

TRANSPORT

SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER REPLACEMENT PROGRAM—STATUS OF EH-101 CONTRACT— GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. J. Michael Forrestall: Honourable senators, I should like to try to clear up another matter. It has to do with search and rescue helicopters. As the Leader of the Government is no doubt aware, her colleague the appropriate minister has announced a final settlement with EH Industries for the contract that was cancelled by her government on assuming office.

I know she understands the importance of making the settlement public, because it speaks directly to the total cost of cancelling the EH-101 contract. It is also important because it is relevant to the \$600-million price tag that the minister has outlined for the purchase of replacement equipment.

I would appreciate it very much if, sooner rather than later, the leader would shed some light on this matter so that we might have her answer as part of our record.

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): I will certainly do that, honourable senators. I cannot do it today. On an issue like this, I would not even attempt to do so. I will try to obtain the relevant facts for the honourable senator as best I can.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FIREARMS BILL

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT OF COMMITTEE— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Beaudoin, seconded by the Honourable Senator Grimard, for the adoption of the sixteenth report of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Bill C-68, an Act respecting firearms and other weapons, with amendments) presented in the Senate on Monday, November 20, 1995.

Hon. Lise Bacon: Honourable senators, in a few days we shall be commemorating the horrible massacre at École polytechnique in Montreal.

On December 6, 1989, 14 young women lost their lives because a madman happened to cross their path, a madman with a gun. The École polytechnique massacre, like many other tragic events, reminds us that all too often firearms are part of our day-to-day reality. Cases of family homicides are surprisingly common in our country, and it is a shock to realize that firearms are the weapon of choice in spousal homicides.

Also terribly common are suicides involving a weapon that was too readily accessible, and made the difference between an irreparable outcome and an instant when the worst could have been avoided.

Bill C-68 was drafted in order to spare the women and men of this country from having to experience, or to fear, such situations any longer, and delaying its application and proposing unfounded amendments is not the way to start any effective action.

First of all, I shall address one of the amendments which is to delay implementation in certain provinces or in the territories. Allow me to state, honourable senators, that I find it somewhat ironic, when there is talk of equality between the provinces, that there is a desire to make some of them distinct cases. This amendment would allow provinces and territories to delay total Canada-wide implementation for up to ten years. This amendment is tantamount to allowing the provinces and territories the possibility of not implementing the firearms act for ten years. A ten-year delay means a heavy risk to the health and safety of Canadians.

This proposal cannot be supported, for a number of reasons — practical, economic and legal.

In his final submission to the Senate committee, the minister addressed the possibility of withdrawal, and its consequences for public safety and crime prevention.

Firearms from the provinces and territories deferring implementation will end up in jurisdictions that have chosen to implement registration promptly, thus undermining their program of universal registration.

Provincial and territorial governments told Parliament and the Senate committee why there was a need for national standards for enforcement of the legislation. The experience of other countries has illustrated the problems that occur when universal registration is not mandatory throughout the country. For instance, in Australia, universal registration exists in five of the country's administrations but not in the other three. The national committee on violence, an intergovernmental committee that examined violence in Australia, found that gun control was seriously undermined by the differences that existed from region to region. The committee recommended making universal registration mandatory throughout the country.