped.

I recognize that electoral riding boundaries are not frozen for all time, nor should they be. Changes in population distribution often render electoral boundaries obsolete requiring them to be changed. However, changes should be made with one important element in mind: This country cannot afford any more members of Parliament. What it needs are parliamentary reforms that will make the system and the MPs we do have more effective in carrying out their roles in the House.

One of the most important of those reforms is Senate reform. An elected Senate would ensure that regional interests are effectively balanced against the electoral distribution we now have, one that is heavily weighted in favour of central Canada. An equal, elected and effective Senate is what Canada needs, not more MPs. The long range interest of Canadian federalism, a reformed Senate, must be put ahead of short term expediency, more MPs. Reforming the Senate is the kind of long range planning Canadians expect from government.

The 35th Parliament must take a leadership role in demonstrating we are seriously heeding the wishes of Canadians and that we are acting on their advice. The bill before us today should therefore be rejected by all members who respond directly to the wishes of their electorate.

(1605)

Like a number of other government programs the exact cost of yet another proposal to possibly add more members of Parliament cannot be calculated.

For example the government has yet to deal with the cost of MPs pensions. While we support the government's intention to review MPs pensions, we cannot endorse the mixed message this bill sends to Canadians. Where is the government's commitment to control and limit spending? Let us be clear and provide consistent messages to Canadians because they are not only listening but they are also watching.

We support a federal democratically elected government that provides equity to all regions through a reasonable alignment of boundaries. Equity is better served through downsizing than through upsizing.

Given that the government cannot fund all of our current expenditures out of revenues, it falls to our lenders to fund with interest these additional costs. It is becoming a very scary part of Canadian government that our lenders are funding with interest those activities and actions we wish to pursue in this House.

In recent years the trend in corporate communities has been to become more efficient. Companies in the nineties have become slim and trim to give better services with decreased overhead. When will the government learn to look to the private sector to see where it is going and what it is doing? There are many lessons to be learned there.

I do not understand how the government is going to create jobs for Canadians when it has no concept of what is going on in the private sector. I certainly met no one during the 1993 election campaign who felt that job creation meant more jobs for MPs.

We are clearly over governed. We have three levels of government. Among the three levels of government there are thousands of elected representatives. The House of Commons has 295 MPs representing some 28 million people. This works out to approximately 94,915 Canadians for every member of Parliament.

The Prime Minister likes to make comparisons between Canada and the United States. I agree with the Prime Minister that we look outside of Canada for comparisons to measure our own performance.

In the United States there are 435 congressmen in the House of Representatives and 100 senators. This totals only 535 representatives for some 250 million Americans. This works out to one elected representative for every 467,300 Americans. I have not heard of any support from Americans to increase their levels of representation by 497 per cent to bring them in line with the level of representation provided for in Canada. This per capita comparison clearly shows that we do not need more MPs; we probably could do with less.

Until there is a comprehensive review of Canada's electoral needs as we approach the 21st century and an accompanying strategic plan, there should be a moratorium on changes to electoral boundaries. The government should guarantee there will not be an increase in the number of seats in Parliament. The notion of simply adding MPs as the population grows lacks any vision regarding representation.

A move toward a downsized and elected Senate will stabilize representation at a lower cost. Making senators accountable to their constituents will allow a further reduction in the number of MPs required to provide greater voter representation than that found in most other democracies.

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(1610)

The government has suggested that a parliamentary panel should study the redistribution and size of Parliament. This suggestion causes the people of Canada, and I am one of them, great concern. They have been left out of the decision making process long enough.

It is time government recognized that Canadians are not satisfied to sit idly by and let politicians make decisions without consulting them. The government says it is committed to an open and honest style of governance. Yet at every turn it is calling for councils, panels and committees that do not include nor are open to the public.

It is not up to current members of Parliament to put forward proposals to alter constituency boundaries for future elections. When a redistribution takes place on a large scale the House of Commons frequently rings out with what one MP, Mr. C. G. Power, frankly described as an unseemly, undignified and utterly confusing scramble for personal or political advantage.

Since 1892 Tory governments have proposed committees to redistribute electoral ridings and the Liberals have opposed them. Conversely, Liberal governments have proposed committees to redistribute electoral ridings and the Tories have opposed them. The opposition premise was that the committees were only serving the interests of the government.

Remember the 34th Parliament and how the Liberals objected to an expanded Senate. The Senate has not brought any improvement to Canadian representation. The Liberal opposition of the day argued that electoral boundary changes would only benefit those on the committee deciding the changes. Why have the Liberals now so dramatically changed their position? They are now proposing yet another committee with a mandate to study electoral boundary changes which would likely recommend increases, not decreases, to the number of MPs.

I am not opposing out of my own self-interest. I oppose electoral boundary redistribution because I want to ensure there will be no new seats and preferably fewer than we have today. This is what the constituents I represent are telling me. Further, this exercise by parliamentarians does not include the public beyond broader based review nor does it have the popular support of the public.

We are calling for the government to adopt a procedure that cannot be accused of being partisan. Electoral boundary changes must only be implemented if they will benefit Canadians.

There were calls for non-partisan redistribution prior to the BNA Act, 1867. Those wishes still have not been satisfied. We in the Reform Party are bringing to the House those popular

wishes, wishes that government in this country have failed to listen to for 127 years.

I ask the House to support our amendment.

**Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the part of the hon. member's speech where she was comparing our system with the American system.

I have spoken to a lot of American congressmen and women in the last five years. I have often talked to them about the size of their constituencies.

The hon. member mentioned the American constituencies were about five times larger than ours. They are about 500,000 on average compared to our 100,000. What the hon. member failed to mention is that the size of their staff ranges from 18 to 25 workers. One will find that is an increase of 5 per cent.

In making a comparison therefore we should be comparing the whole picture. Sure their constituencies are larger in that they have 500,000 to our 100,000, but the size of their staff is five times larger as well. It is fair to mention that also. Maybe we could add that to the bill when we are considering it a bit later. Perhaps the member has something to say on that.

(1615)

**Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her comments and her observations.

For me and as I represent my constituents, those individuals who elected me to the 35th Parliament, I have to say that they are the ones who are giving me my direction. I would like to read from one of those constituents who sent me a letter with regard to the whole matter of electoral redistribution. She wrote:

Dear Jan:

Do we really need more government? At this time we are so far in debt, we should be looking at all ways to reduce costs and restricting the increase in the size of all our governing bodies, not increasing our debts.

Therefore, I would like to see all boundaries remain the same or better still reduce the size of the House of Commons and get our huge debt under control.

The issue at stake is not only representation. It is also keeping our expenditures under control, managing our money more effectively, and keeping our debt under control. Quite frankly it is scary to me to consider that staffing issues will be increasing and burgeoning in light of the enormous debt costs we carry and that the request of my constituents would be ignored in that instance.

Once again I thank the hon. member for her observations. I trust she will understand why I stand here and speak on behalf of, for and with the constituents of Calgary Southeast.

**Mr. Werner Schmidt (Okanagan Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Calgary Southeast a question. I found her address extremely interesting and very

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refreshing, particularly her reference that Parliament ought to become more effective and more efficient and her reference to how the other place might be changed.

Would it be possible for her to outline for us, in perhaps greater detail, how one could actually bring about a change of that sort and how it could relate to the House of Commons and make Parliament a more effective place?

**Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I would like to reference my answer with a little story.

At the last meeting in Calgary Southeast that I attended with some of my constituents a motion was put forward that will come forward at our assembly in October. I got a very clear message about how effective and efficient they would like us to become here. In this policy they are requesting that we reduce the number of MPs in the House from 295 to 140.

That gave an idea about trimming down, paring down and increasing efficiency here. That gave me a very clear and powerful message from them.

**Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette):** Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting half hour sitting here, listening to and seeing how hon. members who sit with me referred to half the thoughts I was to mention on this afternoon. I will try to enlarge a few of them and address a few comments to hon. members across the House.

We are addressing Bill C-18. I have not been in politics very long but I have seen some of the bills presented to the House. I have noticed how additions have been made to bills to get them through, to make them a little sweeter, to sweeten the bait so that people can support them.

If hon. members on the other side of the House had really wanted to pass the bill, they would have probably included such things as suspending strikes in the western grain handling system. That has just cost my constituents about \$200 million in sales. That would have helped me to support the bill instead of being against it.

(1620)

Why did they not also include in the bill to sweeten it up a bit a suspension of the gold-plated pension plans for MPs? Then I could have supported the bill. My constituents would have sent me congratulatory messages as soon as I left the floor of the House.

Why did they not include the suspension of phrases that we cannot use in the House when we want to give our appreciation to or criticize the other place or whatever they call it? I could have supported that. I could have gone home and said: "I am for Bill C-18", and people would have loved me for it.

Many members have raised concerns about the redrafting of constituencies, especially our hon. friends on the other side. I see a few little problems with it. I do not think they are that severe. I think we can overcome those little problems. One

problem I have with my constituency is that it is gone. I do not object too much to that, but the name Lisgar, a very prominent name in Canadian history, will be gone. I will dwell on that point a little later. I do not find it so objectionable that I do not have that riding to run in next time because the piece of property where I live is still there. It is going to be included in the boundaries of Portage. It is a real incentive for me to run in the constituency of Portage; it means that I have to defeat another federal minister. I did that in the last election. It really gives me incentive to be a politician.

The bill suspends the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. What does that really mean? It means we are suspending a regulation or a rule entrenched in the Constitution. Why is it such a serious issue? I would like to dwell on it for a few minutes.

In 1992 when we were discussing the referendum to change the Constitution I will never forget Mr. Peter Warren, a very well-known investigative reporter for CJOB in Manitoba, said: "I am going to read to you the best constitution that has ever been written and then just show and point out to you how valuable a constitution is".

I wondered what he would read the following day because I was not that informed about constitutions. He read the manifesto of 1917 written for the Communist Party. If that constitution were taken to legal authorities or political analysts, it would be found to be the best constitution that has ever been written, guaranteeing all freedoms, all rights, everything needed in a perfect constitution.

However the reason it did not work in the Soviet Union was that politicians did not honour it. All of a sudden they felt they could suspend the right to have property. All of a sudden they thought they had the right to suspend freedom of religion. All of a sudden in 1937, when things got really hostile in the world, they thought they had the right to suspend the judicial system. When my uncle was accused of being a traitor to the Soviet government he did not have the right to appeal to the government. A military tribunal accused him of being a traitor and he was shot the following day without having any representation.

That is what happens when we as politicians change the guidelines and the rules of a constitution. If after the hearings of April 29 Canadians say that the boundaries commission is no good, that they do not want it, I will very gladly support them in having the boundaries commission stopped. We as politicians do not have the right, according to our Constitution, to do that before we have had the hearings. That is why this worries me a bit.

(1625)

If the procedures and House affairs committee fails to put forward a new proposal for consideration by the House, there is no contingency plan offered to save the work done by the current commission. If no new process is introduced the original

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process that was started is finished, which means that we will have wasted \$5 million worth of work.

Is this the way to run government? That is why I said previously that if the right to strike had been suspended we could have saved \$200 million, which would have made a lot more sense to me.

I am aware of no proof that Canadians are dissatisfied with current distribution. Politicians are another story. I have heard that the problem with redistribution comes from politicians. This would be the second political interference in the process since the 1991 census. Politicians should remove themselves from the process, except for the purpose of ensuring that the number of MPs does not increase.

As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier in the House, it is amazing how quickly politicians can get action in the House when their own interests are threatened. When they hear about criminals being let loose and about children who are starving they are very slow to react, but here is a situation which does not suit us and we react.

Once it was determined that the commission's proposals could change the chances of re-election, the government was very easily prodded to take action. It put its feet against the wall and said: "This is no good. This process does not work. Let us change it".

Very often constituents can pester their MPs and the government for action on an issue that is important to them and their community and they get very little response. But once the politicians' interests are threatened we see immediate action like we see here today.

This problem clearly highlights the need for more regional representation. This is the whole issue. Hon. members object to this process. They are not so much worried about the process as they are about losing political clout in some areas where they have had it and want to keep it. This is why I think it is very important, as my hon. colleague said, that we go to a more regional and equal redistribution of the Senate. I would fully support her comments about that.

It worries me when I see that in Manitoba we would lose more rural MPs. That is the one thing I do not like, and we would get more urban MPs. The people who have little power already would get less power down the road. By increasing the members of Parliament from huge urban areas we would be getting less regional representation than more.

That is why I think we should go to an elected, equal Senate like the United States has. That is why I can support my hon. colleague. The problem with the current system is not only that it adds more MPs but it increases costs. It is useful to compare the Canadian system with the American system as my hon.

colleague did. Her figures are much like mine. Each representative in their house represents about half a million people. Each state has two senators, no matter what the size of the population, and each senator represents about 2.5 million people. When I look at the issue today in the United States and the clout that those farmers have because of these two Senate representatives in the farm states, it amazes me why we have not done this a lot sooner so that we could have equal representation from regions and have equal distribution of wealth or a chance to improve our economics in those areas.

(1630)

Perhaps I should not raise it here. The Prime Minister was a little upset about not getting the wages that hockey players receive. I remind the House that hockey players' salaries are based on United States guidelines of what they think they are worth. If our Prime Minister served 10 times the population and increased his wages by 10 times, he would probably get more money than a hockey player. That is my answer to the value as far as our work is concerned. As an MP, if I did 10 times as much as I am doing today maybe my wages would be a little higher too. We have to put those things in perspective.

I said I was opposed to this redistribution because of one or two concerns. One is about the name change. Adding six letters to the name of Portage could be very easily remedied for me. It would either read Lisgar—Portage or Portage—Lisgar. That would satisfy my complaints about the redistribution problem.

Hon. members may wonder why I am so set on having the name Lisgar in that constituency. This is what I found out looking into the records of the House. The name Lisgar is of significant importance because Sir John Lisgar is a great figure in Canadian history. He was born in Bombay, India, and educated at Oxford University. He was the member of Parliament for County Cavan and served as a Lord of the Treasury from 1844 to 1846 and the chief secretary for Ireland from 1852 to 1855.

During his term in Canada Lisgar took an active role in diffusing Canadian—American tensions created by the Red River rebellion and the Fenian raids. We know how important the rebellion was in Manitoba, the Louis Riel rebellion as they called it. We lose a tremendous part of history if we lose the name Lisgar.

He was a strong supporter of Confederation. He helped negotiate the transfer of Rupertsland and the entry of Manitoba into Confederation. He also encouraged British Columbia to join. He was designated by John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister at that time, as the best Governor General that Canada ever had.

This is what we lose if we take the name Lisgar out of Canadian history. I would encourage the commission and I am

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going to write a letter to it asking it to change the name Portage to Portage—Lisgar or Lisgar—Portage, whichever way.

We can see that this name is of great importance to all Canadians and in particular Manitobans. I am at a loss therefore as to why it was dropped. I hope that when the commission finishes its work, completed its hearings, it will come to the conclusion that is beneficial to Canadians as a whole, not as Canadian politicians but Canadian citizens.

The reason we are here as members of Parliament is to follow the wishes, suggestions and guidance of our constituents. We are desperately failing to do that with Bill C-18. There has been no discussion of this bill in any constituencies. It has been done very expediently and quickly for some members of the House.

I hope that we honestly start recognizing that we represent our constituents, that we are here for one purpose, to serve them, not just to tell them how to be served.

(1635)

**Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville):** Mr. Speaker, the member made some reference to what the Prime Minister said in the context of the poorest NHL hockey players in reference to what MPs should be making. I am not talking about the pension. That is something that most MPs here think should be addressed, particularly when there is no age factor to qualify. I leave that out of it.

Would the member just throw out a figure? What would he think? He has been here now for four or five months. He knows some of the costs associated with the job. I do not think he would want it to be said that in order to be a member of Parliament one had to have an outside source of money. That would put it on a totally different plane. It would eliminate a lot of people from ever aspiring to become a member of Parliament if they had to be wealthy to start with. I do not think that is what the member was suggesting.

What would be a fair reimbursement for the kind of demand that is put on a member of Parliament, on his time and his resources and energy and the costs that he has? Perhaps some Canadians are not fully aware that there are costs associated with being a member of Parliament, particularly like the member who has just spoken whose riding is a considerable distance from here. Would he give me a figure? What would be an appropriate salary?

**Mr. Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question. I would like to answer it in this fashion.

I ran as a member of Parliament and said that I did not care if I did not get a dollar out of this job. I have come here to make sure that in the future there is a country left for my children and grandchildren.

If one wants to know how serious I am about that, I was called into a meeting in my constituency not too long ago about some of the infrastructure programs that hon. members have provided for us. One of my town councils was very interested in it.

I said to the mayor that I had read about two months ago that they had increased their salaries by 2 per cent. I asked him whether that was a fact. He said that yes, it was a fact. I asked him how he could justify that. They wanted a handout from the federal government. They could not run their town council efficiently enough to do without these subsidies and he was asking me to represent him. I said that he was not dedicated enough to freeze his own wages. I knew he was a professional, that he was drawing a fairly good wage to date, that he did not need the bucks.

I would say to the hon. member that I do not think there is a member of Parliament here today who really is going to starve if his wages are frozen until this debt or deficit mess is cleaned up. That is why I am here. I am here to try to make level headed, honest decisions that will benefit future generations and not for my wage cheque today or my pension plan. I am dead serious about that.

When I found that this council had given itself a 2 per cent wage increase, I said that if it wanted any support from me it should kill that wage increase. Whether it will listen to me or not, I do not know, but that is how I would like to respond to the hon. member. I am prepared to sit here without a wage increase until we have a balanced budget and then I will tell the member what I think his work is worth.

Right now we have bigger things to do than worry about salary increases.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, as always I enjoyed the speeches from the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette. He raised a number of issues which I would like to comment on and which maybe he would like to respond to. First, I would note his concern about regional representation and rural representation and the fact that both he and the previous speaker from Calgary Southeast have indicated the importance of Senate reform. I think that is very important to recognize.

(1640)

I have heard a lot of complaints in the last few weeks from members who are being affected negatively by redistribution in various parts of the country. They wish there were some protections for large rural and remote ridings and that they did not simply just grow and grow in order to represent a certain level of population. I understand that concern. This is why our party has been so outspoken and persistent in pursuing the issue of Senate reform. That is of course what the Senate was designed to do. I find it strange that some members who are now in the context of their own riding, not the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette but others, complaining about lack of regional representation

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and are opposed to the kind of meaningful Senate reform that our party supports.

I point out to the member, and I am sure the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette is aware of this or he would not have made reference to these matters, that section 42(1)(a) of the Constitution Act of 1982 states:

An amendment to the Constitution of Canada in relation to the following matters may be made only in accordance with subsection 38(1):

That of course is the two-thirds amending formula. That:

(a) the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons prescribed by the Constitution of Canada;

In other words, some members not of this party but of other parties who are indicating that they are willing to look at the issue of regional representation in the context of reform of the House of Commons are really inadvertently misleading the public. There is no such opportunity to do so unless we enter into constitutional negotiations and get approval by two-thirds of the provinces. That is definitely off the table. I am glad the hon. member brought those matters to our attention.

The hon. member also discussed his concerns about boundary and name changes in Manitoba. My understanding of past practices has been that it is very common for commissions to accept recommendations, particularly on name changes. I am sure he will want to approach the commission on that basis. I am just wondering if that is simply his own viewpoint or whether he has heard this complaint from other constituents, whether there have been other kinds of complaints and what mechanisms are available.

I understand there will be hearings at some point in Portage la Prairie. Perhaps he could tell us a little bit more about what he has heard from his constituents and what they intend to do.

Finally, his comment about the constitution of the Soviet Union I thought was very interesting and something I would like to hear more about. Of course it is true that some of these autocratic or totalitarian states have had highly democratic constitutions but there are no structures of government behind them to protect people's actual rights. They are just pieces of paper. Maybe he could tell us whether he and his constituents feel that their rights in terms of representation would be better protected by the independent commissions that exist today and are operating as we speak that this bill would close or whether they would be better protected by a committee of this House controlled by partisan politicians.

**Mr. Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate those questions from my colleague from Calgary. I think I will address the last question first. The last question was about the commissions.

This name change has stirred up quite a bit of comment in my constituency. As the member knows from recent history, Lisgar had the multiculturalism minister for the Canadian government at one time. It also had the minister of oilseeds and the minister of the wheat board. It later became the agriculture minister. If one goes back in history there was a time when the constituency of Lisgar was represented by the Liberals, a very honourable and very effective member known as Howard Winkler. If we look back in the history books we will see his name. He was very well respected in the Lisgar constituency. The majority of people in my riding of Lisgar—Marquette are former Lisgar people and they are very interested in keeping that name and there will be a number of recommendations to this commission on that basis, the preservation of the name Lisgar.

(1645)

They are not that upset over the boundary change because Lisgar—Portage will actually be a smaller riding than Lisgar—Marquette. It will be better represented whether it is a federal minister or not.

The other one that I want to address, and I see the motion going, is about the United States, farming close to the border. Having had that experience the last couple of weeks on agriculture problems, they do not go to their congressmen, they go to their senator.

Two weeks ago we were hooked up with Senator Dorgan and myself among a number of American and Canadian farmers discussing the durum wheat issue and the tombstone issue and other diseases affecting wheat.

It is amazing how these farmers depend on their senators because of the regional area they represent. Look at Senator Dole representing Kansas, look at all the agriculture states having senators to represent them. They do most of the trouble-shooting for the American farmer. That is why it is so important that they have regional representation.

When it comes to the Soviet constitution, get a copy of it and read it. It is very direct in protecting human rights which were so badly abused later. I would never want to see that happen in this country.

That is why I would rather give up redistribution than go against the Constitution and force on people what they do not want.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Davenport—the Environment; the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle—Information Highway; the hon. member for Capilano—Howe Sound—Immigration.

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**Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose Bill C-18.

I can understand the first blush reaction of my colleagues. The results of \$5 million of work do not appear to be very satisfying.

In many instances the suggested changes of the commission just do not make common sense. However, Bill C-18 seems to be a step backward in time and could represent the slippery slope of partisan interference in riding boundary making.

The commission has been doing its work in good faith. However, the boundaries in the lower mainland of British Columbia do not seem to follow natural geographic divisions or reflect the psychological sense of community or sense of place that needs to be imparted to a political representative.

I am often asked what riding I represent. My riding of New Westminster—Burnaby and the riding of Burnaby—Kingsway are sometimes confused. Fortunately there is never any confusion between me and the member for Burnaby—Kingsway.

New Westminster has a distinctiveness, a history of the riding name that goes back to the by-election of 1871, the year British Columbia joined Confederation. In those days I suspect one had to be a British subject, a male, and probably a land owner to be eligible to vote.

At that first election the riding was very large and included all the hinterland of the Fraser Valley, past Abbotsford and Chilliwack, up the Fraser canyon to Yale.

Successively the riding boundary has been cut back as the population grew. Six of my colleagues now represent former parts of my riding.

The riding of New Westminster—Burnaby was most recently rationalized for the 1988 election and like all others was the same for the October 1993 election.

There is some improvement in the proposed distinctions in the name change as Burnaby—Kingsway riding will now become Burnaby North.

The city of Burnaby is currently split between the riding known as Burnaby—Kingsway taking its name from the city and from the main historical street that was the horse trail between New Westminster and access from Fraser Rivers to the Vancouver ice free port.

(1650)

The proposed boundary shift moves the split of the city of Burnaby somewhat eastward. Although the current division is clear yet artificial in a cohesive community settlement sense the proposed boundary shift looks minor on a map but is very significant.

The new proposal cuts down streets that did not represent main thoroughfares or easily identifiable divisions. It cuts

through the middle of a park, across the middle of Deer Lake instead of taking the preferred street around the edge, then proceeds up a hill through residential properties and through bushlands where no streets exist at all. Therefore, examination of street map can be deceiving. I doubt any commissioner ever actually physically examined on site the strange anomaly that the proposal makes.

It leaves small enclaves of residential areas stranded in the new riding of Burnaby North without access, except by travelling a considerable distance through my riding of New Westminster—Burnaby. Clearly the purpose among others is to rationalize but this proposal has left these orphaned areas.

I know my riding reasonably well since as a lad I have travelled the streets on bicycle and have walked untold miles campaigning door to door. There is always a different perspective for a pedestrian compared with a car slipping through the neighbourhood, sliding by.

I have an alternative proposal that represents a minor change keeping in mind the principles I have mentioned and makes geographical and social sense to the feeling of place in reference to the voter. The boundary between Burnaby—Kingsway which is to become known as Burnaby North and my riding of New Westminster—Burnaby is problematic in one significant area only. The other boundaries are most sensible, easily understood by residents and fit postal code walks as they take into account the municipal political boundaries and the physical barriers. The number one freeway, the Fraser River and Boundary Road between Burnaby and Vancouver are clear on every map and are historically known and accepted by every resident.

These are natural boundaries that thankfully remain in the new proposal. Nevertheless, I am suggesting that the boundary dividing Burnaby be moved just a few blocks to represent a more identifiable division. The population difference is minor but the rational sense is rather significant.

The commission is permitting only one hearing in the lower mainland for the boundary changes and that may seem rather limited. At least the community can participate. I do not particularly approve of the results of the commission either, but I would rather give evidence at the hearings of an independent tribunal and work to convince arbitrators of the merits of my case with geographical and social evidence than let the riding realignments fall into the hands of the Liberals.

Bill C-18 of the government flies in the face of everything we have come to trust about our electoral boundaries for non-partisanship and independence. Up until now we as Canadians could be quite smug as compared with the Americans for what we have achieved beyond gerrymandering, the American derogatory term.

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This government does not like the results of the commission's proposals and has introduced a bill to cancel everything. Let us not at the stroke of quick vote undo history that makes us distinctly proud to be Canadian. If we are not happy with the proposed results of the commission we should work to change it within the system before wiping out what we have on the books.

Millions have already been spent and therefore the bill that we see before the House implicitly says that the money has been wasted. If the government is so aghast at the results, I say get in the game and make the process work. Give it a chance. If after all is said and done, and usually from this government more is said than done, the boundaries are still troublesome send the commission back to do its homework, refine the evidence and get it to justify its recommendations.

What we have here in this bill is the old adage that if we do not like the message on the front line of the battle, shoot the messenger instead of the enemy.

In my case in New Westminster—Burnaby I believe that I can change the situation by getting folk to walk the ground. I certainly do not trust electoral boundary reform to be put into the hands of the government. It is the cat among the pigeons, the fox in charge of the hen house. How long did it take us to learn in Canada and achieve the statute of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act?

British Columbia is already short about six seats that should come from other provinces and this bill certainly perpetuates that inequity.

(1655)

This bill is audacious and the government is not even embarrassed. We need regular, independent non-partisan redistribution in a manner that inspires confidence. The analogy is like a court. When the judgment is a little out of character we outlaw and remove the judges instead of dealing with the case.

We need redistribution. Even more we need a cap on the number of members of Parliament. That is what new Canada thinking says. Modesty and common sense must begin in Parliament.

We have become a country of city dwellers with vast hinterlands. There needs to be equity with an upper limit within which redistribution can take place. That is the vision of new Canada thinking of equality and reason.

Such measures as I am suggesting are tied to the regional representation that a true triple-E upper House can bring. The Prime Minister could just announce what he will honour in appointment, the elected nominee, which follows the precedent of the late Stan Waters. This is a most important subject as representation by population and regional representation of our

vast land require a balance that will not be ameliorated by disbanding the commission.

Let not the excuse of dissatisfaction with the commission be the opening door to a hidden agenda. Let the standing committee do its work, but also engage the existing commission and let it do its work.

In summary, let the system do its work, as the alternative proposed by this government is the least desirable of all the options.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** I listened with some interest to the speech by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, although I did miss a small portion of it.

I wanted to draw the attention of the House to how this kind of redistribution would affect a riding like this in a population sense. New Westminster—Burnaby is an urban British Columbia riding. Under the current boundaries this riding has a population of 112,510; 16.5 per cent above the electoral quotient established for British Columbia. Under the new boundaries, which I appreciate are not entirely satisfactory to the hon. member, there is a population of 101,881, or only 5 per cent above the electoral quotient. There is a considerable improvement in representation there.

It is interesting because that is allowed for under the current sets of acts that are leading us to this process in giving British Columbia two more seats. Maybe we do not want an increase in seats overall but we certainly recognize that British Columbia is entitled to more seats by virtue of the representation by population provisions of our Constitution.

We will all remember that the previous formulas were not so generous to British Columbia. We will also remember that, as I indicated earlier today, in the Charlottetown accord of only a year and a half ago the party opposite and what remains of the other two parties in the former House got together to limit on a permanent basis the number of seats and the representation in the House of the province of British Columbia.

I am sure that is colouring the reaction of members from that province when they see a committee being given an open ended mandate, a committee of this House, to re-examine the formula and to re-examine all kinds of other aspects of electoral reform.

I am wondering whether the member for New Westminster—Burnaby had any comment on that, whether he shared those concerns, whether his constituents shared those concerns. Since the boundary decisions or proposals have been published by the commission, has he had a widespread reaction from ordinary constituents or is this a reaction he is getting primarily from members of Parliament or politically active individuals?

I would appreciate his assessment of that situation.

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(1700)

**Mr. Forseth:** Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief.

At first blush, looking at the riding boundary map for the lower mainland, one questions the rational sense of how the reconfiguration of some of the boundaries will cross waterways and there is no natural geographical sense. There is an effort to bring better representation on line based on population. There is a creation of two new seats. There is a process there.

I guess my reactions are somewhat the same as we get from constituents, do not throw the baby out with the bath water. We have a process in place and just because we do not like the first blush of the response we do not abandon the whole process and disband the commission.

We certainly are looking for increased representation in British Columbia. I am afraid that Bill C-18 in the long run is not going to bring us that. One of our major fears is that British Columbia will be in the catch up position of trying to get representation that it should have had a long time ago.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi):** Mr. Speaker, since this morning I have been listening to speeches made by members of the Reform Party, and I wonder why these people want a process that differs from the existing one, while the government is simply asking for a legislative review. The legislation goes back to 1964, which means it is 30 years old. This legislation should be revised, and we already seem to have some idea of what the new legislation will be like. I am sure that the committee formed to review this legislation will make recommendations to the House, which will examine these proposals before it decides to accept them.

Recently, I went around my riding to get the opinion of my constituents on this subject. I must admit that as far as the boundaries of the riding of Chicoutimi are concerned, some municipalities were to be removed from the riding and most came out against the process. Today, residents realize that money has already been committed—as much as \$5 million was mentioned—but they are still telling us to “Stop the process. Look at what is wrong with the legislation, because every time they want to make readjustments, they have no regard for boundaries or for the people”.

The following is a case in point. The municipalities that were to be removed from my riding are all connected with Saguenay Park and would be added to the riding of Jonquière, although there is no link between the two. I think that after 30 years, it is time to pause and consider what we can do with this legislation and amend it in line with the twenty-first century.

[*English*]

**Mr. Forseth:** Mr. Speaker, what I was addressing is the principle of arm's length independent process. Members in this

corner of the House are very concerned about suspending that and putting redistribution into the hands of politicians.

The parallel is the tradition of this House essentially writing its own pay cheque. There is a cry in the land that we change that.

We must have redistribution but my opening comment was that we could by this bill represent the slippery slope of partisan interference in riding boundary making. We are warning the House about that and we hope that it will not go that way.

**Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, we are here once again debating the merits of political interference in the rights and privileges of the Canadian citizen.

(1705)

It has always been that bad politicians make the assumption that the electorate cannot make decisions for itself and so they get involved in its everyday life and in its rights and privileges and make changes on its behalf. I thought that we were through with this and that this new Liberal government would make some changes in that regard.

There is a saying that if we forget the past we are condemned to repeat it. That saying goes particularly well in this House of Commons. If this government forgets what happened with the last government it is condemned to go the same road in the next election. Let us look at how we got to this point in the history of electoral reform.

In 1964 the present system came into effect so that the Canadian citizen would always have the right of representation based on a specific formula. Is that logical?—yes. In 1974 the federal government amended that formula and with it the rules for the Canada Elections Act.

Unfortunately that formula would have resulted in an increase in the number of MPs to about 369 by the year 2001. We all know that more MPs are less desired than fewer MPs. Then we move on to 1986 when politicians of the day decided to simplify the formula. So important was this concept that the government of the time enshrined this right in our Constitution.

Let us briefly cover the basics of that right. The first basic right is the Representation Act in 1986 which retained the idea that certain provinces would be guaranteed certain levels of representation. This affects provinces with slow or declining population growth, like P.E.I. and Quebec, more than others.

The second basic right is after every election, to preserve one of the founding principles of our nation, representation by population, the system is re-examined and constituencies are readjusted according to the rules set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

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Like all rules, they must be interpreted before they can be applied and this is where the government comes in. As we have seen in the past, when the government gets involved things tend to get a little muddled. It is amazing to me the similarities between this Liberal government and the Conservative government in this regard. Actually, it is becoming quite clear.

There are many similarities in many regards. For instance, their spending habits thus far indicate that both governments are more intent on leading us into bankruptcy than out of bankruptcy. However, let us look at a similarity between the dying Conservative Party and the Liberal Party.

**Mr. Fontana:** We are not dying.

**Mr. White (Fraser Valley West):** The hon. member says the Liberal party is not dying. I would go back to the original comment I made that if it forgets the past, it is condemned to repeat it. We will see how well the Liberal Party does.

What is striking about this new government is its willingness to allow the direct interference of politicians in a long standing practice. In 1990 the majority Conservative government interfered in a long standing practice and wanted to legislate the GST despite the opposition of the majority of Canadians in this country and opposition parties, including the majority of Liberal senators.

In order to get its way, however, the government at the time with the help of the Queen appointed eight political hacks as senators just to get its legislation passed. If the public does not like it, ram it down its throat is what the government said, which is kind of indicative of things here today. It is the cod liver oil approach, I say, as someone from the maritimes originally.

Canadians are not going to swallow cod liver oil politics any longer. Not only will the Canadian taxpayer have to pay the bill for supporting these political hacks until the age of 75, but the government established a terrible political precedent. If we do not get our way in the House of Commons or we disagree with the accepted rules of our country then we change them to make them fit our political agenda. It is quite similar to Bill C-18.

(1710)

The fact is that very few people in Canada today really get excited about the political boundaries because they have always changed as the population changes. The only people who have concerns at the moment appear to be the Liberal Party members. Like the Conservatives and the GST, they will interfere in an issue, that of redistribution.

This is neither their right nor any of their business. If this government were really in touch with the people of Canada today it would be attempting to reduce the number of ridings to

200 or 250 and save some much needed money as well as making the job of members of Parliament a little easier.

Having 295 members of Parliament in the past has not really served us that well, has it? For instance, MPs would be able to handle the workload much better if we did not waste so much time passing unnecessary laws like this one.

How could we be spending this time? Look at the state of our economy. Look at the state of our criminal justice system. Look at the number of unemployed people in Canada and look at the stagnating parliamentary system we have today, one which refuses to recall MPs, one which refuses to give Canadians the right to referendums, and one that will not even elect senators.

All these things merit our attention much more than deciding if we are going to postpone a decision we have no business interfering with in the first place.

Is the government that desperate for new legislation? As in the case of the GST, let us look at what a desperate government might do after it sets the precedent of monkeying around with the electoral boundary process.

I am not saying that this is a desperate government, yet. I predict that this Liberal government will be fighting for its very existence in 1997, and then who knows?

If this government interferes with the realignment of electoral seats what is to stop it from realigning seats by interfering with the process in 1997? Perhaps the government may wish to add seats in a particular part of a province that is typically held by a majority of that party's voters. That is why the process has been set apart from politics in the first place.

The action put before this House may mean instead of freezing the number of MPs to be added the public will see more seats eventually. At an average cost of \$1 million per MP, do we really need more MPs?

We have already spent \$5 million on the process. Now, because politicians do not like the realignment, there is another \$5 million out the window—what is \$5 million today, they ask.

This government seems willing to throw away tax dollars like this with no regard for common sense. This government wishes to pass the bill before the Easter break, suspending the current process for 24 months. If a new bill is not passed by Parliament within 24 months the process will be restarted under the existing legislation.

The member across in the Liberal Party says he is saving money. Talk about a waste of money, how does one save money by spending it that way?

It is absolutely amazing to me that this government again wants to change the constitutional item relating to electoral boundary redistribution. The government is already embarking on complicated changes to the Constitution related to aboriginal

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self-government. The government has recently elected to change the constitutional item relative to Prince Edward Island ferry service.

When it comes to the Reform Party's constitutional issue of insisting on a Senate that is elected, what do we get? The government says the issue was defeated in 1992 in the referendum so Canadians do not want it. Liberal Party members across the way say that they defeated the referendum in 1992. That is the narrow focus we get today.

(1715)

This government wishes to pass a bill before the Easter break. Why? What is the benefit? Is it to save money? No, I believe it is to fulfil a political ambition.

Why is it when there are majority governments in this country they do what they want and not what the people want? There is nobody crying and screeching about this today other than a party.

It makes one wonder about the Reform Party's platform on referendums, citizens' initiatives and free votes, does it not? Those are things where the people finally get to say what is right or wrong rather than the politicians assuming they know best what is in it for the people.

There is a process in place on redistribution, one that allows all Canadians, including MPs, to state their case at public hearings. They have been established. The new proposal would see Ontario getting four new seats and British Columbia the other two.

I can speak against this issue even though my riding is one of the ridings that will be drastically changed and not for the better. Unlike some members opposite they would prefer to get involved in a political process to change the process rather than address the issue through the appeal process.

The government should do a number of things. It should come clean with the Canadian people and admit it is letting a political concern override a process that has been set up to ensure politicians will not be involved. It should introduce legislation that freezes the number of MPs at current levels. It should get on with the business of really running the country instead of tampering with an already overly complicated system.

**Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague.

I am glad to see that members of the Reform Party who campaigned for change are now defending the status quo. They are now saying they are happy with an act that was put in place 30 years ago and they want to continue with it. Things change and sometimes we have re-evaluate things.

I am very surprised that members of the Reform Party who campaigned on the basis they were going to reform things are

now in favour of the status quo. They want to support and maintain an act that was put in place in 1964.

The hon. member states that the Liberal senators voted in favour of the GST. He should look at history and see how hard the Liberal senators fought against GST. The hon. member should get his facts straight on that issue instead of making erroneous statements. Everyone knows that simply was not the case and is not true.

My riding of Vancouver South has a tremendous history. John Fraser, the first elected Speaker, was from that riding. Under redistribution it is basically wiped off the map. There is no riding of Vancouver South.

We need to review the act which was brought in in 1964. Should it continue? Can we improve it? Are there better ways of doing it? Canadians also want us to look at things that were done 30, 40 or 50 years ago, acts that have not been reviewed. That is what we are doing.

(1720)

Reform members say they do not want to change anything but they would like to make some changes themselves. They are saying they do not want to change anything but they would support freezing the number of seats. When it is something the Reform Party wants it is quite acceptable to make the change. Those members only want to review it if it supports their party's view and political ideology.

Is the Reform Party against reviewing, updating and seeing whether other acts that have been in existence for a long time make sense in today's age? Times change and the way we do things change. For a party which is committed to reform and wants to make changes we are going to work with its members and co-operate with them.

**Mr. White (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has made some interesting comments. I should clarify one thing. He talked about a listening technique. I will read part of my speech again.

In 1990 the majority Conservative government wanted to legislate the GST against the opposition of the majority of Canadians and opposition parties, including the majority of Liberal senators. I think that is what I said. The member can read it in the record. Listening skills are important in the House of Commons.

It is important to understand that in a democracy the people are never wrong. Given that, one has to give some credibility to the electorate that if they are concerned about issues they will let us know. Right now we do not hear very much, if anything about this. In fact beyond these walls it is not a big problem.

I want to talk about defending the status quo. It is ironic that when an issue comes up they expect us as Reformers to take an opposite position on it, but we do not.

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We are for change. We are for changes in referendums. We are for changes in free votes. We are for changes in elected senators. We are for changes in recall. We are for balanced budgets and for changes to the criminal justice system. Those are the kinds of changes we are for. We are not for changes in a process for political gain rather than other gains.

When it comes to the status quo the member is talking to people who are against the status quo on many issues. It does not mean that on every issue it must be changed. A government member who suggests that just because it is there it should be changed is probably looking at the wrong methodology for undertaking that change.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I also would like to comment on the hon. member's speech and the whole issue of change.

Members on this side who have been speaking against this particular bill are not opposed to reviewing or changing the process. What is interesting about this bill is it makes no such proposal. There is no proposal to review or to change the process in any meaningful way. It is simply to kill it and substitute nothing other than parliamentary committee hearings controlled by politicians on a matter which is supposed to be the purview of an independent commission.

Let us look at the recommendations of the Lortie commission on redistribution. The previous Parliament set up a commission to look at all aspects of electoral reform and election law. I am not saying that we necessarily approve of those things, but they were studied at considerable expense to the taxpayer of Canada. Now they are just off the table, we are talking about another study.

(1725)

The Lortie commission recommended to amend the representation formula found in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867 so that Quebec would be assigned 75 seats and other provinces would be assigned seats on the basis of the ratio of their population to Quebec. The senatorial clause would be kept. No province would lose more than one seat from a previous distribution. No province would have fewer seats than a province with a smaller population.

Of course, that formula would lead to a more rapid growth in the number of seats in the House of Commons than the formula we are dealing with today. That was the last time we spent money to discover what was wrong with the process and how we could improve it.

Actually, the Lortie commission said: "Maintain the current composition and manner of appointment of the electoral bound-

aries commission". The last study was not proposing that we change the method or that we kill this particular process.

One other recommendation from that commission was that electoral boundaries commissions would justify their proposals with reference to communities of interest, et cetera and discontinuance of the procedure of parliamentary committee hearings on electoral boundaries. Instead, the commissions would hold a second set of public hearings if their second proposals departed significantly from their first proposals. In other words far from suggesting that Parliament should get itself involved again in the process or in examining the process, it suggested quite the opposite.

We spent millions of dollars to find out from that particular commission that the opposite should be done. Parliament has no power to change but it does in fact review the recommendations of the boundary commission. We would actually cancel that to go to a second set of public hearings instead of one set of public hearings.

With those observations I would appreciate the comments of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West on whether those recommendations are consistent with what he is hearing from people. Do they at all affect his view of whether we need to amend this act and whether we should be doing it in this way?

**Mr. White (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's observations are thought provoking. It is important to note that the government has introduced a bill on a process which is already taking place. Our constituents by and large really do not know this is happening.

Far be it for us as politicians to get involved and take it upon ourselves to change it on their behalf when already there is a process in place. As much as I may dislike the change in the electoral boundary of Fraser Valley West, the fact is that I and everyone else in that constituency has a process and an avenue to address it through the hearings that are going on.

My hon. friend is absolutely correct. Why do we want to get into another process? We have already spent \$5 million, which is too much in my opinion. Why are we not just taking it upon ourselves to let the process run its course? That is what it should do.

We do not know everything that is better for everybody. This process has been operating for a long time. Let it run its course.

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to voice my strong opposition to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. I feel quite strongly that this government's taking it upon itself to halt these proceedings, resulting in the disbanding of the existing electoral boundary commissions is not only unethical but also is highly irregular.

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(1730)

Of the approximate \$8 million allocated for the readjustment process an estimated \$5 million has already been spent. If the bill is passed into law, how much additional funding will be required to revisit the ground already covered? In other words, how much of the \$5 million will have been wasted?

Although I am completely opposed to the bill, my opposition should not be misconstrued to mean that I am happy with the proposals the commissions have drafted for redefining existing electoral boundaries. Certainly there seems to be widespread concern among my colleagues in this place. However I have yet to see evidence that their concern is echoed by the Canadian electorate.

My constituency of Prince George—Peace River is huge. It encompasses 212,000 square kilometres in the northeast corner of British Columbia, stretching from the city of Prince George in central B.C. all the way to the Yukon border. No other federal riding straddles the Rocky Mountains, and this poses a serious barrier for winter travel in the constituency. The Pine Pass connecting the Peace River area with the rest of the province has one of the highest annual snowfalls found anywhere in Canada. Having lived all my life in the north, I can personally vouch for the difficulty it presents for east-west travel within the riding. To travel by road from the Lower Post community on the Yukon border to Prince George in the south requires driving some 1,300 kilometres. This does not take into account any side trips to communities lying off the main arterial routes of the Alaska or Hart highways.

In addition to the three main centres of population of Prince George, Fort St. John and Dawson Creek, the riding encompasses some seven additional smaller municipalities beginning in the north with Fort Nelson. These include Taylor, Hudson Hope, Pouce Coupe, Chetwynd, Tumbler Ridge and Mackenzie. There are also 15 native communities located in the constituency. Some are inaccessible by road during summer months; others can only be reached by air, river boat or snowmobile.

Not only is the riding a blend of urban and rural; it is also a home to a mixture of diverse industries. With over 80 per cent of the arable land of British Columbia located in the Peace River district, the riding has a strong agricultural base. The economic viability of the area is further assured by the existence of many other industries such as oil and gas, lumber, pulp and paper, mining, hydroelectric, trapping, guiding, tourism and manufacturing. Representing such a multitude of interests and concerns is already an incredible challenge to the member of Parliament.

Under the proposed electoral boundary changes the physical size of the riding will be lengthened by adding roughly 300 kilometres of the Yellowhead highway and a further 70 or so of the Cariboo highway south of Prince George. This increase in

geographical size will be offset by losing the one-third of Prince George currently contained within the riding. The elimination of confusion that currently results from having Prince George split into two ridings must be weighed against the fact that the MP will have to travel through Prince George to service the 10 or so smaller communities in the extreme southern end of the new riding.

The only other noteworthy change is the loss of the native community of Lower Post near the Yukon border. Under the proposed changes this community would find itself in the riding of Skeena, even though the MP would have to travel through part of Yukon to get to it.

Although the suggested boundaries would ensure that the new riding of Peace—Yellowhead has a more consistent rural flavour, I am not in favour of the proposal because of the substantial increase in the physical size. It is proving more than difficult enough now to get around the riding on anything resembling a regular basis, without the addition of hundreds more kilometres. Even allowing for the increasing use of toll-free phone lines and faxes, constituents in far-flung small communities continue to expect a periodic personal visit from their MP.

It is my intention, therefore, to take advantage of the same option open to any other Canadian living in northern British Columbia. I will make my concerns known to the commission when it holds its public hearing in Prince George on June 2.

(1735)

My concern about the impending passage of the bill is not that the changes are the best ones possible or even that they are really necessary. My concern is that the bill will be viewed by the public as just the latest example of politicians thinking they are free to alter any process they believe is not in their personal best interest.

These commissions have been set up to be free of political interference. I can readily imagine the never ending arguments and endless disputes which will arise if the issue of electoral boundaries were left in the hands of politicians.

If I may be so bold I would issue on behalf of all Canadians a word of caution to the government. If members opposite proceed with this plan it will be viewed as extremely self-serving by the general public. Just as in the case of gold-plated MP pension plans, expense allowances or other benefits of our elected offices, Canadians want to see decision making powers regarding these types of things removed from the politicians and placed under the jurisdiction of totally independent bodies.

Canadians are sick and tired of this double standard. There appears to be one set of rules for politicians and another quite different set for the rest of Canadians. If members have legitimate concerns about the changes as proposed by the commissions as I do, they should make representations at the

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appropriate hearing, not attempt an end run by circumventing the process.

I do not believe that Liberals have a problem with the process. The real reason is that they do not like the results. Even a quick comparison between the old electoral boundaries and the proposed new ones indicates substantive alterations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the present Liberal power base of southern Ontario.

It is common knowledge that an incumbent enjoys a considerable advantage at election time. Over the life of a Parliament an MP establishes many contacts within the confines of his or her constituency. However when those boundaries are subjected to major changes or as in some cases an entire existing riding is completely eliminated, the incumbent suffers the loss of this comparative advantage. In effect this means he or she is virtually starting over. It places challengers on a much more even footing during the following election. It is this loss of advantage that is behind the government's sudden need for further reviews.

What will be accomplished by a 24-month delay? I believe it is simply the intention of the government to ensure the changes do not come into force in time to alter the boundaries prior to the next general election. The bill would immediately disband the existing commissions and enable the government to form new ones with new people two years from now. There is only one legitimate reason for delaying the process.

There are currently 295 MPs in this place. Surely that is more than enough to govern our country. Rather than a further increase of six seats as is required under the Constitution following the last census, we need fewer MPs, not more. At the very least the government should fully and completely commit itself to establishing a cap on the total number of members. To say it would review the present system of continual increases I would contend is simply not good enough. If Canadians are to believe the government really intends to limit the number they must be able to see that commitment.

In summary, the present system allows for input from all interested parties. I am prepared to take my turn along with all other northern B.C. stakeholders at the hearing in Prince George on June 2. I urge members opposite to consider carefully how the public will view their intended meddling in this process.

**Ms. Roseanne Skoke (Central Nova):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has stated clearly that his riding would be adversely affected by an electoral boundary distribution. He is not happy with the proposed redistribution.

If this is so, why is there opposition today to the bill? If it will adversely affect the member's riding, it is respectfully submitted that the member has a duty and a responsibility to

represent the best interests of his constituents. To oppose the bill today is in direct conflict with the best interest of the member's constituents and his riding.

(1740)

It is unfortunate that the Reform Party insists on concentrating its focus on process. It is also unfortunate that the member has placed more confidence in the process than confidence in his own judgment to make a decision today that will protect and safeguard the best interest of his constituents.

**Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about process here. Other than the suspension for 24 months there is nothing in Bill C-18 that would indicate the government intends to follow through with an in-depth review. The government has stated that it is not in the bill.

We are saying that this is simply a way for the government to circumvent the system. Rather than having an open, consultative process wherein members of the public, including MPs, are quite free to make submissions both written and oral in front of the commissions when they are in their areas or our ridings, we will refer it to a committee of politicians. It is my contention that the public has had enough of that type of attitude.

[Translation]

**Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs)):** Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make a few remarks about the bill before us today. Of course, this bill raises fundamental issues that go to the heart of our democratic system and, as members of Parliament, we must admit the importance of these issues.

It must also be said that the process for redrawing the boundaries of electoral districts has been in place since 1964. On examining how the present system operates, we clearly see that it has several shortcomings. First, the commissions are not required to hold consultations before publishing their proposals. Second, the commissions are not required to give reasons for their proposals. Third, the criteria that the commissions must follow in setting the boundaries of electoral districts are very general.

Depending on the approach taken by the commissions, the results can vary considerably from one province to another. If we look at the proposals put forward by the commission for the province of New Brunswick, we see that the commissions can make recommendations which certainly do not represent the interests of the people of New Brunswick in this case. We received a map making really major changes, where we lose a riding in the north of the province and other ridings bring together communities that do not have affinities or common interests.

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The criteria are so broad that one of the commissioners from New Brunswick told me what he thought of the proposed map for New Brunswick. He did not agree with the commission's proposal even though he was one of the commissioners, but the commission could only put forward a single proposal. He told us that he had been unable to influence the people on the commission to be a little more reasonable.

(1745)

What we would like to do in readjusting electoral boundaries is just that, propose reasonable changes instead of turning the whole system upside down.

Finally, based on the existing formula, described in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867, the number of seats in the House of Commons will increase from 295 to 301 as result of the 1991 census, and that concerns me in light of current fiscal restraints.

I have heard several members today express concern about the extra expenses the government and the people of Canada will incur if the number of seats does increase. Members from the Reform Party have indicated that this issue should be examined.

I will point out to the Reform Party members that the only thing to do about this steady increase in the number of seats is to suspend the procedure and review it, as we are suggesting.

I also heard members say that we are trying to prevent public participation in the process. On the contrary! We want to open it up, so that the people from all over Canada can speak on this 30 year-old procedure. I think it is justified.

In short, there is certainly no general agreement about the current procedure for readjusting the number of seats and electoral boundaries. The time has come to subject all elements of the present system to a thorough review, which has not been done, as I said earlier, since 1964. That is why the government has introduced the Act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. As mentioned earlier, this bill would suspend the procedure for twenty-four months.

Mr. Speaker, to give all members the opportunity to speak on this bill and go ahead and suspend the current procedure—

*[English]*

I therefore move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 26, the House continue to sit beyond the ordinary time of adjournment for the purpose of considering the second reading stage of Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operations of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Will those members who object to the motion please rise in their place.

*And more than 15 members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Pursuant to Standing Order 26(2), the motion is deemed to have been withdrawn.

(Motion deemed withdrawn.)

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, I took great interest in the comments of the secretary of state.

I would like to make a couple of comments. I was interested in the fact that there was the motion to extend the sitting, once again another attempt to rush this bill through.

This bill was tabled in the House on Friday and is being debated for the first time today. There has been virtually no public discussion. The public discussions the process allows for are the independent commission hearings that the bill seeks to terminate.

(1750)

I find this all very interesting in that we have had a number of speakers today and this is really the first debater from another political party other than the hon. member for Kamloops who gave a very reasoned and considered intervention. We had the first two speakers from the government and from the Official Opposition. It is not questions and comments, not true debate. They just state their position. Since then we have been talking here to ourselves.

I find it peculiar this great effort we are going through to make sure that the public does not have a right to go to the hearing process.

Perhaps the hon. member could explain to us precisely why that is such an important public policy objective, why it is so important that we not get some reaction from the public before we continue to debate this particular issue?

The member raised some of problems, some of which I am more sympathetic to than others. He raised two complaints, particularly in relation to the province of New Brunswick. This bears some examination. On the one hand he noted the radical changes that the commission has proposed in some parts of New Brunswick because of population shifts. On the other hand he raised concerns about increasing the number of seats in the House of Commons.

I suppose if we were ultimately to revise the formula, which would require a revision to the senatorial clause, so that we were able to resist the increase in seats then we would have fewer seats in provinces like New Brunswick and we would have even more radical changes to the boundaries. This is what I find particularly disconcerting. The various reasons that are being used, not in this House but sort of in the hallways, for stopping this process are a complete contradiction to each other in terms of the results that they would bring about.

*Government Orders*

Besides his commenting on the necessity of killing this, as a government minister would the hon. member favour having a public policy objective to this whole thing that the public would support limiting the number of seats so that we can proceed to at least give the public some reason why we would be interested in killing Bill C-18 after we have spent \$5 million on the process?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robichaud:** Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not our intention to rush the bill, in the words of the hon. member who just spoke. We simply want to avoid a process like the one now under way, that is holding hearings where members or representatives of organizations, associations and municipalities wishing to make submissions to commissions must give notice, prepare their submissions and then appear before the commissions, the operations of which we are proposing to abolish. If we suspend the entire process, all of this work will have been for nothing. We simply want to save money by putting a stop to the process as soon as possible.

As for the public's participation, we want their input. We want the public to have an opportunity to express their views because when the matter comes before the House committee, the public will certainly be asked to propose ways of changing the process. The committee will also likely consider the possibility of capping the number of seats in the House at the current level of 295. Clearly, this is what the Reform Party members want, but the government is not prepared at this time to say that it will cap the number of seats at 295.

(1755)

First, we want to get the public's opinion on this process, if it comes to that. I assure you that we want to encourage public input in the readjustment of electoral boundaries any way we can.

[*English*]

**Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster):** Mr. Speaker, I have a comment and question for the minister. This is a bit of *déjà vu*. When looking at the history books a very similar incident happened in 1974, 20 years back in Canadian history. At that time a number of MPs, the majority being Liberal MPs on the government side, were not happy with redistribution.

I have not had time to read all the *Hansards* from back then to find out what all the reasons were, but the bottom line was that members were not happy with redistribution and so they interfered with the process. As a result 18 new seats were created in Canada.

We have no indication from this government that by suspending the current process and the commissions in place there is goodwill from that side. The purpose of the suspension is to cap the number of seats in the House of Commons.

I do not think the government has even considered all the ramifications of capping seats in the House of Commons. Perhaps that is a subject that really needs to be debated at greater length in the House.

Bill C-18 calls for the commissions currently in place to cease to exist upon the passing of Bill C-18. Once the suspension is completed, some 24 months later, 60 days later new commissions are to be appointed. Certainly the government is opening itself up to allegations of patronage. We hope that would not be its purpose in suspending this and causing these commissions to cease to exist. However, the allegations could come.

Therefore, if the government wanted to suspend the work of these commissions would it reinstate those commissions and have them resume their work at the point they were at when the suspension took place, thus saving the \$5 million?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robichaud:** Mr. Speaker, if we want to suspend the current process, it is because we intend to make a number of changes. It would be hard to say: "We are going to suspend the process for 24 months, but after 24 months, we are going to start right back at the beginning, without taking into account the committee's findings or recommendations". I do not see how we can predict the outcome of the committee's study. It would be like saying to people: "We do not need your input. You have nothing to say, everything has already been decided".

As for the hon. member's concern that we could be tempted to resort to patronage, I can assure him that this is not what we have in mind. The process for selecting commissions is not open to this type of action and we have no intention of making changes in that regard. However, the committee, which is made up of representatives of all parties in this House, could make all kinds of recommendations and observations.

[*English*]

**Mr. Hugh Hanrahan (Edmonton—Strathcona):** Mr. Speaker, I will begin by expressing my opposition to Bill C-18. I also acknowledge the fact that the Liberal government must truly be committed to deficit reduction. I can make this statement because any government willing to scrap an electoral boundary commission report that has cost Canadians nearly \$5 million must be committed to fiscal responsibility.

(1800)

To make matters even more convincing, the government will be asking Canadian taxpayers to go through this process all over again even though the present commissions' report has not been tainted by any political influence. Nor is there any outcry from Canadians regarding the current redistribution process other than the fact that they do not want the number of seats in Parliament to increase.

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Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the government's plan is that there is no strong defence for interfering with the present process before determining if the public hearings are not successful. We can also see that throughout Canada's history the issue of electoral boundary redistribution has been a contentious issue. This hostility is derived from the very premise that those who have power are never willing to relinquish their hold on it.

I think the idea of politicians redrawing their own boundaries lies at the very core of a serious problem in Canada. That problem is a lack of trust by the public regarding politicians. It is evident therefore that this government does not see that Canadians are unhappy with the entire process in which politicians have been doing their business. Canadians want change. They want a new style of openness. They want a new style of fairness. This type of legislation can only be viewed as regressive.

This House was given the absolute right to redraw the electoral boundaries at Confederation. However because of the contentious nature of electoral redistribution which I have already mentioned Parliament has agreed to share this responsibility of redistribution with the electoral boundaries commissions created in 1964.

Since the creation of these electoral boundaries commissions public perception that there are not considerable amounts of political interference to the readjustment process has diminished. This political interference which took place before the creation of the electoral boundaries commissions was an attempt to assure as far as possible the re-election of the members of the governing party.

This is absolutely wrong. I hope that this government is not travelling down the same path of early governments.

It is important to note that since 1964 while many politicians have been unhappy with the outcome of redistributions, there has rarely been the concern of political interference. This is for the simple fact that these commissions are non-partisan.

There are 11 electoral boundaries commissions in Canada, one in each of the provinces and one in the Northwest Territories. These commissions consist of three members: a chairman who is appointed by the chief justice of the province from among judges in that province and the other two members of the commission are appointed by the Speaker of the House. These two individuals are usually university professors or non-elected officials of the legislative assemblies.

The commission looks primarily at the number of people in the province, not political partisanship. They do not consider how the changes will affect one party over another. In fact the largest criticism of the commissions is they do not consider

enough non-political information. Many times they overlook the common community interests or community identities.

It is important to ensure that redistributed boundaries correspond as closely as possible to the national quotient while also taking into account community interests and the historical pattern of an electoral district.

These factors then will enable the commissions to properly manage the geographic size of districts with sparsely populated areas. The commissions are allowed to deviate from the provincial average by plus or minus 25 per cent. This allowance then allows them to accommodate the human and geographic factors.

(1805)

Another issue that is troublesome for me is that in 1985 Parliament passed the Representation Act which set out a formula for redistribution. It was a constitutional amendment which ensured that no province could have fewer seats than the 1985 level of representation regardless of the population of that province.

The exception is P.E.I. which can have no fewer MPs than senators. We therefore have done away with the premise of absolute representation by population. The government would like to suspend the Representation Act and attempt to develop a new proposal for the consideration of the House.

Let us start with the basic premise of rep by pop. Within the concept of representation by population emerges the concept of equality of vote. Any notion of equality of rep by pop may permit if countered by the fact that the current and historical development of representation in Canada has only partially been based on the notion of representation by population.

Since Confederation, Canada has developed a system with respect to electoral representation whereby the heavily populated provinces retain a majority of the seats within the House of Commons while the less populated provinces receive an adequate number of seats to ensure representation.

By no means does the federal government reflect the notion of representation by population in its purest form. Rep by pop has been altered in order to guarantee a minimum number of seats within the House to less populated provinces so that they do not become under represented if their population base decreases.

Thus while the principle of representation by population may be said to lie at the heart of the electoral apportionment in Canada, it has from the beginning been altered by other factors.

Due to Canada's vast geographic size and regional differences, a modified version of representation by population has emerged. It is therefore determined that the equality of votes guaranteed to Canadians is one of relative equality and not

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absolute equality. Therefore we do not have equality of voting power but rather relative equality of voting power.

This relative equality is not just within the provinces but between the provinces as well. For example, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick constituting 6.1 per cent of the population are guaranteed 7 per cent of the seats. Alberta and British Columbia comprise just under 22 per cent of the population while we are entitled to only 20 per cent of the seats.

The west is not only under represented in Parliament, we are also under represented in the Senate. How can a region of Canada that has less than 11 per cent of the population have over 28 per cent of the Senate seats while western Canada has over 29 per cent of the Canadian population with only 23 per cent of senate seats. These injustices must be rectified. The west wants in.

Canada is a country of many regions and there are probably as many definitions of regionalism as there are people defining it. Regionalism is not some sort of disease to be stamped out. Rather it is a healthy manifestation but lacking a healthy institutional outlet.

The only true significant political failure of the Canadian experience is its chronic inability to solve those regional tensions. The Senate was established to protect the interests of the provinces. Yet, for too long western Canada has felt that its interests have not been adequately represented in the federal Parliament. The National Energy Program is just one example and the possibility of a carbon tax implemented at source is another.

The Canadian Senate lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many Canadians because it is an appointed body that runs counter to the fundamental Canadian belief that democratic governments should be conducted by an elected rather than an appointed body. What Canadians need is a triple-E Senate, an effective, elected and equal Senate. A reformed Senate will not just benefit one province or one region. It will help build a better and stronger Canada.

(1810)

We should have an elected Parliament based solely on representation by population with a constant number of members of Parliament. This concept will only work if we have an elected Senate to which all regions of Canada have an equal number of senators.

This would ensure that Parliament reflects the notion of one man, one vote, and allows the Senate to reflect the regional interests of our nation.

Moving on to specific recommendations of the recent electoral boundaries commission which has recommended that Calgary be given one additional seat for a total of seven, while Edmonton in Alberta would remain at six and 26 respectively, it was

encouraging that the commission did recognize that Calgary and Edmonton have traditionally the same number of representatives in Ottawa.

Because the number of electoral districts for Edmonton remains at six the proposed changes to the boundaries are relatively minor. The changes that will be made to my riding are not extensive and I feel that they have been done in a just manner.

Edmonton—Strathcona's population will be almost 16 per cent above the provincial average yet it is well within the established plus or minus 25 per cent deviation.

Although I do not wholeheartedly agree with this plus or minus 25 per cent as an absolute figure, I do agree that there needs to be some allowance in riding size because of urban and rural differences. However I am not convinced that the deviation presently allowed has not been picked arbitrarily.

Why should it not be plus or minus 20 per cent, 15 per cent, 10 per cent? However, this is an issue that I will leave to debate another day and I will continue with the specific changes to Edmonton—Strathcona recommended by the commission.

The southern tip of Edmonton—Strathcona will be lost to Edmonton Southwest while we gain the northeastern part of Edmonton Southeast riding. Although I realize the need for redistribution, I do have some trouble with the map that has been made for Edmonton. However, with a few minor changes in the electoral boundaries which would ensure that the riding populations of the rest of Edmonton are closer than they are presently, I can see nothing else that is substantially wrong with the commission's report. These small changes could be made through the public consultation process.

In fact these consultations or hearings are to begin in Quebec on April 12. They will move across Canada over the next three months and are due to hold hearings in Edmonton on April 28 at two o'clock and at 7.30 p.m. at the Macdonald Hotel.

The present process of designing constituencies by independent boundaries commissions for each province has worked well. We do not need a change for the sake of change. If the electoral boundaries commissions were inherently flawed then changes would be made. However, this has not been shown to be the case.

The use of such non-partisan commissions has made it possible to give consideration to community interest criteria without including a partisan tone to the nature of the equation and/or the process.

These independent commissions have allowed us to redraw constituencies based primarily on equality of the vote which includes specific criteria based on a national quotient and have also included a need for justification of variations that deviate dramatically from the quotient.

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In conclusion, this process has worked and it has been fair. Any alteration to the process will raise suspicions and a sense of unfairness among the Canadian public. Bill C-18 does not give the appearance of fairness to the Canadian public.

**Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's concerns about Bill C-18 that is being introduced. Every elector in my riding of Kindersley—Lloydminster received a map of the new boundaries two or three weeks ago. I have not heard a public outcry even though my riding boundaries have been quite drastically changed.

(1815)

The current riding of Kindersley—Lloydminster will not exist after the readjustment takes place as proposed in the current report by the boundaries commission. In spite of that I have not had a hue and outcry from the public. I know as an MP I have some concerns. I know my constituency association has some concerns. However the general public seems more concerned about other decisions made in the House such as dollars spent.

Has the hon. member had an outcry of concern from his riding regarding the new boundary proposals, or would he sense it being more a concern of politicians and political organizations?

**Mr. Hanrahan:** Mr. Speaker, I have had concerns expressed to me with regard to the boundary changes. I have also had constituents recognize that the process by which they can express their concerns to the commission is a valid one. They are much more confident with that process than with a committee of politicians deciding on where boundaries should or should not be.

They are concerned but they see the opportunity they have to express those concerns in a traditional and fair manner.

**Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast):** Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge my hon. colleague's comments and his presentation in the House tonight. There are several points I would make. I ask my colleague if he would care to respond to the points I am going to bring forward, one of which is clarity of purpose.

It seems to me that anything we would do in the House of Commons would always have a clarity of purpose and that we would always know, by having defined that clarity of purpose, where we were going.

We heard earlier from the side of the House from which I am speaking that perhaps it was personal self-interest that motivated some of the comments in today's discussions by the government side. Indeed those members mobilized themselves extremely well in terms of putting the bill forward, hastily I might add.

When we have a clarity of purpose it is only the beginning of a process. I would like my hon. colleague to comment. Having extended the clarity of purpose perhaps we then have the review. However the review is only one small part of what comes next, a

broad analysis of what the review has told us, followed at that point by drawing conclusions and then making recommendations.

All this would be in very open debate; all this would be very much in the public view. If the bill had died tonight constituents across the country who watched the debate would have seen only a few of us make presentations in the House today. We have an obligation to our constituents to ensure that in the fullness of debate the richness of our ideas is shared with them.

Does my hon. colleague wish to make some comments on that?

**Mr. Hanrahan:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague in terms of quality of purpose. I suggest to her that the vast majority of Canadians would also agree with her.

I would agree with her and Canadians would agree with her on the very point that the process as it now exists is separate from politicians rather than involving politicians. They have seen it work over a period of time. What it seems to be in this instance is change for the sake of change. I do not believe that change is for the benefit of the Canadian people. I doubt very much if my constituents or anyone else in the country would see it in that manner.

(1820)

**Mr. Werner Schmidt (Okanagan Centre):** Mr. Speaker, are the same kinds of things that happened in the boundary changes of the member for Edmonton—Strathcona happening in Okanagan Centre? If I heard correctly the southwest portion of the constituency will be lost or will be added. There may be some confusion as to the economic and social benefits if this were to happen.

The southern part of Okanagan Centre is being taken out of the constituency and put into the Penticton riding or the Similkameen riding. That will not benefit that particular community because people naturally go to Cologne to do their shopping and so on.

Could the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona detail exactly what is happening in his constituency with regard to the new boundaries?

**Mr. Hanrahan:** Mr. Speaker, in terms of Edmonton—Strathcona it is geographically located in south central Edmonton. We are losing part of the southern tip and gaining part of the eastern section of it. In terms of socioeconomic changes, they are minimal. I do not see that it is going to be of major significance to my riding. We are studying that now.

As I suggested there is a process in place at Hotel Macdonald on April 28. If we have problems with it we will submit them to the commission.

**Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the applause from both sides of the House. I think it is someone dying to speak over there who has been thwarted

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perhaps in the debate today. They want to say something more. Who knows?

Let us look for a few moments at how the bill came to be and what some of the reasons are for the incredible crisis that is under way and why it has to be dealt with so quickly.

**Mr. Milliken:** Because they are getting rid of Beaver River.

**Miss Grey:** My friend says: "Because they are getting rid of Beaver River". Let us cut to the basics here. That is very true. It would be easy for me to stand today in the House of Commons and say I think that shelving the whole thing is a marvellous idea. We would then see a cocooning of Beaver River and, if it were politically motivated, I would say: "Whew, that makes me safe".

There is something far deeper, far more democratically essential in terms of this debate. Whether I would lose my constituency or whether my neighbour from Kindersley—Lloydminster would, as is the case as well, that is not the issue. People watching the debate need to be aware of exactly what is going here and the things they have heard from just one party in the House. Granted, the government House leader spoke and someone from the Bloc spoke, but basically they have heard from the Reform Party.

Why has the Reform Party been talking about this bill all day long? Why are we concerned about the whole idea? If it were just political we would say: "Let us put the thing off, shelve it for two years, and get back to looking at the details later". That is not the case here.

**Mr. Robichaud:** Yes, it is.

**Miss Grey:** Certain people have talked about it on the government side but basically only in questions and comments. I think that would be the general consensus in the House. They have probably been asked not to speak because they wanted the debate to die out, as we saw when they requested extra time. Let us not be foolish. There are people who have all kinds of concerns. We will continue to talk about this matter until something is done about democracy in the country. We would not see politicians getting in the way of electoral boundaries commissions that have been set up. We can talk about reasons: why they are set up and whether they are politically motivated. I will talk about that for a couple of minutes also.

(1825)

As soon as politicians get their hands into the tub we know there is something going wrong in the Chamber that is filtering out across the country. We are saying it must stop. We are not trying to be sanctimonious. I am not standing here trying to be self-righteous because I stand to lose. My constituency of

Beaver River was brand new in 1988. It lived through the 1988 election and the 1993 election, and under this proposal it stands to die.

It is easy for someone to sit on the other side, chuckle about it and say: "Look at her". However, I have no seat in which to run in the next election. I want that very clear and I want that on the record. I stand here and that Beaver River lives, but let us make sure Beaver River has a chance to live in terms of the process of going to the hearings and making representations on April 27 and April 28. That is what we are talking about here.

It is easy to ask whether this was politically motivated. That is not for me to say. This is supposed to be a commission that has worked at arm's length from the government. I cannot quarrel or quibble with that.

Recently I was at a hockey game in Elk Point and player came off the benches to me and asked: "Deborah, could they not have made it any more subtle that they were trying to get rid of you"? Of course the circumstances were such that in the last Parliament I sat here as the only Reform member in all of Canada. My friend from Edmonton—Strathcona just mentioned that the head justice of each province was set up by the chief justice of the province. We have that situation in Alberta and the two members of the commission, one from Calgary and one from Edmonton, were appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

If in Elk Point, Alberta, somebody comes off a hockey bench and says "boy, it sure looks political to me", we need to pay attention. It is not self-righteous to stand here and say that is all they are trying to do. That is not the point.

We are trying to say that something has been set up here whether or not we like it. Whether my friend's riding in Vancouver has been blitzed is not the issue. My friend from Vancouver should be there, absolutely firmly at those public hearings. That is his chance to talk about it. He should not hurl insults and comments across the House of Commons because it gains nothing. It is his party that has brought it in.

It is sad to me that the public is feeling skeptical about the matter. Members of my party from various ridings have said today that they did not think there was much a hue and cry. Maybe in their ridings there has not been, but certainly in Beaver River there has been.

The constituency of Beaver River, although it was a brand new riding in name in 1988, has a marvellous history in north eastern Alberta. The Beaver River itself is an amazing waterway which was a trading route for the fur traders or the voyageurs into the Athabasca region. They came to Lac-la-Biche, up the Beaver River, portaged very few miles across to the Athabasca and were gone all the way north.

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It was a really exciting moment in our history when people on the previous commission decided that Beaver River riding would be named. As I have said, why would the constituency have such a short history?

In terms of setting records, if this bill goes through as proposed, yes, they will shelve it for 24 months. That is fine but what will happen after? If it goes through I will have sat as the only member of Parliament for the entire life of the constituency of Beaver River. We feel old and start looking old quickly in this place, but it seems to me that is a pretty short shelf life for a constituency.

I am not arguing all in favour of the proposal because I have some serious reservations about it. I have been in touch with the person with whom we are to get in touch to say that I will be appearing in Lac-la-Biche, Alberta, at McArthur Place on Wednesday, April 17, 1994, at 7.30 p.m. That is where I am to go as a citizen and as a member of Parliament. That is what was set up in terms of stages that we are to go through.

I sent in my notice saying that I would be appearing before this public hearing commission. Why should that be kiboshed? If I have any reservations about it, it would be just to ask one question: why did the commissioners draw up their lines first and consult second?

(1830)

I have problems with the process. I have problems with the map that has been redrawn because I have serious reservations about totally eliminating a particular constituency that is brand new. I have a method in place to go and voice my concerns and my complaints about that. That is to go and talk to the people at the public hearings.

Five million dollars has been spent on this already and are we going to throw it off on the shelf?

**An hon. member:** That was the Tories, not by us.

**Miss Grey:** Nonetheless, how much will it cost to redo this completely? How much does it cost for lost time when the government is trying so desperately to get some other bills through vis-à-vis money and the borrowing authority?

We look at things that it wants to put through Parliament and then all of a sudden now we have a crisis that we need royal assent just as quickly as possible.

Why is it that people are so frustrated with this? There are problems but could it be that they would be losing out politically? That is the one thing that this commission was set up originally to do, to try to keep politicians' hands out of the works of this. If ever we have seen politicians' hands and dirty finger marks all over everything we see it today in this Chamber

on March 21, 1994. That is a sad day in Canada as far as I am concerned.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order. I know that the member for Beaver River has seized her colleagues' attention opposite but I certainly do not want to miss anything either.

**Miss Grey:** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about details in the way that this is set up versus process. That is what I am trying to draw to the attention of members opposite. I do not particularly like the way this is drawn up. I made that very clear. I have obviously riled some people on the other side of the House.

I disagree with the way it is. I have constituents who are very upset about it. Nonetheless, when we look at a process that is flawed and only becomes more seriously flawed when we all get into it, that is what I am expressing concern about. I think that is probably what we have heard more and more.

Let me address a couple of other issues before I close. Does this further divide rural and urban Canada? I spent my first 25 years living in Vancouver which is about to lose a riding, as I understand from the other side. I grew up practically in downtown Vancouver. I know what it is like to be a city person. I know the concerns of urban Canada.

I live in northeastern rural Alberta by choice. Many people are born in areas and there they are, citizens of that area just because. I chose to leave Vancouver and teach school in northeastern Alberta and so I am a rural Albertan by choice.

To me that says a lot. I realize both sides of the coin. I know what it is like to live in the city and to be able to go to the symphony which is about six or eight minutes from home. I also know what it is like to watch the Edmonton Oilers play hockey or watch the Edmonton Eskimos play football when it is a three hour, one way drive for me. I know what it is like to be a rural Canadian.

I would like to invite the commissioners who sit as the Alberta commissioners, two from Calgary, one from Edmonton, to come and spend a week with me in Beaver River, in my four by four. They would understand what rural Canada is all about. They would understand what it is like to travel 28,000 square kilometres regularly from end to end of our constituency. In terms of square kilometres mine is far smaller than many others. If we look at the map, if we look at the riding which is north of mine, Peace River, Athabasca, those take up physically literally half of Alberta's square kilometres.

Beaver River is small in comparison to that but I would love the commissioners to come with me in my four by four. I appreciate my friend from Broadview—Greenwood. We have known each other well over the years. I always remember his saying he could ride around Broadview—Greenwood on his

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bicycle in about an hour and a half. I have given him a standing invitation to come on out to the "Beav" and we would see how far he would get on his bicycle—not very.

(1835)

I looked up the mileage of the three vehicles that I have gone through since my election in March 1989. There is my basic four by four that I spend most of my time in the riding with. I have also put lots of miles on my truck and camper, a small car and another truck when I have needed to.

On my four by four that I do most of my business travelling with I have put 324,000 kilometres. I am no mathematician but I divided that out. It is basically 8,000 kilometres across Canada. That is 40.5 trips from sea to sea across and around Beaver River. That is an incredible number of miles.

Rural Canada is an exciting place to live but let me tell members that in terms of hours and time and driving and getting around, driving two hours or three hours one way to a one and a half hour meeting and then turning around driving three hours home again is an incredible amount of time chewed up. However, it is peaceful time.

Telephone time, if I need that, is marvellous. Why would we take that away from people? What is wrong with urban Canada's getting to know its country cousins better? Why could we not redraw these boundaries by taking a corner of the population out of a city and moving it into the rural areas? Why do we need to be so firm and obsessed with city boundaries all the time?

Why not take a corner out of some of the population of four or five thousand people in Edmonton and tell them they have something in common with these people? The guidelines that the commissioners were given say that boundary readjustment must take into account human interests and geographic characteristics.

Every one of those people who lives in Edmonton, Toronto or whatever is eating the bread that was grown for them on these farms. They do have something in common with urban and rural Canada. Why do we not celebrate that instead of always moving it off against each other? There are such divisions between the country and the city. We need to celebrate what we share in common rather than saying that person is from the country, that one is from the city and we have nothing more to gain from each other, we have precious little in common.

That is wrong. That is incorrect. We need to look at these things and say that there are problems in the way this commission has gone about doing it. However, that is not the end of the world. One does not make a matter worse by having the government and the Official Opposition jump up and say that we should shelve it, that we should try to come up with something better.

I would be in favour of that if I had a list of possibilities of what might be better. I really would. Let us make sure that we

have some options on the table rather than saying that we will put a committee together. I get nervous when I see things like that and when I hear things like that.

As rural Canada and rural MPs are called upon to represent larger and larger areas, we need to be very careful that we do not get into the situation in which MPs feel absolutely worthless because they simply cannot cover the physical distance.

I think of my friend to the north of me from Athabasca, an incredibly large area. There is my friend from the western Arctic and my friend from Churchill. How do they get around? Why would we in Beaver River say that we are totally happy with being able to say take the north end of the riding and move it up to Athabasca, it can use a few thousand square kilometres extra, what the world? When one has 200,000 what is another 10,000 or 15,000?

Those are people who live there. Those are real people who live in Lac-la-Biche and they want to see their MP. They want to talk to their MP and know what their MP looks like and thinks. What about the people who live in St. Paul and Bonnyville and Cold Lake? They are going to become part of the Vegreville—St. Paul riding then, no problem. We will just throw a few thousand square kilometres on to that riding.

There have been rappsports built up with members of Parliament. I suspect that is why there is nervousness built up on the government benches to a great extent. They have built up rappsports with their constituents, absolutely. I have built up a rapport with mine. I have a fine group of people I represent and I am proud to say that I am the representative of Beaver River.

What about the people in bedroom communities of Edmonton, Namao, Gibbons, Bon Accord, Redwater? Those people are going to become part of Elk Island. Sorry, folks, we will just add a few thousand square kilometres on to Elk Island. My friend from Elk Island will represent any number of other towns. As I have heard so often today, the split or the general movement or flow of those people probably would not be to that area but to the west of them, over to St. Albert.

(1840)

This is flawed. I have serious problems with it but the reason we are so concerned about this, let me reiterate very firmly, is that the process for this is dreadfully flawed. The process in my neighbour's province of Saskatchewan is the same thing.

Under this particular format it may lose a seat. We look at constitutional limitations on it. That is one thing. Do we toss it aside and say we are going to try and come up with something better? I hardly think so.

What about my neighbours in my home province of British Columbia where the population is growing at an incredibly rapid rate? They have some serious considerations about the flaws in this as well, where things were drawn up, where there are so many people.

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Look at discrepancies in constituency numbers. These people need a chance to be able to say they will go to those hearings and we as Canadians or as members of Parliament will go to those public hearings because that is the system, that is the way it was set up and that is exactly what we need to do, not sit here in Parliament and cook up some deal in which we will shelve the thing for 24 months.

In closing, I hope that the Canadian public has learned something here today in terms of process about this whole review. Let us make sure that Parliament does not have its fingerprints all over this process. Let us open it up. Let us consult the people first and then make decisions.

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

**Mr. Comuzzi:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to pose some questions to the previous speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I regret the time has lapsed. I am sure the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon will seek the next opportunity to ask questions of his colleague opposite, the member for Beaver River.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport):** Mr. Speaker, back in February the Minister of the Environment stated in the House her intention to review the present situation and to propose within four to six months timetables and schedules for the phasing out of toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes, particularly of organochlorines.

Chlorine is at the centre of a controversy because of its impacts on the environment and on human health. On one hand chlorine has been very useful but it is also has negative effects.

Today there are about 15,000 chlorinated compounds in use by industry. In addition, many byproducts are produced when chlorine is used in processes such as pulp and paper and vinyl manufacturing. These byproducts include such toxic persistent substances as dioxins, furans and PCBs.

Organochlorines are known to be persistent in the environment and to build up in the food chain.

A number of health problems are associated with organochlorines and mounting evidence indicates that some organochlorines can cause not only cancer, but also reproductive dysfunctions, endocrine disruptions, developmental impairments, and immunological effects.

The International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes has recently recommended first, the virtual elimination of persistent toxic substances from the Great Lakes, including the use of chlorine and chlorine-containing compounds as chemical feedstocks in industry. Second, the elimination of other chlorine uses or at least their reduction and, third, a shift from government or the public having to prove the danger of a product to the chemical industry so that it would be the chemical industry that would have to prove the product or a substance is not harmful.

(1845)

In addition, the International Joint Commission is urging industry to rethink its practices in order to eliminate the production of persistent toxic substances, a much better preventive approach than the reacting and curing approach we have at the present time.

Many scientists are saying that organo-chlorines are a problem from a public health point of view. While some organo-chlorines might be generally safe, they should earn their designation as safe through good, solid science and through a shift in the onus of proof.

For all these reasons, I urge the Minister of the Environment to announce a plan for the gradual elimination of industrial chlorine use as recommended by the International Joint Commission. Also, I urge the minister to set up a strategy and a timetable for examining the possibility of reducing or eliminating other uses of chlorine and other persistent toxic substances.

In conclusion, it seems to me that in 1994 the Minister of the Environment has the opportunity to act and to plan a transition as called for by the International Joint Commission which recommends the adoption of a virtual elimination strategy within two years. This action requires political will and commitment, of course. The Minister of the Environment and Deputy Prime Minister has the power to prove that this Liberal government is committed to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement which as we all know commits the Government of Canada and that of the United States of America to a toxic free water body for the benefit of Canadians and Americans.

**Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, the government has been following the chlorine issue extremely closely. So far the government's policy has focused its regulations and control efforts on chlorinated compounds demonstrated to be toxic and on the processes that generate them.

Environment Canada and Health Canada have undertaken a science-based examination of 22 chlorine compounds and have shown 14 of them to be toxic either to the environment or human health.

We are determined to address this issue through the CEPA, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, a review that will start very shortly through the Standing Committee on Environment

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and Sustainable Development of which my hon. colleague is the chairman.

Through the Great Lakes action plans and programs in place already and through close interaction with other countries, especially the United States, we need to establish strategies along with our neighbours to the south to reduce, prohibit and substitute for the use of chlorine and chlorinated compounds. The U.S. is now proposing a task force with timetables to establish a definite action plan that will define the ways to reduce, prohibit and substitute the use of chlorine.

Currently the Minister of the Environment is convening a consultation process of multi-stakeholders to do exactly this, to try and define an action plan to reduce, prohibit and substitute the use of chlorine. This action plan should be ready by the late spring of this year.

## INFORMATION HIGHWAY

**Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members of the House, for the opportunity of being able to speak in this House. It is a rare opportunity for some of us.

(1850)

The question I am raising tonight is a question that I raised in the House on March 15. It concerns Rogers' takeover of Maclean Hunter and the virtual monopoly that Rogers Communication will have on the information highway.

Rogers Communication with this takeover will have some 43 per cent control over Canadians who are hooked into the cable system. In Ontario it is over 70 per cent.

My question to the government was to request it to either set up a special committee of Parliament or to ask the standing committee for the Department of Heritage to have special hearings, not just on Rogers' takeover but on the whole question of what is the public interest in the information highway.

I acknowledged in my question that both the CRTC and the Competition Tribunal will have to hold hearings and approve this takeover. My position is we must first define what is in the public interest in terms of the evolution of the information highway.

Mr. Rogers might be quite correct in claiming that we need large monopoly type organizations or companies in order to compete with the Americans and to take full advantage of the technologies available. If he is right then basically what he is saying is that he is a natural monopoly like telephone, like power and other utilities. If that is the case then we must look to make certain that the proper regulations are in place. This type of work, I suggest, should be done by a parliamentary committee.

I noticed later last week that the government had set up a commission under the chairmanship of Mr. David Johnston from McGill University. The discouraging part, when I read about this in the Thursday, March 17 edition of the *Citizen*, is that most of these hearings will be held in private and not open to the public.

I wish to underline the importance of an open public process in which all the players, including the public, can participate. I would also suggest that this is a creative way of using members of Parliament and the existing committee system. I could envisage working very closely with the departments involved, including the Department of Canadian Heritage, the bureaucrats in that department working with the committee, to work together on a co-operative basis to develop a position of what is in the public interest.

I was also somewhat encouraged by the response of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry. I believe that the parliamentary secretary left open the possibility of using members of Parliament either in a specially struck committee or in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to deal with this issue. I believe this is an issue that should be dealt with by committee and utilizing the work of the House.

Let me again underline the importance of what is happening here. Never before has a development of this magnitude, that is Rogers' takeover of MacLean Hunter, been seen in the Canadian history of cultural industries. It creates a virtual monopoly. It is a turning point in Canada's technological and cultural future. Therefore, it is essential that the public interest be defined and that this be done through a committee of the House of Commons.

**Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry):** Mr. Speaker, I begin by thanking the member for his concern on both of these issues.

First, the information highway will be a cornerstone for future industrial development and economic growth. The development of innovative products and technology will provide Canada and Canadian businesses with the infrastructure and technology necessary to compete successfully in international markets.

On Wednesday, March 16, the Minister of Industry announced that Mr. David Johnston, the vice-chancellor of McGill University, will be the chairperson for the advisory council for the information highway. The advisory council will assist the Minister of Industry to develop a Canadian strategy for the information highway.

The council will analyse and provide advice on general matters of policy and strategy to ensure that Canada has access to the benefit of advanced communications information services. The council will also be accepting submissions from Canadians in any area of interest to them.

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(1855)

I want to say to the member that in my own community with the assistance of constituents and Mark Cameron and Roman Kowalczyk, members of my support staff, we are beginning to set up a community centre for information access on this very important subject.

I welcome members of the House and all Canadians to write for information on how to set up one of these systems in their community. We will supply them with the information. We are very much concerned that we bring this issue into the public forum. It is moving fast. It is complex and we want to make sure that public participation is involved all the way along.

Getting back to the advisory council, it is not being established to review the proposed merger of Rogers Communications and Maclean Hunter. Issues concerning the merger will be addressed by regulatory bodies under existing legislation.

Pursuant to the Broadcasting Act which Parliament passed in 1991 a change in ownership of cable companies greater than 30 per cent requires the approval of the Canadian Radio–television and Telecommunications Commission. The CRTC has broad powers and a fact finding mandate that will explore and examine the issues in this takeover to ensure it is in the public interest.

Once the CRTC has received the application from Rogers Communications, it will make plans to schedule public hearings for the takeover of Maclean Hunter. Any group or organization that has an interest can request to be heard by the CRTC at those hearings.

Furthermore the takeover will also be reviewed by the director of investigation and research pursuant to the powers vested in him by the Competition Act. It is also important to allow these officials to proceed as currently planned.

Though the hon. member suggests that the Commons committee on heritage—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order, the hon. member for Capilano—Howe Sound.

## IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Herb Grubel (Capilano—Howe Sound):** Mr. Speaker, this is a question for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Since the minister announced that next year's level of immigration will be 250,000 I have received only critical comments from my constituents concerning this decision. Other Reform members of Parliament have had the same experience. We are getting clear signals from the people of Canada that they want less immigration.

Last week I asked the minister about the contacts his office has had concerning the same matter. I received no answer and

instead received a lecture about the merit of the government's determination to stick to policies regardless of public opinion polls and comments received from the general public.

I find this attitude of the government policymakers arrogant, elitist and undemocratic. When this government was in opposition its MPs were constantly arguing against government policies on the grounds that the people did not want such things as free trade and the GST. Power corrupts. Now the people's wishes no longer matter.

I ask the minister again a simple and straightforward question which should be answerable in simple terms. How many contacts from the public has he received critical and supportive of the immigration levels since he has announced them?

**Ms. Mary Clancy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Capilano—Howe Sound for his intervention.

I must say that counting the number of representations on any issue is really no way to determine the wishes of the majority of Canadians. It is also no way to determine whether public policy reflects the opinion of the people of Canada.

Write in campaigns initiated by certain groups distort reality. All of us who have sat in this House for any length of time are aware of that. They only reflect the opinion of the particular group. With the greatest of respect, I might remind the hon. member that we on this side of the House who did win the majority of seats campaigned on exactly the immigration level the hon. minister brought forward this year.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is aware that many Canadians are concerned however about the future directions of the immigration program. That is why on February 2 of this year he launched a major public consultation process that will help shape this country's immigration policy for the next decade.

His intentions are clear. He wants to hear from Canadians through an open and informed discussion. The process will set the stage for establishing a new 10-year framework for immigration and a new immigration plan.

The minister has stated on numerous occasions he has no intention of formulating immigration policy on public opinion polls, but by an open and frank discussion of the facts, not the myths.

In the red book this party described our policies. Canadians accepted them through the national and democratic election. The 1994 levels fulfil the red book commitments, including a total immigration of approximately 1 per cent of the Canadian population and a priority to family and independent immigrants.

The Reform Party is calling for cuts to levels which would reduce immigration levels by 100,000 people. The only way to

do that is to modify the eligibility criteria which means changing the rules of who gets in and who does not.

This is a very important issue which deserves input and discussion by as many Canadians as possible, not just a few letter writers in a few constituencies.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** It being 7.03 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to S<sup>2</sup>

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