

Government Orders

Madam Deputy Speaker: I guess that settles the argument.

Hon. Kim Campbell (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to finally enter the debate on this motion. I look forward to the appropriate procedural opportunities to discuss this with members of the House at the committee hearings. I think that is the appropriate occasion to do that. What I want to do is to put on the record a number of propositions and discuss to some degree what it is I would like the committee to deal with.

I have been wanting to get this legislation into a committee since before we rose for the summer because, as members of this House and I think of the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and others who have served in this House for a very long time will know, this is probably one of the most contentious subject matters with which Parliament will ever deal. My colleagues, who go back to 1978 when the previous package of gun control legislation came before this House, have told me that it was, without question, the most contentious issue that the House ever dealt with and in terms of their own ridings whether people were for or against the legislation. It roused an enormous amount of public controversy and interest.

That is why, on our side of the House, there is not a disposition to have a very quick second reading debate because on all sides of the issue on this side of the House members want to—

Mr. Waddell: Oh, oh.

Ms. Campbell (Vancouver Centre): I wonder if the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam could even consider in his wildest dreams offering the same kind of courtesy that he is regularly granted from me in the course of debate in this House. I am minister and he is my critic and I think we have a responsibility to try and debate the issues in this House—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would like to call the House to order. I am sure the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam will eventually talk on this motion and he will want to be given the courtesy of speaking quietly. He will

please allow the minister to do the same. The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms. Campbell (Vancouver Centre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is really interesting that what the hon. member calls shameless, or shameful and gutless, is in fact the essence of democracy because when we have issues in this society that are highly divisive, it is important to ensure that we move forward with support of the public and, more important, with the understanding of the public.

I have spent a lot of time since the tabling of Bill C-80 and even before talking to people in Canada who are concerned about the question of gun control, and listening to them. What we need is a process that will move this legislation ahead. I have been wanting to get into a committee, a public process, since before the bill was tabled, and certainly since the bill was tabled.

Mr. Waddell: You offered us a bill.

Ms. Campbell (Vancouver Centre): Madam Speaker, the hon. member talks about offering a bill. The point is that the members on this side of the House regard this as one of the most important issues they will deal with and they want to have a full second reading debate. They all want to get their views on the principle of this bill on the record. It is not, in their view, a subject of legislation that should have a perfunctory nod of the head, go through a committee process, and come back for third reading when it is too late to discuss the philosophy of the bill. Third reading debate is generally a slow debate.

It is because of my respect for their concerns and my concern to move the legislation ahead and get it into a timely public process that this motion has come forward.

Mr. Waddell: You are killing the bill.

Ms. Campbell (Vancouver Centre): We are not killing the bill, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to have the opportunity today to explain what it is I would like the committee to address. I think it is, as I say, one of the most important issues we will deal with in the House during this session, an issue absolutely fundamental to the question of public safety in this country.