

Government Orders

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member shows a little bit of patience, I would imagine that his colleague would make this quite relevant to the motion which is before the House.

• (1600)

Mr. Fee: Madam Speaker, my intention will become very clear very quickly. I know very well that people have concerns. They have been expressed to me, as I am sure they have been to every member of this House. Some of the concerns that have been expressed to us are valid. Some might have been exaggerated because of lack of information or perhaps misunderstanding. However, these concerns deserve to be expressed and deserve to be responded to before we proceed any further with this bill.

I am very pleased for the opportunity, on behalf of some of these individuals and myself, to speak today to the bill and to the motion to refer it. I want to encourage this House to allow the establishment of a committee that will hear from concerned Canadians and responsible firearm users before proceeding any further.

I was also encouraged this morning to hear the reply to the question offered by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce by the minister when she said that the committee would not be restricting itself to the narrow confines of what is included in the bill but can look at the regulations in a broader picture. I feel that is important.

There are many responsible firearms users in Canada who can help us. Many of them were solicited for input prior to the drafting of this legislation. I asked the minister for a list of those consulted, and I have been informed that the previous minister had conducted extensive consultations from July through September of last year. Major firearms interest groups had the opportunity at that time to make submissions outlining concerns and suggestions. Meetings were held with representatives of police departments, the Shooting Federation of Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Federation, Canadian Chiefs of Police, Canadian Sporting Arms and Ammunition Association, the National Firearms Association, and the Dominion of Canada Rifle Association. All these groups were consulted.

Now that we have a legislative package together, I feel they deserve the opportunity to respond. They want as

much as we do to ensure the safety of Canadians. They have a vested interest in their sport in promoting the safe use of firearms. They deserve to be involved, and they deserve to be listened to again. I am sure that every member of this House who represents a rural riding has already heard from many of their members.

Since the bill was introduced in June, I have received numerous representations from several constituents. My riding includes a large urban area, the city of Red Deer. It is surrounded by hundreds of square miles of open productive farm land which leads into the foothills of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. It is an area of incredible scenery and beauty. It is also an area of good, natural hunting. It would be an exaggeration to say that absolutely everybody hunts and is involved, but it would be quite accurate to say that everyone knows those who do, and there are a lot of them.

I have received some letters from hunters and gun club members who live in the city, but by far the largest proportion of my mail has been from the rural area: from farmers and ranchers who use firearms for predator control, from legitimate hunters who have pursued their sport safely for many years, and from members of gun clubs and people who pride themselves in the safe handling of firearms.

The fact that the bulk of my mail comes from the rural area illustrates a problem. The problem is the same as we have with many other issues in this House. In this large and diverse country of ours perceptions differ between groups, between cultural groups, between regional groups, and sometimes between linguistic groups. Here I see a difference in perception basically between the rural and urban perspective. Legitimate gun owners are not restricted to rural areas, but there are more of them in the rural area. Problems and abuses with firearms are not restricted to the urban areas, but they occur more often there.

When it comes to drafting legislation, the drafters tend to be the urban folk, those who do not always have the experience they need to understand the rural position. Because of the large rural population of my riding, I have received a great deal of mail. Their concerns have been expressed to me, and I feel it is my duty to represent those concerns both to the minister and to this House.