

*Government Orders*

• (1530)

As well, it may seem insignificant to some but I think it is very important, a conviction for criminal harassment will be added to the list of reasons for a judge to invoke a firearms prohibition. That is very significant.

It is also significant that the child protection provisions have been amended to prohibit convicted child abusers from volunteering with organizations that would give them authority over children. Originally the bill prohibited only employment with such organizations. However we know that a lot of the opportunities for child abuse happen as a result of voluntary organizations, not as a result of employment. It is important that has been added.

It is also important that we have also increased the sentence with respect to removing a young person from Canada. Section 273.3, subsection 1, says:

No person shall do anything for the purpose of removing from Canada a person who is ordinarily resident in Canada and who is—

It goes on to talk about the various categories of young people and offences pertinent to those age categorizations. Originally in the bill the maximum sentence was two years. We have increased that from two years to five years. It is a very serious offence and therefore it is very important that we have a stricter penalty.

I also want to say that we have to be mindful that even though we have an act which is a major step forward there is so much more to do. I do not necessarily mean with respect to legislation. I am hopeful that this legislation will do what is intended by members of the House and by the government. If we took a lot of time we could make changes that might add to the significance and effectiveness of this bill. However we do not have that kind of time. The House is close to adjourning. We have a bill which is a major step forward and which we need to pass.

If we do not pass this legislation and a woman who has been stalked and harassed is murdered over the summer months or in the immediate months which follow then this House of Commons would have to seriously look at itself. This is a concern that is becoming more and more prevalent among the people in Canada. As we heard from one of the witnesses during the committee hear-

ings, stalking is just one step on the continuum of violence against women.

We have to stop the harassment behaviour of the stalker before it escalates into serious physical harm or death, and this all too often happens in stalking cases.

It is also important to think of the words of the attorney general of Ontario who said: "Stalking is about the denial of some of the most fundamental rights of every person in a free and democratic society". That is important because if we deny the woman the right to be free from stalking we are sentencing that person to perhaps years of incredible terror and persecution.

We have heard cases of women who have been stalked for not a month or a year but 10 or 12 years. A woman will constantly not know when she goes to the supermarket if the person stalking her will be in that aisle, whether he will jump out at her from behind a tree, whether she will receive roses from that person just to let her know that he is still there and watching her or whether he will leave a message on the seat of her car. This terror day after day has to end for the women of Canada. They have to be able to have the peace and security that all citizens want for them.

• (1535)

We heard excellent testimony from the women's groups. Dr. Glenda Simms, the president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, said: "Violence against women is systematic in nature and requires a systematic response. Legislation itself is inadequate. Our society will not have any success in eliminating the kind of behaviour targeted in this bill if we do not also ensure that those involved in the criminal justice system better understand violence against women and the equality issues".

That is important because one of the things we have to do to reduce stalking after we pass this legislation is to work with our judicial system, our judiciary, and our police forces to ensure that we are giving them the information and assistance they need. We have heard cases in which women have said that the police did not feel their cries for help were legitimate. The police thought they were over-reacting. We heard of judges who felt that what the stalker did was not out of the ordinary. This thinking has to be changed. We have to