

Hon. Paul Lucier: Honourable senators, when I spoke on second reading of Bill C-68 in this chamber on June 20, 1995, my first comment was that I would not support or vote in favour of Bill C-68 as presently written.

My main, stated objection to Bill C-68 was, and continues to be, registration of rifles and shotguns, and the negative effect such legislation would have on Canadians in general and northerners in particular.

Let me be clear, honourable senators: I understand and respect people who support Bill C-68. As previously stated, I support a great majority of the proposed legislation contained in Bill C-68. Responsible gun owners everywhere support the provisions of Bill C-68 which deal harshly with criminals who commit serious offences with guns, and they demand enforcement of mandatory prison terms for offenders who commit serious crimes with guns.

They also demand that law-abiding citizens who do not commit crimes with guns and who obey the law not be treated as criminals and not have their rights and freedoms trampled by a clause in Bill C-68 that is virtually unenforceable, unworkable, very expensive and, unfortunately, will not accomplish any of the goals claimed by those who support the legislation.

Suggestions that those who oppose Bill C-68 are in any way less compassionate of the need to protect abused women and children than anyone else are false, and, quite frankly, they do not constitute an honest argument.

Honourable senators, we, as members of Parliament, must continue to do whatever is necessary to prevent future abuse of women and children. Registration of shotguns and rifles will not accomplish this goal, but it will make life extremely difficult for a very large number of Canadians, particularly aboriginal people.

I wish to quote from a letter dated November 8, 1995 from Mr. Phil Fontaine, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, as follows:

There is no justification for imposing gun controls on our people. The regulatory scheme to be put into effect impacts disproportionately heavily on us. Whatever may be its effect on other Canadians, for us it is the death knell of our traditional rights and our current economic practices. And all of that is happening without there having been any, let alone adequate, consultation with our people.

We urge you to stop this travesty in its tracks.

During the Whitehorse hearings, the Senate panel heard from Kaska Elder Charlie Dick, who has been providing food for his family and himself since he was a child. When this legislation is put into effect, that will be very difficult, if not impossible, to comply with for people like Mr. Dick, then their fears become very real. As stated very clearly by Mr. Dick, his gun is used to provide food for the family, not to harm anyone. Why the sudden urge to register his firearm?

• (1630)

Honourable senators, the amendments proposed by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee have come as a shock to me. We have been dealing with registration of rifles and shotguns for quite some time now, and never once have I spoken to, or heard from, a gun owner who said, "I am opposed to registration but will accept it if the implementation date is 10 years instead of eight." In my opinion that amendment is a complete abandonment of those who opposed registration of long guns.

Honourable senators opposite have heard me state publicly in Whitehorse that I would support an amendment that would remove registration of long guns from Bill C-68. This amendment does no such thing. Therefore, I will not be able to support the motion for acceptance of this report. Yukoners and other Canadians who were hoping to see a removal of registration from Bill C-68 will be bitterly disappointed with the proposed amendment.

Senator Ghitter, in reply to my question yesterday, said Yukon Minister of Justice Doug Phillips agreed with the amendment. I accept what Senator Ghitter has said, although I was very surprised to hear that my friend Mr. Phillips had changed his position. I will not change mine.

In concluding my remarks, may I once again thank senators who took the time to visit the Yukon to allow people to express their views. Some people were for Bill C-68; many were opposed. However, as I have said in this chamber for the past 20 years, Canadians not living in this area should be heard by members of the Senate. I attended meetings in Vancouver and Whitehorse and have heard from people in Alberta. They were very grateful for the opportunity to be heard. I know it is not easy or cheap to hold hearings away from Ottawa, but it is the proper thing to do. I thank Senator Ghitter and all the senators who participated. I encourage the Senate to hold more hearings away from Ottawa.

Hon. Gerry St. Germain: Honourable senators, I have a question for the honourable senator. I agree that there should be an amendment to this legislation excluding long guns by way of hunting rifles and shotguns commonly used for the purpose of hunting and sporting practices. However, if the honourable senator feels that way, why then does he not move an amendment in this house? I am prepared to stand and support the honourable senator, because I honestly think that this bill will adversely affect the people in the region that he represents. Anything we can do to help the aboriginal peoples, which the honourable senator could support, should be done.

I am appreciative of the fact that the honourable senator took time to be with us. I am sure that if I had not conducted the hearings, he would have done so. I feel that it is so important that the honourable senator deal with this matter that I should like to see him introduce an amendment that would resolve the situation in the way in which he feels it should be resolved. Could I hear the honourable senator's comments on that suggestion, please?