

Government Orders

question: Why spread the whole registration process over an eight-year period? I am convinced that, as elected representatives of the public, we could help save human lives simply by reducing as much as possible that registration period.

Is it really reasonable to allow 13,000 military-type automatic weapons in the country, considering that such firearms are designed for rapid fire in a combat situation?

More than 560,000 Quebecers and Canadians signed a petition asking that military-type weapons be banned. Yet, the new legislation allows gun collectors to own such firearms. Why? Why this fixation about firearms?

According to a recent survey, 84 per cent of Canadians, including 71 per cent of gun owners, support a ban on military weapons. Again, I find it unacceptable to make it perfectly legal for the owners of these 13,000 firearms to keep such weapons.

We need a more rigid form of gun control.

• (1310)

In my opinion, current legislation is inadequate, and Bill C-68 still does not go far enough, both in terms of its restrictions, as well as its deterring and punitive effects. It is our role to protect members of the public, often against their wishes.

[English]

Ms. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, not only is it an honour for me to speak to the bill, I am enthusiastic and I would like to applaud something that is long overdue. The bill addresses the health and safety of Canadians. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, health and safety are extremely important to me.

Guns threaten, guns injure, and guns kill. I understand that guns are an important component of life in many parts of Canada: for hunters who live in isolated parts of the country and for people who play some competitive sports. Guns are also very important to the tourism industry.

The bill is not intended to harm that group of people or to stop any sport or tourism or person who wants to hunt in any sporting way. The bill is something most responsible gun owners would support. The firearms act seeks to bring into line those people who by their irresponsible use of firearms create a bad name for law-abiding gun owners, which is why the bill is supported by 68 per cent of gun owners. Those who operate within the law and act responsibly in storing and using their guns see nothing to fear in the bill.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics and the Department of Justice have compiled a lot of startling data on the issue of guns. I bring them to the attention of the House today because they are what frightens me about the whole issue. Firearms

cause suicide. Some 1,100 suicides a year are committed with guns, which means that 78 per cent of firearm deaths are suicides. In 1990, 300 of the suicides were committed by 15 to 25-year-old youths. People who commit suicide with a gun have a 92 per cent success rate, compared with only 35 per cent if other means are used.

As a physician and a mother this is totally unacceptable to me. It is alarming and it is sad. I know as many health and social workers know that suicide attempts by young people are often only a cry for help by very desperate and frightened youth. As a physician I have treated many of those desperate and frightened youth who would not be alive today if they had access to guns.

Firearms not only decimate our youth but firearms create other household tragedies. Firearms victimize women. Over 40 per cent of women killed by their husbands each year are shot. Every six days a woman is shot to death in Canada in her own home by a legally owned gun.

In March 1992 the Department of Justice showed that 78.3 per cent of domestic homicides in Canada involving the use of firearms were by legally owned guns. I stress that they were legally owned guns. We know that domestic violence is endemic in society but firearms transform violence into murder. One fit of anger, one violent rage combined with access to a gun, can result in a dead woman.

These are not the only disturbing statistics about violence with firearms against women. In 1993, 75 per cent of female victims were killed in a private residence; 85 per cent of the guns used to kill women were specifically rifles and shotguns; and 82 per cent of the rifles and shotguns were legally owned at the time of the shooting.

Is this the type of society we want to maintain, where women and children are not safe in their own homes? Is this the freedom espoused by those who oppose the bill? Is there any freedom at the end of a gun? I would argue that there is not.

Deaths by firearms are preventable deaths. Injuries by firearms cost our public health care system millions of dollars a year. Over 1,000 firearm related deaths and injuries are treated in Canadian hospitals each year. The cost of this is estimated between \$15 million to \$30 million per year. Therefore in my book firearms present a major health hazard; in the book of anyone interested in public health and safety. Even if the value of human life lost is not very important to the members of the third party, I am sure that the cost to the health care system might make them think twice because it is enormous. I believe \$30 million a year is enormous. They did not factor into their recent budget the cost of firearms related injuries to the health care system.