

In conclusion, honourable senators, the purpose of Bill C-68 is to make our society safer and gun owners more responsible. That is the basic principle underlying this bill.

Bill C-68 is aimed at protecting family members from the dangers of unsupervised or easily accessible weapons. It is also designed to protect police officers, and to make their fight against crime more effective. Thanks to the registration of firearms, to harsher sentences and to other measures provided for in this bill, police officers will be better equipped to do their job while enjoying better protection.

Gun control represents an important and even an essential milestone in the fight against crime and violence. Honourable senators, we all want a safer, more secure society, and that is what Bill C-68 proposes.

[English]

**Hon. Janis Johnson:** Honourable senators, I rise today to express my support for the government's gun control bill, Bill C-68. I support this bill as it stands, without amendment. I ask each and every one of you to approach this as a matter of conscience. This is not an easy decision for any of us.

In the Senate, honourable senators, our most important role is to provide careful and ethical analysis of legislation. On matters as important as gun control, we must consider the ethics of our decision, and we must vote according to personal principles.

This is one of the most divisive issues to come before this house in recent memory, but the controversy is rooted in politics and the power of certain lobby groups. The fact is that the great majority of Canadians support tougher laws for the use and ownership of firearms, and this bill expresses the will of the Canadian people.

A poll taken by Angus Reid last October indicated that a clear 70 per cent of the 1,504 adults surveyed support tougher gun regulations. An Environics poll indicated that 90 per cent of Canadians support a law requiring all firearms to be registered. In the same poll, Canadians, particularly women living in large urban centres, show even higher levels of support than the national average. These statistics are impressive and cannot be overlooked. There is substantial support for this legislation, particularly in the province of Quebec.

• (1440)

My dear friends in the Senate of Canada, many organizations and groups in my own home province of Manitoba also support Bill C-68. When one hears people from the West speak, one would think that no one in Western Canada supports this legislation. This is not true. The Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Manitoba Police Association, the Manitoba Teachers Association, the Manitoba Child Care

Association, the John Howard Society of Manitoba, the Children's Home of Winnipeg, the Portage Women's Shelter, the Winnipeg Health Department, the Winnipeg Police Service — and I could go on with many more — all support the passage of this bill. I support the position of these groups.

I am concerned about public safety in Canada and, as honourable senators are aware, many police associations representing hundreds of officers across Canada support Bill C-68. I would remind my honourable friends of what was said by Chief MacDonald, President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, on this matter. He said, and I quote:

Without information about who owns guns, there is no effective gun control.

In his letter of February 24, 1995, he stated:

Opponents of gun control argue that the registration of firearms will not reduce crime. In fact, it is the position of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police that cost effective registration is a key component of the new proposed gun control legislation. Registration of firearms will help control smuggling, gun theft, and the misuse of legal firearms in a number of important ways. The illegal gun trade is a major problem, particularly in large urban centres.

Regarding the effect of the registration system, the chief also stated the following in his letter:

Registration will help to ensure that gun owners are held accountable for their firearms and do not sell them illegally or give them to individuals without appropriate authorization.

Honourable senators, this is not a perfect bill. We are a patchwork of cultures across this country, and some groups such as trappers, hunters, farmers and aboriginal people have argued quite convincingly that this legislation runs counter to their life style. I think they have a point. However, this legislation will prove to be nothing more than an inconvenience to those groups. They certainly have a right to oppose inconvenient legislation, and they have done so with remarkable vigour. In my travels, listening to hunters, farmers and other gun owners — and, keep in mind I grew up in rural Manitoba — I have yet to encounter any explanation of how exactly this bill will constitute anything more than just that: a minor inconvenience.

Guns are designed to kill. Handguns and assault weapons in particular exist for no other purpose than to kill human beings. That being the case, this bill is only a moderate step. Any law-abiding Canadian citizen will, under the terms of this bill, retain the right to purchase and use a vast variety of guns. In no way does this legislation diminish the right of law-abiding Canadians to own guns.