

Government Orders

ble, respectable people who enjoy hunting as a sport. They value their rifles and shotguns and take great care to secure them.

However these responsible people could, through no fault of their own, be charged with a criminal act; for example, a person who is unaware that a rifle or shotgun is stored in an attic and does not know that they are required to register it. For many years now handguns have required registration. This is not new for handgun owners.

• (1600)

Currently an FAC, or a firearms acquisition certificate, must be obtained prior to purchasing any new firearm. It has been suggested that the FAC system be upgraded to include full registration for new firearms, instead of trying to initiate a universal registration system for all firearms. As I understand it, a thorough check is required and the name of the applicant, the description and the serial number of the firearm is kept on record at the retail outlet but not forwarded on to a central registration centre. I believe that it would be very useful for the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs to review this possibility in an attempt to streamline the registration system.

Other alternatives were also suggested, including a program which would include issuing an owner's certificate only to ensure that the holder is a qualified and legitimate owner.

Another point was that although one person may own all of the legal hunting rifles and shotguns in a family, the individual's spouse, sons and daughters, who would use the firearms for hunting purposes, would have to purchase individual firearms licences at \$60 every five years. This happens in many cases where the entire family enjoys hunting. I would suggest that the standing committee review the possibility of a family package for these cases.

Finally, hunting plays a very important role in the economy of my constituency and throughout New Brunswick. Many outfitters have benefited from and created employment for others through this tradition. We must ensure that the system adopted is fair and equitable for the responsible firearm owner. We must protect this important aspect of our economy. These assurances can only be provided by the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, through its review of Bill C-68, by bringing forwarded the appropriate changes.

I would be pleased to assist the committee in any way possible to ensure that we have fair legislation which will be supported and will achieve the goals for which it was intended, to make our communities and our streets safe for my family, for your family and for all Canadians.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin today by expressing my appreciation for the presence of the Minister of Justice who is listening

to the debate. I find it commendable that he would be here to listen to the speakers.

I rise in the House today in support of the Reform Party's motion proposing amendments to Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons.

For several months now the people of Cariboo—Chilcotin have been campaigning non-stop against a bill they have seen as not only intrusive, but an invasion of their rights and their privileges as Canadian citizens.

I received over 800 letters and 70 petitions since the Minister of Justice tabled his firearms legislation late last year. They all had the same message: get tough on the criminal, not on the legal, law-abiding gun owner. These are impassioned letters and the message being given is a simple message. It is a message that has been sent to Reformers, Liberals and Bloc members alike. It is a message which has not been heeded in Bill C-68 and it is a message to which the Reform Party is trying to respond with this amendment.

Bill C-68, as it now stands, is, as my colleague from Prince George—Peace River noted, really two bills combined into one. On the one hand it gets tough on criminals that commit crimes using firearms and replica firearms by increasing minimum sentences to four years in prison. This is a measure for which the Reform Party has been calling. As the Reform blue book clearly states: "If elected a Reform government will introduce legislation by which the criminal misuse of firearms will be severely punished". Reform has called for minimum mandatory jail terms for firearms related crimes. I am encouraged that these concerns have been at least partially included in Bill C-68. This truly is getting tough on the criminal.

• (1605)

If these measures are brought into law independently, the government can count on the support of Reform Party MPs and our party membership across the country. On the other hand, Bill C-68 places what many Reformers and even some Liberals agree are excessive and unnecessary restrictions on the legal, law-abiding gun owner.

I refer particularly to the proposed firearms registry, along with the many accompanying provisions that could make criminals out of gun owners. It could make criminals out of them simply because they do nothing. This provision, as I noted earlier, has raised a great deal of concern within my riding and many others.

The current handgun registry has had little if any effect on crime. The proposed firearms registry will only follow in its footsteps, adding more rules but doing nothing to solve the problem. However, this is an issue to which I will speak at another time.