

If one life will be saved by the passing and proclamation of Minister Rock's legislation it will be worth it. We ask that you support this bill for the safety of women and children in violent family situations and in memory of the women of Montreal.

• (1355)

I believe that the sentiments expressed in this letter are those of the vast majority of Canadians. I believe that the legislation being debated is a compromise which advances the cause of public safety in the community without imposing unreasonable constraints on anyone's personal freedom.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to be speaking to this motion to sever Bill C-68 because I think most members enjoy speaking to legislation that makes sense.

A very sensible approach would be to separate Bill C-68 so the House can thoroughly examine the two distinct segments. The section of Bill C-68 that deals with the criminal use of firearms is the only part of the bill that could have a significant effect on improving public safety.

However, this section of the bill, part III, will likely be ignored in public debate. Like many pieces of Liberal legislation there are aspects that are a step in the right direction. However like most government legislation, most of part III does not go far enough and some sections are actually regressive. Because part III has the pretence of being a step in the right direction it will be ignored as critics and supporters of the bill debate the merits of universal registration. I believe it is extremely important that the House thoroughly review part III and that is why this part and the other relevant sections of the bill must be reviewed separately from the registration section.

My Reform colleagues and I wholeheartedly agree with any legislation that would get tough with criminals who use firearms. Unfortunately this bill does not make the grade.

Last June I introduced a private member's bill C-260 that dealt with the criminal use of firearms. In that bill I called for the inclusion of replica firearms in section 85 of the Criminal Code. I did this because crown counsels had informed me that one of the reasons that so few section 85 charges went forward was because it is so difficult to prove that the object that was used in a crime was actually a firearm. The way the legislation has been written the crown had to prove that the object that looked like a firearm was actually a firearm.

Unless the firearm was fired during the commission of the offence or unless the criminal was arrested at the scene of a crime or immediately after in possession of a firearm it was unlikely that a conviction could be won. There was no other way the crown could prove that the object that looked like a firearm actually met the legal definitions of a firearm. Since the crown

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could not prove that it met the legal definition of a firearm a charge under section 85 could not be laid.

The inclusion of a replica in section 85 would fill that void. My private member's bill treated a replica the same as an actual firearm. There would be no need for the crown to prove that the object was a real firearm.

When robbery victims have what looks like a handgun shoved in their faces they are not in a position to determine if the gun was real or just a replica. The terror they felt at that moment is not mitigated if they learn later that it was just a replica. Does the inclusion of replica in Bill C-68 solve this problem? Unfortunately it does not. It is that ever so typical Liberal small step in the right direction. Someone who uses a replica firearm during—

The Speaker: The hon. member will have the floor when we get back after question period. It being 2 p.m., we will now hear statements by members pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to draw the attention of my hon. colleagues to the importance of Commonwealth Day. The theme of Commonwealth Day 1995 is tolerance.

The Commonwealth stands as a symbol of international co-operation and as a model for all nations of the globe to work in friendship promoting diversity and harmony through tolerance.

Our nation has benefited greatly from its membership in the Commonwealth and in turn Canada has lent its strong support to this venerable institution.

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[Translation]

TRAGEDY IN BLANC-SABLON

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to extend our sympathies to the families affected by the tragedy that struck Blanc-Sablon, in my riding of Manicouagan, on Friday.

At two o'clock Friday morning, tonnes of snow came tumbling down the mountain to devastate the tiny North Shore village of Blanc-Sablon. A father and his son were killed. It is a miracle that the mother, who was buried under the snow for hours, survived. Had it not been for the outstanding courage of local residents, who defied extreme cold and winds of over 100 kilometres per hour, the toll could have been even worse.