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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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**THIRD SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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Morning Sitting

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2007

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. C. Richmond:** I call the adjourned debate on second reading of Bill 39, intituled Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2007.

### Second Reading of Bills

#### ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT, 2007 (continued)

**C. Trevena:** Some time ago I was talking about Bill 39, and I'm very happy to continue my remarks about the bill, because I find that it's one that raises great concerns for me. I was talking at that stage about the concept of gerrymandering and whether this is or isn't gerrymandering. It is clearly, I believe, political interference.

We have an independent commission that has been charged with a duty, to be carried out independently, to look at our electoral boundaries. Because the result wasn't up to what it was felt was needed by the government, the Electoral Boundaries Commission has been given another charge.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

What is particularly troubling about this is that it's been charged with saying that there were going to be a set number of seats, instead of "up to." Instead of up to 85 seats, which would give the Electoral Boundaries Commission, an independent commission, the opportunity to look at the electoral map and work out where the best distribution is going to be, it is now saying that there have to be 87 seats.

I know that the arguments being stated about this are that this is going to guarantee rural representation. When I finished my remarks — I believe it was about ten days ago — I was talking about the fact that I represent a rural constituency.

[1005]

I know very well the importance of the way that our electoral system works, where rural constituencies may have a smaller population but, because of the larger land mass, have an equal representation. My constituency is about 17,000 square kilometres, and I know that where it takes me four or five hours to get across it, including either ferries or boats — water taxis or boat rides — for some of my colleagues, it might take only an hour to cross their constituency, if they're in an urban constituency.

Fixing the seats by declaring that we are going to have X number of rural seats and X number of urban seats really isn't helpful. I think that everybody understands

the irony of this — that this is coming from a Premier who at one time wanted to cut the number of seats and wanted to cut the number of MLAs. Now we're saying: "Oh well, to protect rural representation, we're going to ensure that we have a certain number of seats in the rural areas, and then we can divide the rest of the province up."

This shouldn't be for our Premier to decide. It shouldn't be for us to decide. It should be for an independent commission to decide. The commission's independence, I believe, is fundamental for trust in our democratic process.

In my remarks a couple of weeks ago I raised the fact that we don't have many women here. We don't have many people from what represents B.C., and we don't have many young people here. What I find, when I'm talking to people, is a lack of trust in our democratic process. There's the sense that it doesn't matter, that they're not going to be heard.

When we get interference, an independent commission that is being interfered with.... When we have a group of highly respected people who are not allowed to go about their job independently and who are told, "Well, you can do it independently. Go off and talk to all the people you want, but this is the answer we want," where is the democracy in that? Where is the independence in that?

It doesn't surprise me that when you go into a classroom and try and explain that to young people, they get disillusioned. It is a fundamental part of our democracy that we have this independent commission, and I think it was very healthy when it was created. It's not that old to have an independent commission in B.C., and I think it really should enhance our democratic process here.

Yesterday I had a very interesting discussion with some Ukrainian women who were here. I introduced them in the Legislature. They come from Ukraine. Most of them were born in the Soviet era. There were a couple of younger women there who were.... One was five, I think, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine became independent.

They were admiring our democratic process. They are a new government, and I'm not sure whether.... They have a democratic process, but it is a struggling democratic process. They really admired our democratic process and the way that there is distancing — the way we are elected compared to the way members in their governments are elected, the way we can operate compared to the way members in their government operate and the way we set our boundaries compared to the way they set their boundaries.

It is, I think, something we really should remember — how precious our democratic process is. I keep coming back to the sense of democratic process, Madam Speaker, because this is such a part of our democratic process. The structure is such a part of our democratic process, and the way the structure is set up is part of our democratic process.

If people can't trust that a boundaries commission can work independently of a government or, rather,

that a government cannot let a boundaries commission work independently — that a government is so insecure or so autocratic that it has to feel that a boundaries commission has to be told what to do — it's no wonder that people lose faith in democracy. It's no wonder that people lose faith in our democratic process, and it's no wonder that.... Come the next election, I'm sure we'll see even fewer people going to vote. They can see that it doesn't really make much difference, because our processes are fixed.

[1010]

I say that I represent a rural area. I represent a rural area where we're seeing some changes. One of the changes is in our electoral processes, and that is the change in our regional district, where it's being split from one regional district into two parts. It's being done without consultation.

Again, people are questioning how this can happen. How can we have a structure that works be broken up? How can a government just come and say high-handedly: "This is what we want to do. This is how we want to make our view of democracy work"?

It's very troubling that there is a government that is so insecure in its fundamental beliefs that it will come in and tell an electoral boundaries commission: "This is how you're going to be setting up." It will tell an elected body such as the regional district: "Sorry, you don't exist." It really is of great concern that we are seeing a government that will say: "This is the way that we want it. You agree with it or else. There is no choice."

I think that that is very troubling. It's very worrying. I think that, as this continues, as we start seeing more and more of the voices not being heard, whether it is in elected local government or whether it is in the way that our boundaries are set up.... Why get involved? If we don't have people getting involved, if we don't have any trust in our democratic process, what does that mean for our future? If people cannot trust the independence of our democratic process, what does that mean for us in the future?

All members talk about the honour of being in this chamber. I think we're all honoured to be in this chamber. We're all extraordinarily proud to represent the people who have elected us, to represent our constituencies, our communities. But that pride does become tarnished when we see the system sullied, when we see the system being abused, when we see that we have a government that will say: "I'm running it this way. Take it."

I have huge pride in being in this House. Like a number of my colleagues on both sides of the House, I'm a new Canadian. I am very honoured that I have been elected by my constituents, and I'm very proud to represent them. I'm in this House because I believe in democracy. I believe democracy works, and I believe democracy should be encouraged to work.

As I mentioned, I met with women from the Ukraine, and I've been in and worked in places where democracy doesn't work. I've worked trying to help these countries and these places learn about democracy and learn about the electoral process.

One of the very basic things when you're dealing with a new government, a new country which is going to have an election, is education about the electoral process. A fundamental part of education about the electoral process is the independence of an electoral boundaries commission.

Across the world where you are working to instil a democratic process, you talk about the independence of an electoral boundaries commission, where it will not be interfered with by the executive, by the government, by anybody. They have the right to go and examine the country, go listen to people and talk and find out what is going to be the best way that boundaries can be drawn up.

Yet here in B.C. — a young province in an established democracy of Canada, an established democratic system and parliamentary democracy — we have a government that doesn't have the courage to let people work, to let an independent boundaries commission work on its own.

It's a government that is afraid of its own people. That is a very, very scary concept — that it is so afraid of what people might say or what people might do or maybe that people don't like what it is saying and will do something else, that it has to impose its views on the system.

[1015]

B.C. is growing. It's a young province that is growing. I think everybody agrees that we need to look at the electoral boundaries. There's no question we need to look at the electoral boundaries so that we get good representation for everyone in B.C. But that doesn't come from diktat. It doesn't come from telling that Electoral Boundaries Commission how many should be.

As I say, I've worked in places where democracy doesn't work and where people are striving for a fair and just democratic system. They would love to have an honest election. If I went and told them that the way it works here is that yes, you have honest elections, but the government can come in and the government can say, "This is how we want the electoral system to work," they'd be shocked.

One of the things we can pride ourselves on as Canadians in the democratic free world and in the Commonwealth is that we can go into different countries and explain our democratic system and share with people our democratic system and share with people the independence of our democratic system. What is so sad is that this tarnishes that reputation.

By having the line that we have to have a set number of electoral districts, taking away the freedom of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, it sullies our reputation. It sullies our reputation in this country, and it most certainly sullies our reputation anywhere else that looks to Canada as a democratic, bright, hopeful place.

Democracy. I would hope that we would all agree that democracy is something that we should be celebrating. It is a wonderful evolution of the people's voice, of the way that we listen to people, the way that we hear people, the way that we represent people. Democracy should be able to operate without political interference. The very basic structures of democracy should be without political interference.

The independent process that was set up, which we all agreed to in 2005, was also going to be looking at the boundaries for proportional representation. I know there's a lot of discussion about proportional representation, whether this is the right version or the wrong version and whether STV is actually proportional representation. I could talk for another half-hour about the different forms of proportional representation.

I think that proportional representation is the way forward, and it's definitely a way to engage more people into the democratic process. I think it will really enliven both our democracy here in B.C. and Canada's democracy. When you see a system of proportional representation where you can get independent people standing, you can get small parties standing and getting elected, it's very exciting and very representative.

It is so troubling, so distressing that this Electoral Boundaries Commission is drawing the map for what will be the vote for B.C. on proportional representation. What should be a whole new process that can be brought to the people of B.C. through an independent body on a whole new voting system, on a whole new way of how we make democracy work and how we can engage people and enliven the debate, has again been tarnished because there are instructions being given to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. And while there are instructions being given to an electoral boundaries commission, the process is not going to be open, it's not going to be transparent, and I think it's going to leave people with a very bitter taste in their mouths.

[1020]

I think that we had an opportunity here both for proportional representation and for the boundaries for our province. The freedom of an electoral boundaries commission is a huge opportunity for a province to define itself, for people to go and talk to the Boundaries Commission.

I know that people from my constituency talked to the Boundaries Commission. Rather, the neighbouring constituency of Powell River-Sunshine Coast just across the strait talked to the Boundaries Commission, because the Boundaries Commission actually enlarged my constituency under the maps that were drawn in a report that came out this summer to include people who live in the Broughton Archipelago, Gilford Island, Echo Bay and up the inland areas.

They felt they were not being represented properly, because their point of reference is Port McNeill and Port Hardy, not Powell River or Sechelt. They were able to approach the Boundaries Commission and say: "It doesn't work for us. The way the system is at the moment, it doesn't work for us. We want to be able to be part of North Island, because that is where our voice is. We know our representative. We see her a lot. We know where her office is. We know how to communicate with her. We don't have any connection with the other constituency."

It worked, Madam Speaker. The Electoral Boundaries Commission listened, and they changed the map to include the voices of those people. Now the Electoral Boundaries Commission is being told that they have to

listen to the Premier. Clearly, they have to listen to the voices of some people, but they are fixed with the 87 seats.

I keep coming back to my concerns about the government's approach on this, because when the government was first elected in 2001, it did promise openness, and it promised transparency. We can all talk about the open cabinet meetings. I think both sides of the House mostly get a laugh from that now, because I don't think anybody can remember when the last open cabinet meeting was.

Interjection.

**C. Trevena:** There may be some heckling there, but I don't think the member opposite can be very proud of the number that his own cabinet has had. He is a member of cabinet, and I would hope that he would take this issue to his Premier and say: "We want openness. We want transparency. We do not want a government that is fearful of the democratic process and fearful of its own people." And that is what we're getting.

This is a government that also brought in fixed-term elections. Now, fixed-term elections.... Some people say they're good; some people say they're bad. They are an evolution in our democratic process.

I realize that the time I have left to speak is limited, but one of the concerns that I think many people have in the redrawing of the maps that have been given to the Electoral Boundaries Commission is that suddenly we're going to have a very tight time limit for these new maps to be put into place ahead of an election on May 12, 2009.

We have an Electoral Boundaries Commission that is still waiting for this House, obviously, to approve the bill and then to be able to get back on with its work. It's going to leave less than 18 months for the whole process to fall into place. I find that very, very worrying.

I know the government has changed the rules many times on the whole Electoral Boundaries Commission. Initially, we were supposed to have the next vote on proportional representation in 2008. Luckily, that's already been put back to 2009, because it would be exceedingly worrying if suddenly we had to get whole new maps together in nine months' time.

In closing on my opposition to this bill, what we're seeing is a government that changes the rules — a government that is frightened of people and will change the rules to get the political outcome it wants, whether it is the political outcome in the map of the elections for B.C. or the political outcome in the way that a regional district works. You see the autocratic splitting of the Comox-Strathcona regional district.

I oppose this bill wholeheartedly, because I think it is the sign of an autocratic, fearful government.

**R. Cantelon:** It's a pleasure and a privilege to talk about an issue that's really at the heart of our democracy — the establishment of electoral boundaries to equitably and fairly represent our people in the province.

[1025]

I had the opportunity this summer to attend a parliamentary conference, which basically encourages and engenders the preservation and extension of our parliamentary system. Unless I mistake the member for North Island's eloquent elocution, her mother country is the seat of that democracy. The Magna Carta and the origin of our parliamentary system go back to that country, England. It's a great system. Many people have tried to change it and modify it, but over the years it stood the time well. It gives the people a chance to speak through their elected representatives and to say what their feelings are and to direct them in their affairs.

I have quite a few concerns, though, about the tactics and the slant that the members opposite are putting on this. I have to say that I think it does not accurately reflect the process. I think it could give the public listening to these speeches the mistaken impression that this process is somehow unfairly slanted and unfairly used. I think the statements within the House, though, in many ways sharply contrast what has been said outside the House. I'll refer to those comments in a few moments.

There are two essential components to this. Certainly democracy is the core, and the second, of course, is representation within that democracy. It's been said that the process is being unfairly managed and slanted, and let me speak to that a bit. It's as though we are lifting from the Electoral Boundaries Commission their right to act independently. Of course, that is far from the case.

They have put a considerable amount of good work into it. But even in presenting the report to us as they did, they recognized there were some shortcomings and some flaws — particularly on the Island that I represent, Vancouver Island. It was recognized in the comments by the Electoral Boundaries Commission that there was a need and pressure for the expanding populations on Vancouver Island to get additional representation.

Distribution on Vancouver Island, of course, is quite difficult inasmuch as, unlike central metropolitan areas in the lower mainland, where you merely cut the grid into different shapes.... If triangles don't work, you can use squares or circles or whatever to adjust the population to the required amount.

However, on Vancouver Island the population is spread up and down the Island, and it's not so easy to divide it into equal population areas that receive fair and equitable representation. The member for North Island in her comments pointed out that her riding is indeed one of the most sparsely populated and spread-out ridings — from Campbell River to Gold River to Tahsis to Zeballos up to Port Hardy and Port McNeill and across to Alert Bay. It's a very, very spread-out Island.

I would have to comment that the representation that riding received was a little awkward in that the Electoral Boundaries Commission came up with a population base that was 5 percent over the average, despite the fact that this was one of the most sparsely spread-out areas. This is one of the areas that I think the electoral boundary would have sought to have more freedom and the jurisdiction to operate differently.

But electoral boundaries commissions operate within the guidelines that the government gives them. The

government gives them guidelines according to what the population desires, what the people of the province want.

Going back again, the core tenet of our parliamentary system, of course, is representation by population. That was an easy thing in rural England and in rural Canada in earlier days, where so much of the population was based on agrarian production, that people were on the farm. The population was evenly distributed, principally between the cities and the countryside.

That, of course, has changed with industrialization. The need becomes to develop and to more fairly represent these two differing and disparate concentrations of population. Now, I would not agree with some of the members on my side of the House who say that we have to represent the areas where the resources come from.

Well, the resources don't vote. But I would concede that the people who are the stewards, the people who live in those areas, the people who we look to for advice on how resources will be developed, how the important resources of the province will be managed, how we will protect the environment.... These considerations in developing our wonderful province need to be given strong and adequate representation.

[1030]

What we clearly heard after the first Electoral Boundaries Commission was a protest from the people who live there. They showed up in considerable numbers in northern communities — in Prince George and others — saying: "You can't do this. You cannot remove representation from the rural areas."

We have to achieve what is a fair balance of representation, skewing away from purely representation to population, that gives a representation of the stewards of these rural resource-producing areas a proper say in the development of our province and still acknowledge that the people in the lower mainland have to be adequately represented in terms of population.

You can't go too far in this extreme and have ridings where you need to tend to an inordinate number of constituents. Firstly, it isn't easy or fair to handle a greater number of constituents than in a more sparsely populated area. Just as importantly, the main principle of our democracy is representation by population — one person, one vote. The more you vary from that, the less democratic, fundamentally, your government becomes. I think both sides of the House recognize this.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission was tasked with redoing this. "Let's keep the seats." That's what we clearly heard. "Keep rural representation. It's important. It's necessary." We heard that from both sides of the House in public, but not here. I'll refer to some of those comments in a few minutes. So we certainly said: "Keep those seats."

Coming back to all the members on Vancouver Island, the regional district of Nanaimo was the second-fastest-growing area of British Columbia, at 9 percent. It's clear that the Island is being discovered by more and more people and that more and more people desire to live there. In the province it's the most desirable place in the world to live. Vancouver Island, as its climate and favourable aspects of recreation are recognized, is

becoming one of the most desirable areas to live in British Columbia.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission struggled with that and could not accommodate everybody, could not accommodate all the growth needs, all the potential voters who aren't properly represented. So it was the decision of the government to set broad guidelines, and I emphasize broad guidelines.

It has been said — and I expect it will be said, perhaps, by the following speaker — that we had somehow constricted or tied the hands of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Not so. The previous speaker said that they have to agree or else. It's also going to be held forth, perhaps by the next speaker — perhaps he'll be more sagacious in his comments — that we're somehow trying to ram this through.

Well, first of all, let me comment that the hard work, the spadework, of the Electoral Boundaries Commission has already been done. They have done the statistical gathering of information from the last census. They've compiled a wealth of statistics, developing population trends of all the communities on the islands. So all the numbers work, the hard crunching, has already been done. That doesn't have to go further.

They've also heard representations regarding community of interest, which I think is a very important consideration. In fact, it's really at the core of retaining the rural seats — to retain a community of interest and not further cut them up.

They've done that work. Now it's not as if they're going to have to reinvent the wheel. *Au contraire*. What they will be doing is re-examining their work in the light of the new guidelines that have been set forward — the new broad guidelines.

To suggest that the Premier or any other person is trying to specifically dictate where those boundaries go... I think that the members opposite know that truly that is not the case.

The commission is now handed its guidelines, and they will consider them as they divide into new boundaries. I think all members will look with interest when those boundaries come up and are unfolded before us.

They have, from the passing of this legislation... Although the legislation hasn't passed, I'm sure some of the people in the bureaucracy are already considering what the work ahead of them likely will look like. They will redraw those boundaries by the end of January. By the end of January they will put forward a new set of tentative boundaries. Those tentative boundaries will then be up to public scrutiny, as they were before.

[1035]

I certainly hope and it's my expectation that unlike the first set of boundaries — where the people in the north were basically screaming for a change; they did not like the idea of removing representation — they'll be received a lot better, particularly that the three seats would be put back in. Also, other areas — like Vancouver Island, like areas in the lower mainland — will profit from the expansion of the number of seats.

They will then be able to see their representation expectations fully met. Those expectations will then

have to meet the open, transparent scrutiny of the public. Everybody will have a chance to talk about and discuss and make their representations known to the commission, which will then have to report back by the end of May. Then the final report will be forwarded.

It's not a complete rechanging of the entire grid. It's not a complete change or throwing everything away the work that was done. All of that work will be compiled and yet further refined. It's a significant but a very important and positive step of moving forward.

It's much better to do the change that we did than to move forward with a plan that was clearly not acceptable. I invite any member of the opposition, perhaps following, to say that it was acceptable, to say that the north was happy with the reduction in seats, to come forward and say: "We like that. My constituents have told me that we like less representation."

In fact, we have had the opposition try to say both things at the same time, an equivocation that just does not pass the test of logic, I'm sorry to say. They want to preserve the representation in the north on the one hand, but they don't want any changes in the system. The two conflicting ideas, happily, do not seem to cause any conflict in the minds of the opposition. But we've often seen, I'm afraid, on the other side that apparent — at least apparent to me — contradictions in logic do not seem to inhibit them in their policy statements.

In fact, I see some agreeing smiles, I think, from the member for Columbia River–Revelstoke opposite. May I remind him of what he said just....

**N. Macdonald:** I wasn't agreeing.

**R. Cantelon:** You agree? Thank you. I happily take that concession from you.

"The increase in the number of seats in the Legislature" — this was when it went from 75 to 79 — "will allow some retention of rural seats." That was a statement by the member for Columbia River–Revelstoke.

I would hope that he would happily agree that going from 85 to 87 would be even more beneficial to the representation in rural seats. If I abridge his statement, I'm sure it's one that stands the test of standing alone, because it's quite clear in its sentiment.

That's what we heard, and we heard other things, too, very recently. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Victoria–Beacon Hill on.... Well, this is recent. This is from this September, relating to the upcoming one: "We have been very vocal about saying that we shouldn't lose rural representation. Not often the Premier and I agree" — my goodness, it does say that — "but on this one, we'd like to see rural seats remain." That seems to be a pretty clear statement.

**D. Hayer:** Very clear.

**R. Cantelon:** Very clear. "We don't think we can lose them."

It would certainly seem to me that the statement of sympathy is clear. Then, on the one hand, we say what we're doing....

Interjection.

**R. Cantelon:** Ah, they're awake. I'm glad to see that the opposition has been inspired to participate in this debate, and I look forward to future comments. I'm glad to see they're turning their gaze from their other distractions, because I think this is an important debate, and I think it's worthy of serious discussion by all members of the Legislature. But I say serious discussion.

Let's not talk about, as some.... They say that the independence of this committee has somehow been inhibited. Everyone knows — and I think the public is very well aware — that the commission will take their instructions and do as they choose with them. Frankly, as individual members, we may not be quite as enthusiastic about the machinations and the results that they derive from relooking at the database that they have acquired and applying and transposing the new regulations, the new instructions, on them.

These new instructions certainly meet what we have heard from the people. "Don't cut rural seats." That's what we've done.

[1040]

I think it's very clear that as stewards of the north, as stewards of our resources.... It's absolutely critical that as the representation from the north, where we obtain so much of our wealth in this province — it drives the economy of this province — they be adequately represented to decide how these lands should be used.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I'd like to take a pause and allow another member to make an introduction.

**Hon. M. Coell:** Madam Chair, I'd like to take a moment to make an introduction, if that's all right.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. M. Coell:** I have 25 grades 4 and 5 students from my riding from Brentwood Elementary School who are here today with some parents and their teacher, Julie Kirzinger. They're actually here now, listening to debate on the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act. I would say that ten years from now they're going to be in a position to be able to vote for all members of this House, so if you would please make them very welcome.

### Debate Continued

**R. Cantelon:** It's wonderful to see so many students and their teachers here in the gallery. If I may, through you, Madam Speaker, make comments to the fact that what they are watching today — I digress slightly — is a very important discussion.

We are discussing nothing less than the absolute core of our democracy: how people should be represented by their electors. That's what we're debating here today. What our government is suggesting is that it be done in

a fair way so that all the people, notwithstanding where they live and what the population is, receive fair representation.

What I'm suggesting today and what I'm arguing for, Madam Speaker, to the gallery, is that the north should have and maintain its representation. What you may hear from the benches opposite is that they don't want to do that. They don't want to retain the seats in the north. But they will do it in a way — interestingly enough, intriguingly enough — to try to have it both ways: "We don't want to lose rural representation, but we don't like the new guidelines as set forward."

You can't have it both ways. Well, evidently, that is the position they espouse. They can't have it both ways. You can't both retain the rural seats and expand representation the way we're suggesting to do it. It's an impossibility, and there are other needs.

I was talking about Vancouver Island. On Vancouver Island, again, the Leader of the Opposition has said, about representation with regard to Victoria — where there are long-held traditions which define the other aspect besides population, the aspect of community of interest.... The member for Victoria-Beacon Hill said: "No one would have expected" — indicating surprise — "there would be this amount of change."

The change, I infer, refers to the fact that the traditional demographic and community-of-interest lines, instead of running north-south, were suddenly cut in a different way and all the ridings were changed. "There's a long history." I infer from that that the history should be respected, and I agree with that. The history should be respected — the history of the ridings in Victoria.

I think that the public will really want to get involved. We intend to give them that opportunity, Madam Speaker. We will be passing this legislation. I assume we will be passing it. I hope there will be unanimity on this, although there may not be. There may be some recalcitrant members opposite who, despite their own instincts and logic, will pursue the party dictums on this, I'm sure.

In any case, as of January 31, once the Electoral Boundaries Commission has ample time to reconsider their massive database and reconfigure the ridings, they'll go to what they said. They'll go to the issues like the representation on Vancouver Island, which they acknowledge was just barely below adding another seat. They'll now be able to do that and add that seat if they choose. They'll have the flexibility to do that, whereas they didn't before.

They will do that, despite what you may hear from the opposition, with considerable public influence but no political influence. The die will be set, and they'll be able to then move their jurisdiction within the wide latitude that's provided to them. And I'm sure comments such as those that I just mentioned from the Leader of the Opposition will be taken into account so that the history of Victoria ridings will be respected in these new considerations and deliberations.

[1045]

I look forward to a new Electoral Boundaries Commission that recognizes the shortcomings that the

Electoral Boundaries Commission themselves recognize — that Vancouver Island, for example, was not quite at the threshold of a new seat. They will now have the opportunity to do so.

I'm sure there are areas in the lower mainland that feel the same pinch. Adding seats provides more flexibility that would have allowed them to do the representations that they need.

The issues about democracy.... How do you preserve democracy? You need a modern interpretation that balances the fact that the rural areas continue to decline in population and that the urban areas continue to grow. You have to find a balance that acknowledges and recognizes the historical basic tenet of democracy — which is representation by population — that recognizes that but, in a new and modern way, compensates for the decline in rural populations.

As I reiterate, the rural populations are critical. They are, indeed, the stewards of our resources, and the resources of this province are what drive the economy of this province. I think it was over \$200 million. The restimulation of the mining industry has been tremendous, and the people who live there are important. Their representation and their voices are extremely important.

We've heard, of course, a member opposite from the Prince Rupert area. I know that the important new port that has been put into Prince Rupert is going to be of great benefit to the people in that area. We are going to become the gateway for goods and services travelling to China because, after all, Prince Rupert is three days closer than Los Angeles and will become an important point of importation of goods and services and export to that growing huge market in China. It will be critical.

The people in Prince Rupert need to be represented, and they need the support of their other rural members. To see their voices reduced would be a horrible thing.

**G. Coons:** Their voice is watered down now because of this bill.

**R. Cantelon:** I'm sure, as the member just evinced, their voices will never be watered down. I'm sure they'll find a way to make themselves heard.

In conclusion, I think to say that the important tenets of democracy, such a rich tradition.... I want to return to the meeting I had in Winnipeg this summer where we met and, in a very bipartisan way with members from opposite, made representations to the parliamentary association of Canada. We had representatives from overseas, and we came to recognize how fragile a thing democracy is and how privileged we are to have democracy here in Canada — to have such a great, free place.

The visitors in the gallery may be somewhat amused by the banter across. And if I can, Madam Speaker, I may comment that we don't really hate each other, that we really have the well-being of the province very deeply committed to in our hearts.

We have different approaches, and you'll hear some of that shortly. I would like you to recognize and look for contradictions where you espouse rural representation but somehow oppose the fact that we are adding back

the three seats that the commission decided quite independently to remove.

Democracy isn't doing well in all parts of the world, even in those that have parliamentary democracies. We have a rich tradition, and it's being very well served and upheld in this chamber. I look forward to the following comments.

But to suggest we're somehow altering or skewering it, to somehow suggest that the Premier wants to set in place a circumstance where the seats are more favourably disposed to the election of our people.... I'm quite happy, in a political sense, to hear — and it's quite interesting to hear — that somehow these added seats are automatically going to be Liberal seats.

I think, and I stand to be corrected, we still have to hold elections in those unheld seats in those new ridings. I'm happy to hear that they are so willing to quickly concede defeat.

[1050]

I say to you: I know that we have said in this House — perhaps unfairly — negative, depressing, pessimistic.... Lift yourselves up from that mire. You can win those seats. Those seats will be open for anybody to win, and I encourage you to run candidates. I hope you run candidates in all of them. You may not. But don't be discouraged, you might win some of them. We'll give you a good fight in every one of them.

To presume that somehow they're going to be automatic Liberal seats or that they're going to be configured so they're more favourable to Liberal seats is a mistake. The Electoral Boundaries Commission knows the number, but we don't know where or how. They will decide the distribution.

It may not be quite as favourable as we would like. Certainly, Vancouver Island has not a rich history, where I live, of electing members from my side of the House, and probably adding a seat is not necessarily to the advantage of the party that I represent, given the historical trends. Nevertheless, when those new boundaries come out, I look forward and relish the opportunity to challenge the ideas of the opposition in a new election.

It will give a better representation. It will protect the rural seats. It will protect the stewardship of the northern seats but also acknowledge that areas like the Nanaimo regional district, which is growing at the second-fastest rate in the province — Kelowna has the fastest rate, and the lower mainland and Surrey, of course, are growing at a tremendous rate — will now have the seats to balance the representation by population against the rural resource areas and will reach a more equitable representation in the province.

They will do this without interference. They will do this independently and will have the results by the end of January. From January to May, over the next four months, there'll be ample time for public representation, for input, and they will listen to this input.

We won't this time, I'm sure, find the dramatic negative response we got to the first pass of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'm sure that the people in the northern communities will welcome the fact that this

legislation will establish their fair and equitable representation, and I look forward to the next election. I think it will be one that will be well fought. Once again, I think the people of all British Columbia will be well served by all the members of this House.

**C. Wyse:** It is indeed my pleasure to get up and to address the House. I do wish to acknowledge the comments of my colleague from Nanaimo-Parksville. I'm sure he's not going to be surprised when I draw some inconsistencies that have been presented in his discussion. I will do this in one of the most positive manners in a most negative situation that has been presented to the entire population of British Columbia.

In the description of the process that has taken place here, it is important to remember that the independence of a commission that defines where the boundaries are going to be for the upcoming elections is very important. It's the independence of the commission that achieves that. That arbitrariness on behalf of the Legislature is most important. There is no question that the matter of issues of pocket boroughs cannot be allowed to develop.

Pocket boroughs are those areas in which they have elected representatives sitting in the House, and in essence, they have no people that they are representing. Equally importantly in our system is the aspect that gerrymandering by the government in power also has to be balanced off.

We have a history in democratic countries around the world of governments in power gerrymandering — that is, setting up a process in which they statistically increase their chances of remaining in power by moving the boundaries around to their advantage. In British Columbia we had moved past that aspect of gerrymandering.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

I intend to develop an argument here for all British Columbians that Bill 39 in its present form is not supportable without amendments. That's the key aspect of it.

[1055]

It requires amendments in order to achieve the instructions that have been set by the courts. The courts rule that you are to find effective representation. Finding that part is what the argument and the debate are about. When you change the situation so that effectiveness has been removed, in actual fact you have changed the rules. You have changed the situation of the independence that had been set up by a commission.

Now, it is important, from my perspective, that without amendments to this legislation, Bill 39 is not supportable. It's not supportable for three major reasons, and they are: the Premier's interference with the commission's work once it had been undertaken.... I will come back and develop the rationale behind my three points as we move along. The second point is the addition of eight new politicians. Finally, the third point that I will develop is the dilution of rural representation in the overall context of the proposed amendment of Bill 39.

Now I wish to return to my three arguments. I would like to advise my colleagues here in the House, as well as the people in British Columbia that are listening to this important debate, that I will be developing throughout my discussion a rationale for why amendments are required to Bill 39 or I'm not able to support it. So I do wish to advise the House that that is how my arguments will be going, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for hearing that.

Looking at the first point — the Premier's interference with the commission's work after the commission's work had begun — requires a little bit of history. About two years ago in this House the process for the commission was set out. The government opposite brought forward their proposed legislation for what they deemed to be how the Electoral Boundaries Commission would go about doing its job in an independent fashion.

That legislation was agreed to unanimously. It was debated, the wisdom of the government was accepted, the analysis of the House was applied to the legislation, and we unanimously gave our blessing to this commission to undertake its important role of independently reviewing the changes of the population here within British Columbia.

We then unanimously agreed again on who these three wise individuals would be to undertake this very difficult task of going out, without political interference, to listen to the people of British Columbia and to sit down with that information and bring forward an initial report that, according to the previous legislation, would then go back out to the population of British Columbia. Once more, the population of British Columbia would have a chance to make their pitch to those three independent commissioners on modifications to what the commission had in mind, to what their initial report was presenting.

[1100]

From the beginning to the very end of where the commission adjourned their process, this side of the House made representation about having effective rural representation maintained. Right from the get-go, there were 24 submissions made by members on this side of the House. There were not necessarily 24 different NDP MLAs making those presentations, but there were 24 of them made by many NDP MLA representatives. I happened to have been one of them, and I will return to that part later.

With no doubt, there were a few members opposite who likewise made representation to the commission — a few. The NDP as a party made representation about maintaining effective representation for rural British Columbians. The Liberal Party — no representation on this particular issue. All of this was during this important, neutral period of time in which the commission was obtaining data and obtaining impartial reactions from around the province.

From the public, there were few to no presentations made for more seats to be added than what was provided in the existing legislation. As a matter of fact, the existing legislation that the commission initiated their independent inquiry on was based on an increase of up to six seats, from 79 to 85.

Contrary to debate earlier, on the introduction of the legislation, it was up to 85 seats. It didn't mandate 85 seats. In the presentations that were made by the public, many to most of those presentations focused on the need for boundary adjustments, not the addition of additional seats.

Returning to my area, which then became defined as part of the Cariboo-Thompson by the electoral boundary, the case for the maintenance of effective rural representation, which I was part of presenting before any report was released by the commission — and I emphasize that — was presented based upon the Cariboo's history, based upon any reduction in the Cariboo seats leading to a dilution of first nations representation.

There is, Mr. Speaker, as you already know, a very significant population of first nations in the Cariboo and, in particular, in my riding of Cariboo South. Under the existing boundaries, population-wise, it is significant in the overall total population.

I argued that adjustments to the boundaries for reduction of seats in the broad area defined as being the Cariboo would reduce the effective representation and, in a sub-argument, that it would reduce the effective representation of first nations.

[1105]

Finally, I argued for effective representation on the difference in style. Being a rookie MLA, I have discovered — learned, if you like, over the last while, approximately two and a half years — that in my part of the world the constituents of the Cariboo wish to deal with MLAs on a personal basis. They wish to interact in that type of methodology — different but no more correct than how other areas of the province interact with their MLAs.

Now, given the geography of where I'm from, further reduction in the number of seats would reduce the effective representation of representing the interests of people from the Cariboo.

Importantly, those arguments were made while the commission was collecting data — not after, when the initial report was tabled. As everyone in this House knows for sure, and as the people in British Columbia are learning, once the initial report is tabled, you've had your first blush of what the commission has in mind. You have, in essence — albeit in rough form — mapped out where the commission intends to be going with the allocations of distribution of power and representation here in the province. You have an insightful look upon where the commission is going in its independent fashion.

At this moment in time, back in the Cariboo, I'm in the process of travelling around my riding and drawing to the attention of local governments — and anyone that I can talk with — that I am concerned about the proposal contained in this report that reduces the effective representation for rural British Columbia, emphasizing at all times that I respect the independence of the commission in this very difficult job.

However, I am advising the constituents of Cariboo South that, in my wisdom, now is the time in the process to step forward — if they have not stepped forward earlier — and make the case to the independent commission that adjustments need to be made in their initial report,

remembering that the commission had the ability to make adjustments of up to 85 seats.

While I'm in the process of doing that, the game changes. In midstream, British Columbians, the game changes. I hear my colleagues from the other side, like myself....

I was interviewed from the Cariboo-Thompson area by local media. I argued for the concern of effective representation for rural B.C. being lost. I did not hear any of my colleagues from the other side arguing for the effective representation for rural British Columbians — not mentioned one time by any of the MLAs from the Cariboo-Thompson area. After the report was made, not once did I hear that.

Very shortly after that, the first and — I want to mention here — importantly, the only public forum that was scheduled to be held in all of British Columbia.... Before that had even taken place....

I then hear on the news, back in my part of the world, the Cariboo-Thompson area, that an MLA or two from up north are now stepping forward saying that they are concerned about their representation and that they will make certain that whatever can be done within their power will be brought forward to, in my assumption, the independent commission hearing.

[1110]

That public hearing was well attended. It was very well attended. The people from the north, with some representation from the Cariboo area, attended the meeting. At this one and only meeting there was concern now raised about the representation for northern British Columbia. By definition within the report, the Cariboo-Thompson area is distinctively different, as is the Kootenays.

After that one and only report, the Premier makes an announcement that there will be changes made to the legislation that governs how the independent body of the Electoral Boundaries Commission will continue doing its work.

It's at that point, after the first blush has been presented to all of British Columbians, that the commission, not surprisingly to me, announces: "Until we get our new marching orders, we're finished marching. We can't march around the province and carry on with our public data collecting, reaction to our initial report, when the Premier has announced: 'You don't know what you're doing.'"

Interjection.

**C. Wyse:** It does make sense to me, hon. Member, that the first aspect of interference in the process is significant, in my mind, for concerns at this stage of the game. So I do mention that, without amendments to Bill 39, it is not supportable in my mind.

Now, my hon. colleague — and I would like to be so bold as to actually refer to him as my friend from the other side from Nanaimo-Parksville — in his discussion talked about the impartiality of the debate and what took place in this House and that it might be construed as though these concerns that I'm raising with the Premier's interference only rest on this side of the House.

I'm not that bright to come up with those types of conclusions exclusively on my own. So I would like to introduce a couple of quotes here from people who don't sit in this House, who are, in actual fact — surprise — supporting the interpretation that I am presenting here. Two quick quotes, if I may.

From *The Province*, September 18, 2007. For those that may be looking for the actual quotes themselves, I am going to change them and remove surnames and insert the title of the individual so that, with the wisdom that you have taught me, Mr. Speaker, I hope this is all within the rules of the House on the debate.

The quote, with those modifications, reads:

"What is the Premier thinking here? Hmm, could it be Liberal politics, perhaps?"

"The Premier announced the new MLAs will represent 'growing regions of the province.' Based on census data, that likely means Greater Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and the Okanagan will get the new MLAs. What a coincidence that these areas are generally hotbeds of Liberal Party support. Looks to me like the Premier is securing himself a three-peat in the Premier's office.

"The Liberals will never admit such a thing, of course.

The Premier says this is all about protecting rural voters." That's not my quote. I'm not that bright.

[1115]

My second quote is from the *Globe and Mail* on October 14, 2007, and it reads, again with the same modification in it:

"It's a bit of a mess. The Electoral Boundaries Commission worked for 18 months and spent \$3 million working on the new riding boundaries under the law. It had hearings set for this fall.

"The Premier turned that upside down, and it's not yet clear how it will be put back together. The legislation this fall will have to answer the questions about how much freedom the commission will have under his new plan. One way or another, it's going to cost more money."

That concludes my argument around the first point of why there needs to be amendment to Bill 39, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2007. At this point I wish to move on to the addition of the eight new politicians.

Bill 39 increases the legislators from 79 to 87. As everyone in this House knows, and as British Columbia is now becoming more familiar with, the increase is mandated. It is mandated; it must be done. That is a significant change from the first set of rules set up for this independent Boundaries Commission to work under. They had the discretion to increase from 79 up to 85, as they saw fit — after they had independently collected data from around the province.

My understanding from the research that I have done is that when the commission independently collected the data, there was not a stack of requests for more MLAs. They did not have a stampede for that. As a matter of fact, at the hearings that I attended, that was not mentioned. But I didn't attend all hearings, so what would I know? That's why we were all part of structuring a commission to do this task and to do it independently.

Looking at the effect, mandated with certainty, of these eight additions to the Legislature, I would like to bring forward some third-party validators, separate

from within this House, in order once more to try and put back the independence that this House at one time did have around this process.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

I repeat, Madam Speaker, for your understanding, as well as for the rest of British Columbia, that government in our system has to pass the laws. One of the most difficult things to do in a democratic situation, in the democratic process, is for government, at arm's length, to review how power is going to be passed on in the elections and to do that in a fashion that there will not be political interference in the process.

The third-party validators bring into the conversation the effect of these eight new politicians. Mr. Michael Smyth in *The Province* on September 18, 2007, wrote: "Eight more politicians on your payroll. Just what you needed, right? Wrong. Speaking of fingers, I probably wouldn't need a single one to count how many people have told me that more politicians are what's needed to solve British Columbia's problems."

Likewise, from *The Province*, same date: "By the way, the Legislature is bursting at the seams with 79 MLAs as it is. Expanding it to 87 will probably force hugely expensive renovations to the historic building. That's more of your hard-earned tax dollars down the drain on one" — and a change again — "of the Premier's loopy ideas ever."

[1120]

Finally, from the *Times Colonist* editorial board: "Thumbs down" — and, again, the editorial change — "to the Premier for undercutting the Electoral Boundaries Commission with his decision to boost the province's number of MLAs by eight. That's a lot of offices, salaries and pensions to add to the tax burden of ordinary British Columbians." So you can see the logic, as all of British Columbia can see the logic, of the two reasons so far for why this bill requires amendments.

Now, my last argument is the dilution of rural representation. The member opposite is correct. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot add eight seats mandatorily to bring it up to 87 and maintain effective rural representation. The dilution factor reduces the rural representation percentagewise across the province. You have not, with this legislation, achieved what these courts of Canada have said. You must provide effective representation, and this legislation does not do that.

What it does do, and what British Columbia is becoming aware of, is it provides the opportunity for gerrymandering. It provides the opportunity for manipulating.

After the initial report has been presented, after the first blush is known to all British Columbia and the initial lines are drawn on the electoral boundary map, then the legislation comes in and superimposes how the people of British Columbia will determine who their elected representatives are in the future, whatever party they may belong to — not just simply the parties here but all the parties of British Columbia. That independence, without amendment to Bill 39, does not allow the legislation to be supported, in my mind.

**H. Bloy:** It's a pleasure to stand here today to speak in favour of Bill 39.

Before I was elected I always thought that there were too many politicians, maybe even in the world. We had lots of politicians, and I thought we were getting overgoverned when we got city representatives. Then we were getting regional representatives, and in all kinds of areas there seemed to be more representatives and more bodies trying to represent the constituents of this great province of British Columbia.

When I got to Victoria in 2001, yes, there were quite a few of us — 79 to 2 in the Legislature — but as I started to travel the province and saw the size of this huge province.... I was fortunate to serve on a number of committees, and when I would speak to rural representatives, they would tell me about making a five-hour drive, both ways, in a day to visit with constituents that wanted to see them.

When members in this province talk about.... A member earlier today spoke about rural people wanting to see their representative. They want to have a hands-on, personal relationship with them. Well, that's no different than in urban areas as well.

So a number of years ago I might have had a different thought, but today I see the need for these representatives. I see the need for every individual to be truly represented in this province and to have the opportunity to call upon and to speak, when needed, to their representative in the Legislature.

One vote should be equal to all, but things have changed so much over the years that equal representation may be fewer voters per MLA in the northern areas so that they communicate, versus in the urban areas. Even now in the urban areas people don't know who their elected representative is. Most people aren't interested in politics unless we show up in their back yard. Then they'll debate whatever reason we're trying to change legislation.

[1125]

We need the representation in all areas of British Columbia. We have to be fair to every person who lives in this province so that they can have representation.

I'm hearing from the opposition that, prior to our introduction of Bill 39, they were totally in favour of supporting rural representation. I'm going to read some quotes out from them. They were in favour of retaining rural representation even with the imbalance. Now for some reason, they're not in favour of this. But here's what a number of people have had to say over the last while about representation:

"We've been very vocal about saying that we shouldn't lose rural representation. Not often the Premier and I agree, but on this one, we would like to see rural seats remain. We don't think we should lose rural representation." Carole James, Leader of the Opposition, October 13, 2007.

Interjections.

**H. Bloy:** I apologize for mentioning the name.

"Taking away democratic representation from these communities will harm the entire province." Leader of

the Official Opposition, September 2007. "No one expected that there would be this amount of change. There's a long history of the ridings in Victoria, so I think the public will really want to get involved." Leader of the Opposition, August 2007.

"The increase in the number of seats in the Legislature from 79 to possibly 85 will allow some retention in rural seats." The member for Columbia River-Revelstoke, October 2007.

"I am delighted to speak in favour of Bill 14. I look forward to this debate. I encourage every member in this House to participate." The member for Nanaimo. "Rural communities are conscious of the fact that the numbers of members they elect do not, in fact, provide a sufficient counterbalance to the great numbers of members who come from urban areas." The member for Nanaimo.

"I do, in principle, support this bill. I think that it recognizes changes in our population, the growth in the urban areas. Hopefully, it will recognize the strength and the need for good rural voice. It reflects the change in our character in British Columbia. Most importantly, it maintains a strong balance for our parliamentary system." The member for North Island.

"I rise to speak in support of Bill 14. I am pleased that it provides an opportunity for the appointment of a commission and very pleased with the Attorney General's comment on ensuring that northern representation is not undermined." The member for North Coast.

"On the whole, I think what this bill does is achieve that balance of representation between rural British Columbia and urban British Columbia and, from my own perspective, in terms of how we handle growth on the lower mainland, which is crucial because that is not going to change." The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain.

The last quote: "That is going to continue, and it's something we have to make sure we address because, in the same way that we don't want rural seats to disappear in redistribution, we also don't want to see the opposite, where you have urban seats which become so large that they become very difficult to service." The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain.

It's strange how, coming into this House and over time, people will change. You know, you can admit to change. When I first came here, I thought we were overrepresented. I support this bill because I've seen the work that my colleagues do in this House, on all sides of this House, and how they're out in the community. It's a seven-day-a-week job and long, long hours in the day, and we need the people to represent.

This bill responds to the needs of all British Columbians for effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. It ensures that most geographically isolated regions of our province will not lose representation while at the same time helping to balance the population disparities that exist between rural and urban British Columbia.

[1130]

The commission, which has undertaken its task with care and diligence, nevertheless believes that the best electoral map it could produce under its current

mandate required reducing representation in the north, Cariboo-Thompson and Columbia-Kootenay regions.

The commission's preliminary report, delivered August 15, recommends reducing electoral districts in those three regions by one each and adding a total of five new districts in other regions of the province — the Okanagan, Fraser Valley, Surrey, Tri-Cities, Vancouver — for a total electoral district in the province of 81 seats. That was under the old legislation that had a maximum of 85, and now we're going with the maximum of 87.

The response to the commission's report was swift and clear. Citizens in the north, Cariboo-Thompson and Columbia-Kootenay regions were deeply concerned about the proposed loss of electoral seats. Members of both sides of the House echoed the very same concern.

The overriding issue is one of effective representation. Determining electoral boundaries is a very difficult task in a province that is as large and diverse as British Columbia. The vast majority of population is centred in the lower mainland, southern Vancouver Island and Okanagan areas. That leaves relatively fewer members to represent citizens in rural areas. In particular, it means that rural electoral districts will grow increasingly larger in area and are challenging for members of this House to represent effectively and for citizens in those regions to have meaningful connection with their elected representatives.

To give you an example, the proposed Northland electoral district of the commission's preliminary report would be 255,000 square kilometres. Now, I'm going to assume that could take quite a few hours to drive across, if you could even drive across it diagonally. You know, I've heard stories of 18 hours driving through two other electoral districts to get around your riding, whereas for myself in the urban area, even in rush hour I can be 20 minutes from one side of my riding to the other.

That's a huge area. This is an area slightly larger than Great Britain. While the population in this area is small, it is scattered over 25 different centres from Atlin in the extreme northwest of the province to Chetwynd bordering the Peace River area. Similar difficulties would exist in other proposed districts in these regions.

Urban areas face the opposite challenge. While the geographical areas are small, the populations are larger and are frequently.... I've lost the word.

**G. Coons:** Do you want another one of our quotes?

**H. Bloy:** Yeah, got a quote for me? Okay.

The ethnic populations are quite large, and many different languages occur. The challenge for those of us in urban areas is to be accessible to a large number of constituents who, because they live in concentrated areas, may also have higher expectations that we are readily available to them.

This attempts to strike a balance between the needs of people in rural regions and those in more populous areas while still giving the commission the independent flexibility it needs to produce a workable and well-considered electoral map for British Columbia.

To that end, the commission will be required to ensure that there is no reduction in the number of electoral districts in the region identified in its preliminary report as the north, Cariboo-Thompson and Columbia-Kootenay. For these three regions, the commission will not be bound by the 25-percent population rule contained in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, although it still must consider the principle of representation by population as well as the history, geography and communities of interest that exist in these areas.

Some of the changes that were made, from stories I've heard in speaking to colleagues, is that communities — which were traditionally, we'll say, in the north, part of Prince George — were cut off and were now put in a totally different electoral district. There were cities across a small pass that were cut off from that community, where their representative became another 800 miles away instead of 100 miles away.

You know, communities have a centre. With smaller communities, they go to a larger one. You're taking these smaller centres away from their traditional base of doing business, going to meet their elected representatives.

[1135]

The effect of this requirement is that the north will continue to be represented by eight members, the Cariboo-Thompson by five — and the Columbia-Kootenay.

In determining electoral districts for the rest of the province, the commission will continue to be bound by the rules established by the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, including the 25-percent population rule. The commission will be instructed to propose a total of 87 electoral districts for British Columbia. The addition of three districts in the more populous areas of the province will help to balance the population disparities between urban and rural areas.

They will not in themselves provide for voter parity. To achieve that goal would require a massive increase in the size of the Legislative Assembly. However, the three additional seats will help us get closer to that goal.

To give the commission the flexibility it will need to make its recommendations, the commission may adjust the boundaries of regions as it sees fit. To help the commission complete its revised mandate, the bill provides for the commission to submit an updated preliminary report by the end of January 2008 and a final report by April 15, 2008. This represents an extension of two months overall from its previous reporting deadline.

The direction provided in this bill has precedents everywhere in Canada. Saskatchewan's electoral boundary legislation requires that there be two northern electoral districts above a specific dividing line and 55 districts in the southern portion of the province. Those two northern ridings will exist regardless of the population disparities that may exist between them and the rest of the province.

On Prince Edward Island the French-speaking community of Evangeline-Miscouche has long been recognized with its own electoral district even though that requires a larger deviation from the population average — the fundamental principle that should guide us in effective representation in the Legislative Assembly.

The Supreme Court of Canada, in upholding Saskatchewan's electoral boundaries, made it clear that the right to vote guaranteed by section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be broadly considered.

As the chief justice said in his decision: "The concept of absolute voter parity does not accord with the development of the right to vote in the Canadian context and does not permit sufficient flexibility to meet the practical difficulties inherent in representative government in a country such as Canada. In the end, it is the broader concept of effective representation which best serves the interests of a free and democratic society."

I want to end by saying that I support Bill 39. I support the government. Coming to this House in 2001 and seeing what all members of this House do to represent their constituents — the representation and the amount of pride that my colleagues take in doing this work, spending seven days a week, spending a lot of time away from their families and family commitments....

It's very hard on families to be a representative in this House. I kind of divide my job into three. I spend one-third of my time in Victoria. I spend one-third of my time in my riding constituency, and I spend one-third of my time at social events.

I go to many social events. I eat a lot. Do I always eat well? You know, I have to exercise even harder. Some members do a lot more socializing than others. But we're all out there on a regular basis serving our constituents.

Not to support this bill, not to give every constituent in the province a fair chance at equal representation because.... I just want to quote again from the chief justice on his decision with the Saskatchewan electoral boundaries: "The concept of absolute voter parity does not accord with the development of the right to vote in the Canadian context and does not permit sufficient flexibility to meet the practical difficulties inherent in representative government in a country such as Canada."

[1140]

I believe this sums up what we're talking about today. I would encourage all members to support this bill. Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity.

**C. Puchmayr:** Well, that was an interesting debate from the previous speaker — to hear it put in the context of the workload of MLAs in our region and talking about how a third of his time is spent at social events, and that as a justification for more seats. I think there are many British Columbians that don't benefit from having a lot of social events or invitations to social events. If some of us could curtail some of that, maybe we'll require fewer seats as opposed to more seats.

I'm pleased that they're getting up and speaking on the other side, but every speaker on the other side has always addressed this in the absolute same way. In the guise of putting back three seats that were going to be removed from the north.... In the guise of that, they justify adding more seats in areas that are very dense and areas that are very serviceable. So I see a lot of consistency there.

Certainly, we're hearing over and over again that we need more seats in the lower mainland because we're putting back three seats in the interior or in the

north. That just doesn't justify. The numbers don't play out. You're actually diluting the votes in the north by adding more seats in the lower mainland.

I did attend the hearing. It was in my community, and we were encouraged to go. The commission wanted to hear from MLAs as to what they thought of the workload, how their communities play out geographically, how easy they are to deal with constituents in the communities. So I did attend.

I found it very interesting because the first part.... If anyone did attend, they created a little CD that they played, and it was sort of along the lines of *Mission: Impossible*. The commissioners had their sunglasses and their black suits on. Personally, I thought it was a little bit cheesy, but, you know, whatever. It was probably a way of breaking the ice a little bit and getting people to feel comfortable with the work of the commission. So along the lines of *Mission: Impossible* — and I believe they even had the music playing in the background — it showed who the commission was, what they were mandated to do and what their time lines and time frames were.

Unfortunately, everything that this commission has done self-destructed in 30 seconds after the end results weren't what the government was anticipating. The end results could very well have changed the political groundwork for British Columbia in the next election.

Suddenly the government decides that they have to come to the defence of democracy by setting a new mandate for an independent commission? That is odd — that somebody would go to that extent.

We all remember "Gracie's finger" back in the.... I think it was the '80s. I was fairly young then. It was that little sliver into Point Grey.

Interjection.

**C. Puchmayr:** You were my age? You were never my age.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

That little sliver into Point Grey. It secured a victory for a Socred — Liberal, Socred, Conservative, whatever they were then — cabinet minister. It secured a victory by adding a little bit of comfort and getting some seats where they already knew those seats would predominantly vote Liberal.

[1145]

They looked at the previous election, they looked at the polls in that area, and they said: "Well, these polls will show that if we add those polls into her riding, the chances are that she will have enough seats to get re-elected." That was called Gracie's finger. Well, this will make Gracie's finger look like a hangnail.

I mean, this is adding seats in areas where Census Canada has already showed the demographics of that area. Someone can look at the census. They can look at the polls in those specific areas and say: "If we had more seats directed towards that type of growth, the chances are that those will be seats that have a more favourable opportunity of going Liberal than going for the NDP."

That is what gerrymandering is. It's when you make that kind of system and add in sort of a direction that will get you a possible end result — and all of this in the guise of protecting the north.

You know, both sides agree with protecting the north. The north eliminated three seats. Two would have been NDP-held seats, and one would have been a Liberal-held seat. So there was certainly an outcry from the community.

Because of the mass geography of the north, there was certainly an outcry. The outcry was to not eliminate those seats and to keep those seats intact so that the servicing of that vast geographic region could be done without creating extra travel and more difficulty.

I'll share with you some statistics about the size of the north. British Columbia is almost a million square kilometres — 944,735 square kilometres, to be exact. It's just over four inhabitants per kilometre, and that's including the lower mainland. So if you take that and break it off into the northern region, you're going to have vast areas of many, many kilometres with no inhabitants.

Yet there is a need for infrastructure. There is a need for roads to get into mining and logging communities and resource communities. There's a need for schools so that you can attract families to move into those areas and to have their children come into those areas so that you can build healthy and good communities. It's difficult to do that without an effective voice in Victoria that can ensure that those services are in place and that can come to Victoria and make sure their constituents are well represented.

The one million square kilometres is larger than Washington, Oregon and California combined. That's a significant land mass. It is almost the same size as Germany, the Netherlands and France combined. That certainly would give a very strong argument for the reason that you would need to ensure that you had representation in the north and you had adequate representation in the north.

Remember that a large portion of the coastline of the Pacific west is the United States and that we only have a small section of that, from between Alaska and Washington State. The coastline alone is 27,000 kilometres of coastline, fjords and mountains — most of it uninhabited.

Yet a lot of it generates resources. It generates wealth that is produced for the rest of British Columbia. It would be very difficult for someone to argue that that vast area of coastline doesn't need representation that will facilitate a proper goods movement, a proper infrastructure, proper roads in and out of those areas so that we can generate some economic wealth for the rest of British Columbia.

[1150]

British Columbia has 28 million acres of wilderness, if you can imagine that. In a terrain that is mostly rugged and mountainous, it is very significant. So for anyone to say that we need fewer MLAs representing those areas of vast wilderness would be ludicrous. Both sides agree that we need to retain the three MLAs in the north so that they can deal with this vast area of

wilderness that is, again, an economic driver for the rest of the province.

To sort of take everything that the independent commission has done and turn it upside down, throw it all out, say to start over again, and then add in this mandate is nothing short of gerrymandering. I mean, that is the clear definition of gerrymandering. That is an absolute clear definition.

Both sides agree that we need the three in the north. So what happens? Because we agreed that we shouldn't lose three in the north, those other seats are thrown in there. That is not fair for an independent commission to now be forced with making a decision that is inconsistent with the direction that they were going. The areas in question are without a doubt important to all of British Columbia. They are without a doubt very crucial areas that need some very selective servicing.

Now, with the attendance that I did at the commission... I was thanked for my attendance because I was able to throw some light on what it's like to service the constituency that I represent. New Westminster is intact. One of the goals is to try at best to keep communities, cities intact — some 60,000 people and growing. I have an office with two full-time constituency assistants. Often I have a social worker student that rotates in, and then I have some volunteers that come in and do some work. They do some specific work for us in our constituency office.

I'm able to walk from one end of my constituency to another in a few hours. New Westminster is 11 square kilometres, or seven square miles. So for me to go to meet someone in a hospital or in a care home is very accessible. It's certainly a lot easier for me to accomplish than someone who has to drive, as some of the speakers have said, five hours each way to meet a constituent in the north.

For me, in my area, I find that my constituency is a lot of work — granted. I agree. I probably don't go to as many social events as the previous speaker does, but I like to focus very strongly and very hard on ensuring that my constituents are well represented.

So for me, I do not see that adding seats in areas that are easily serviced serves any benefit whatsoever, other than skewing the electoral boundary and skewing the outcome of the next election.

My constituency has incredible challenges — challenges of growth, challenges of traffic, challenges of hospitals and health care, challenges of seniors aging and finding accommodation, challenges of homelessness and mental illness, challenges of despair of the homeless and the mentally ill. Incredible challenges. The fact that our city is so compact....

There are numerous groups that deal with those issues and can get together on a regular basis. Some actually meet in my office. I have a community space there. I set up a nice community office that's open and available for non-partisan reasons.

[1155]

People are able to get together very quickly and discuss and deal with issues in my community, whereas in the north, to have a meeting on those issues would take hours and hours of travel by not only the

MLA but by other participants that are involved in trying to do what's best for the community.

I should add that being the Labour critic for the opposition, I often deal with constituents from some of the government side who the government represents, who feel they're not being adequately represented by the government with issues of WorkSafe, with issues of workers' rights and with issues that are directed by policies that this government has introduced.

Not only am I servicing my constituents, I'm also dealing with constituents from the other side. I am able to do so and do so in a very professional manner because we have good staff, and we have an area that is condensed, where I can even drive to Richmond and meet with someone who is suffering from an issue and wants to meet with the Labour critic on that issue in Richmond or in Surrey. So it's very easy for me to get around.

I don't buy the equation and the argument from the other side that there is a need to increase seats. There is absolutely no need to increase seats in this area. If any of the members on the other side.... I challenge them to go outside. The first person you see that you don't know.... Ask them if they feel there should be more MLAs in the Legislature. Just ask them that, and see what the response is.

From everything I've read — from all the commissions, newspapers, articles, what all the pundits have written — I haven't heard one person say: "We need more MLAs." I've heard people say: "We need to keep the MLAs we have, especially in the north." But I have never had anyone come up to me and say: "Member, we need more MLAs in Victoria. Don't you agree?" No one is saying that, so what purpose does this bill serve? What purpose does it serve?

Noting the hour, I would reserve the right to speak again.

C. Puchmayr moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.



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