

Government Orders

I have met, as I say, with people across this country on the issue, not just the students at Ecole Polytechnique who, as the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce pointed out, did present me with their petition of 500,000 signatures. I might say about the students at Ecole Polytechnique that in attempting to make some kind of sense out of the tragedy which they experienced, it was very deeply moving to be there. My first career was as a university professor. There is something about being in the company of these young people, young students, who are the future of our country. I guess at my stage in life, I am touched by their youth, seeing them trying to make some kind of sense out of the tragedy they experienced. I was struck by the very sensible, pragmatic, reasoned way in which they tackled a very otherwise emotional issue, the extent to which they, in fact, met with people in Canadian society who are interested in using firearms for sporting and hunting purposes and how their recommendations to me were very much influenced by a sense of fairness and a recognition that in Canada there are people who use firearms in responsible, law-abiding ways. That is why their brief to me and their meeting with me was so helpful. They really did attempt to look at the broad issue of policy.

• (1200)

It is important that Canadians have an opportunity to discuss this issue and to have input into a parliamentary committee that will come back and recommend.

I am very confident about Bill C-80. I think that the committee process will reconfirm what we are attempting to do with Bill C-80, in fact the package that I have put forward because the package is more than just Bill C-80.

I also think it is terribly important that where we have contentious issues there be an opportunity for public participation. In this issue as in no others, I think there are people who want to have the opportunity to speak. I have been frustrated at the lack of a public process.

We may in fact complete second reading before the House rises. I think it is unlikely that we would have the opportunity to bring it back for third reading and a final disposition, which is why I do not want to delay any longer. The last time this subject matter was before this House, interestingly enough it was brought forward by

one of my predecessors as member for Vancouver Centre, who at that time was the Liberal Minister of Justice, Mr. Ron Basford.

An hon. member: He lost his seat over it.

Ms. Campbell (Vancouver Centre): The hon. member says: "He lost his seat over it". It is a contentious issue.

I think Bill C-80 is an excellent one but, for those who will remember, the last time it was before this House it took 70 days to deal with that legislation after a quite extensive public process.

I want to get this legislation through in the most timely way possible, and that is why I do not want to wait for a long second reading debate to get it out in a public process. If we complete second reading on this before the House rises, that is fine.

My colleagues have advised me that they want to participate in second reading debate, but they are uncomfortable with a perfunctory second reading debate. It is too important an issue. If there ever was an issue on which the members of this House want to discuss the philosophy of legislation, want to have their views on the bill recorded, it is this one, and they will do so.

I welcome the opportunity, in the course of debating this motion, to outline for members of the House some of the elements in the government's bill to amend the Criminal Code gun control provisions and why I think it is so important to have these before the public for discussion.

I believe that the measures contained in this bill will significantly enhance the existing gun control system in Canada.

It is a very important occasion for me, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues in this House for their valuable suggestions and contributions to the development of this package.

I might say that contrary to the assertions of the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, first of all, after the very tragic events at École Polytechnique last December I was not in fact the Minister of Justice, so I did not make the comments that he attributed to me. However, the development of this package long predates that. My predecessor as Minister of Justice, after those tragic events, pulled the package back for a further review because he recognized that in light of those