



# Are We Over-Governed In Alberta and Ottawa?

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

Many people think we already have too many politicians, but there are plans to expand the House of Commons before 2015, adding 30 more Members of Parliament and the 2012 provincial election saw four more seats added to the Alberta Legislature. Peter Goldring takes a look at political representation.

This being Canada, any plan to add to the House brings with it competing cries for the lion's share of the new seats, even though the redistribution is being brought about by increasing population. Quebec maintains they have to remain at their traditional 25% of the total, even though their population is shrinking. But if Quebec gets more seats, then Ontario and Alberta, with their population increasing, get fewer new seats than they should under the current system.

Members of Parliament from the four provinces that entered confederation. With a population of about three-and-a-half million, that meant each MP had approximately 19,000 constituents. Today there are 308 MPs for almost 35 million Canadians, or about 111,000 constituents each. Of course that varies considerably – urban ridings have more people and rural ridings have fewer, despite a larger geographic area. Edmonton East has 135,000 constituents while Nunavut has only 31,000 people.



**Do we really need to keep adding more Members of Parliament as Canada's population increases? Or should MPs represent more people than they do now?**

Canada has 308 MPs and 33 million people. The United States has 435 members of Congress and 313 million people, or 720,000 per member. The question must be asked: If the US can be governed by 435 members, why does Canada with about a tenth the population need so many politicians overseeing things? And why should we be adding

We are however doing much better at the number of people per MP today than when Canada began. In 1867 there were 180

more?

Alberta has 83 Members of the Legislative



Assembly (MLAs) for a population of 3.6 million, with plans to add four more seats. That's about 45,000 constituents per member, or about a third the number that a federal MP serves. Are that many MLA's needed to govern effectively?

Ontario, with a population of 13 million, has 107 Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs equal Alberta's MLAs) with each having about 121,000 constituents, almost exactly the same number as it has federal MPs (106), and many of the ridings have the same boundaries. If an Ontario MPP can serve that many people effectively, and a federal MP can serve that many people effectively, why does Alberta need so many MLAs? Could Alberta not do the same as Ontario and govern provincially with one MLA per MP, or 26 MLAs instead of the present 83? Think of the many millions of dollars in savings for the Alberta taxpayer! Similarly, if we simply rebalance the number of MPs in Ottawa rather than adding 30 more, think of the many millions of dollars in savings for the taxpayers of Canada!

Canada's constitution requires that federal electoral districts be reviewed after each census to reflect population changes. In de-

termining how many seats each province has in the House of Commons it has been decided that no province can have fewer seats in the Commons than it has in the Senate and that no province can have fewer seats than it had in 1985. Those clauses are barriers to real change. Prince Edward Island has four Senators, therefore four seats in the Commons, four MPs representing 145,000 people. By contrast, the riding of Edmonton

East has 135,000 people. It could be argued therefore that a voter in PEI has their vote count for four times what a voter in Edmonton does. And that the constituency work for an urban MP is four times heavier given the greater number of constituents. Geographical arguments about riding size may have some validity, but given that Nunavut is one riding with

its 32,000 population spread over almost two million square kilometres, it is hard to justify four ridings in the less than 6,000 square kilometres of PEI. PE Islanders however do not react kindly to suggestions they are over-represented in Ottawa.

Perhaps the solution to this dilemma is to first reform the Senate, before any rebalancing of MP seats, something that might require a constitutional amendment.



**Adding extra seats of the House of Commons will require a multi-million dollar renovation on top of other costs as there is no room in the Chamber to seat that many Members of Parliament.**





The people of Quebec are also resistant to any changes that would see a reduction in that province's representation in Ottawa. Although constitutionally guaranteed at least 75 seats, Quebecers are concerned about the percentage of their representation in the national parliament since Quebec's population has had a slower growth rate than Alberta, Ontario or British Columbia.

Under the redistribution process expected to be completed before the next federal election in 2015 30 new seats will be added to the House of Commons: 15 in Ontario, six each in Alberta and British Columbia and three in Quebec. The cost of 30 new Members of Parliament, office, staff, travel and other expenses could easily be another \$30 million annually to the Canadian taxpayer. And that doesn't include the many more millions of dollars of renovations to the House of Commons itself that will be required.

The solution is at the same time simple and complex. If each US Congressman can serve an average of 720,000 constituents, shouldn't our Canadian Members of Parliament be able to handle a few more? That would mean not only would the renovations to the Chamber of the House be unneces-

sary, but the expensive redistribution process could be scaled back considerably. Some boundary redrawing might be useful to distribute the population more evenly within a province perhaps, but no major changes would be required. Parliamentarians would probably need more staff to serve more people properly, but that would be at considerable lower cost than adding 30 new parliamentary constituencies.



**There are four more MLAs in the Alberta Legislature following the 2012 election.**

While that solution seems simple, it would require constitutional change. Given the Constitutional debates of the 1970s and 1980s it seems no government is willing to re-open the question of how the Canadian federation is structured. That shows lack of vision and leadership. Taking the easy way out is expensive and un-

necessary.

By the same token, provinces, especially Alberta, would do well to take a hard look at their legislatures and see if there could be more effective governance there.

Recent news reports would suggest otherwise. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation recently drew attention to the fact that 21 MLAs sit on a committee that hasn't met since 2008, which each MLA receiving

\$1,000 monthly for their “participation” on the committee. It would seem committee work is a method to pad MLA salaries, since MLAs are paid extra for each committee they sit on (unlike federal MPs who are not paid for committee membership). One MLA was quoted in the media saying she serves on so many committees she can’t keep track of them all. That may be why she didn’t notice she was being paid to be on a committee that does no work.

In the House of Commons there is no extra pay to sit on any committee. Committee work is expected as part of the job. For example, as a member of the Standing Committee on

Foreign Affairs and International Development, Peter Goldring was expected to attend two meetings each week. Committee work is a privilege, not an extra perk.

If Ottawa and Alberta were not to add additional Members there would be a considerable savings to taxpayers, especially if extra payments were cut back. Committee work is part of the job of an elected official, not something you should receive extra compensation for.

**Update:** To find out more about the federal redistribution process go to [www.elections.gc.ca](http://www.elections.gc.ca).

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

Do you think we need 30 more MPs in the House of Commons?

Yes

No

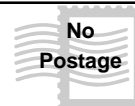
Do you think we needed four more MLAs in the Alberta Legislature?

Yes

No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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