

**The Apportionment Bill,**  
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**SPEECH**  
OF  
**HON. WILLIAM G. SHARP,**  
OF OHIO,  
**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,**  
*Thursday, February 9, 1911,*

On the Bill (H.R. 30566) for the reapportionment of Representatives in the Congress among the several States under the Thirteenth Decennial Census

**Mr. SHARP** said:

Mr. SPEAKER: There are a few more important subjects to be considered in these closing days of the Sixty-first Congress than that of the apportionment of the House of Representatives for the ensuing 10 years. If only the fact that we were legislating for that period, long as it may seem, was involved, that in itself would be of sufficient importance; but from some of the reasons assigned by speakers in favor of a considerably larger representation a precedent may become involved which would be much more important and more far-reaching than a mere fact of legislating for so many years in the future. While a candid consideration of this subject should involve only a difference of judgment—for I must admit that, as a matter of fact, there is no criterion of right and wrong in the abstract to be considered—the real question remains as to what is the most efficient size, numerically considered, of the House of Representatives for the best carrying on its functions.

Interesting as such a study might be, it is not my purpose to review to any length the discussion upon this question when it first came up for consideration in the Federal convention of 1787, yet from the arguments of those learned men indulgent in at that time I am persuaded that the same motives governed then and the same reasons therefore were in existence as confront the Members of this House to-day.

There was, above all, a certain kind of State pride involved which asserted itself in the desire to see that no advantage was gained by one some other State. Indeed, one of the most specious arguments advanced by the gentleman in charge of the bill, Mr. CRUMPACKER, is that by apportionment which he recommends no single State will lose its present number of Representatives in Congress, and this fact furnishes at least a rather unusual coincidence for the expression of the belief that the reported accompanying this bill that “a membership of 433 for the next decade will come nearer meeting the requirement of the country, viewed from all aspects, than a larger or smaller membership.” I wish, in this connection, to commend the gentleman for his manifest fairness in stating the situation, and after having necessarily spent many laborious hours in consideration of this important subject.

Again referring to the report just quoted, I find on page 4, in reference to the size of the House, the following:

The problem of determining the membership of the House, so as to make it a real representative body on the one hand and not make it so large and unwieldy as to seriously impair its capacity for the performance of its function on the other hand, is quite a serious one, and one upon which there is very wide latitude of opinion. Many thoughtful people believe the present membership of the House is too large, and that any substantial increase would result in an increase of the difficulties in securing intelligent and deliberate action in relation to legislation.

Mr. Speaker, let me say frankly that I am one of those who share in this view of the matter. To my mind, the method of apportionment as to the decennial period provided for is probably as satisfactory as could be devised. The experience, judged by the test of time, I believe

has proven this to be true. The basis also of a numerical qualification instead of one of property appears to me as far and wise; but as to the size of the House I believe that time has now come for a halt in increasing its membership. Even as far back as 1843-70 years ago-this phase of the subject was most seriously considered, and the debates thereon in both the House and Senate are very interesting at this time. There were, indeed, giants those days in both assemblies, and after mature consideration of this whole subject of apportionment. Congress not only refused to increase the membership of the House, but actually decreased it: and not for 30 years thereafter was it substantially increased in numbers. Indeed, it is exactly 50 years since the early plan of adding to the number of Representatives was resumed, and from 1863 until the present time there has been a moderate increase in the number of its Members.

Mr. Speaker, I ask in all seriousness if it is not a good time, at the end of this half century of the policy of adding to our numbers, to again take a retrospective view and temporarily, at least covering the next 10 years, follow the precedent establishment of 1843 and keep the number of Representatives practically where it is at the present time. While I am not unmindful of the force of the reasons given by the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. CRUMPACKER] as to the need of due consideration in providing for a close representation of the people, and also to the fact that the work of the Representatives has been and doubtless will be increased, owing to the multifarious developments in the business affairs of our country, as well as increased population, yet I am unwilling to concede that a membership any larger than the present is necessary-or, for that matter, desirable-to efficiently represent that people of the country. IN opposing such an increase in the size of our membership I am actuated principally by two reasons: First, from, the fact that if we necessarily add considerably more to the running expenses of the Government, already very large. The addition alone of the salaries of 42 Members and their secretaries, while no small sum itself, by no means covers all the cost involved, and while this sum may not reach the estimate made by some of a million dollars per annum, yet it is fair to assume that it will be large. But above even the question of economy is that of efficiency of service. Upon this phase of the question let me briefly quote from the learned Madison who, In the Federalist, more than a century ago pointed out the dangers of an unwieldy and oversized House of Representatives. Surely his reasons are as good to-day as they were then. Indeed, no one can read of the deliberations of the founders of our Constitution upon so many problems which they must solve correctly if they would provide a liberal, yet safe, Government that would survive the test of time without coming to the belief that in finally determining what provisions to adopt and what to discard there were guided by an all-wise and beneficent Providence.

Madison says:

One observation, however, I must be permitted to add on this subject, as claiming, in my judgment, a very serious attention. It is that in all legislative assemblies the greater the number composing them may be the fewer will be the men who will in fact direct their proceedings. In the first place, the more numerous any assembly may be, of whatever characters composed, the greater is known to be the ascendancy of passion over reason. \* \* \* The people can never err more than in supposing that by multiplying their Representatives beyond a certain limit they strengthen the barrier against the government of a few. Experience will forever admonish them that, on the contrary, after securing a sufficient number for the purposes of safety, of local information, and of diffusive sympathy with the whole society, they will counteract their own views by every addition to their Representatives. The countenance of the Government may become more democratic, but the soul that animates it will be more oligarchic. The machine will be enlarged, but the fewer, and often the more secret, will be the springs by which its motions are directed.

It is a constant complaint heard on every side that, owing to the present size of the House, we can not have that deliberation which is demanded for the careful consideration of the more important matters brought before it, and I think that this complaint is just, though from the very nature of the case it would be unfair to lay the blame alone to the rules now governing this body, however great the need of their revision may be.

A comparison, Mr. Speaker, has rather ingeniously been made of the size of the House of Representatives and the ration of apportionment with that in vogue in other countries, and while I am aware that much is made of the fact the size of such ratio in the House of Representatives is considerably under that of many other countries, yet it is, nevertheless, true that but very few of them actually have a larger number of representatives than we have. Is not this really the criterion if the relative merits of a larger or smaller body are to be determined? As a matter of fact, most of those countries have a much less population than ours, and for that reason, I suppose, the ratio of representation is smaller. There is no reason to believe that with legislative bodies much smaller in numbers than now exist in those same countries they would not be just as efficient.

In conclusion, let me observe that the motive which not only in making up this apportionment, but I understand in the on or two preceding decades, whereby the size of the House is increased to such a number as will permit no State to lose its present representation in Congress, is not without its dangers. Indeed, will not the reasons be just as strong for pursuing the same plan in future decades? And surely it does not require a prophet to foresee that a like course pursued in fixing the size of the House at the end of the next decade will round it out to approximately 500 Members.

With the constantly increasing tendency of our people to flock to the cities, thee will of necessity be some States that will not keep up in the procession in its proportionate gain in population. Some Eldorado of the far West, rich in promise to the settler, will call him from the East; and the sunny clime of the South, with its fertile fields, will attract migration from the North, while the attractions and the opportunities of the great cities will continue to draw from the farms. With this over-shifting population, to say nothing of the great increase of immigration which has already come to greatly congest our cities, is it wise to refuse to recognize such conditions, and insist that no particular State shall lose in numbers what it has already gained in its representation in Congress?

Fore these reasons, Mr. Speaker, though I regret that I have to differ with a large majority of my own party, I am impelled to cast my vote against this bill.