

Government Orders

dependent upon firearms. Government must acknowledge and respect the use of firearms for farming, ranching and hunting. We must not interfere with this. Also to be acknowledged are those who collect firearms and those who enjoy shooting sports and so on.

The third principle in summary recognizes and respects the rights and interests of law-abiding Canadian citizens. However while these legitimate interests are acknowledged and respected, Bill C-68 requires that they be carried on in a context that is consistent with public safety.

The three principles as outlined by the justice minister are fundamentally sound. They are consistent with the objectives of good government, a peaceful and safe society and an effective response to the criminal misuse of firearms and enhanced public safety.

It must be understood that the universal registration of firearms is a fundamental strategy, a fundamental support system that the government intends to use to achieve the principles and objectives previously outlined. It is at this point that controversy and a divergence of opinion ensue in debate.

There is popular public opinion calling for more stringent gun control measures principally in reaction to recent violent crimes. On the other hand, there is also public opinion that certain restrictive gun control measures are inappropriate and will not adequately solve the problems of violent crimes.

Specifically my constituents of Central Nova have expressed to me concerns and interests regarding the effect and impact Bill C-68 and universal registration will have upon them as law-abiding gun owners. By letters, by petitions and by 800 constituents attending two separate public forums they expressed their concerns, fears and apprehensions regarding the federal government's firearms control program which was announced on November 30, 1994.

Constituents of Central Nova raised issues regarding the fundamental strategy of the universal firearms registration. The concerns raised were: first, that registration would potentially lead to confiscation of their guns; second, that registration would interfere with the property rights and charter of rights, specifically to the right to security of person and property; third, that the ownership of a gun is a right and not a privilege; fourth, they failed to see the positive effects of gun registration in deterring and reducing crime in Canada.

I trust that to satisfy my constituents' concerns the constitutional validity of universal firearms registration and prohibition will be examined and considered in the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

• (1255)

Some Central Nova constituents also raised a concern regarding the cost of registration both to taxpayers and gun owners. There appears to be much public misinformation in this regard. The Minister of Justice was quite clear on debate that the cost to gun owners in the first year of the five-year implementation period is expected to be zero. If for some reason it is not zero, it will be a nominal amount in the range of \$10. The estimated cost of implementing the universal registration system over the next five years will be \$85 million. This estimated cost will be reviewed in detail by the standing committee.

Potential non-compliance with Bill C-68 has been raised as an issue and how such non-compliance will be enforced. In my riding in discussing the issue of future non-compliance reference was made to past non-compliance. Reference was specifically made to the failure of police and crown prosecutors to enforce existing provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada regarding the usage of a weapon in the commission of an offence. Concern was expressed that crown prosecutors were irresponsible and failed to uphold public trust by plea bargaining and failing to enforce the existing provisions.

It should be noted that this concern is addressed by Bill C-68. Bill C-68 will toughen the penalties of the criminal misuse of firearms. With the restructuring of the Criminal Code there will no longer be plea bargaining of charges relating to the use of firearms because the penalties will be woven directly into the sections which provide for the offences themselves.

The firearms owners of Central Nova raised the concern that they were offended by having to consult the Criminal Code to determine the manner in which their private ownership of firearms was to be regulated. This concern has been addressed by Bill C-68 by the government changing the Criminal Code to toughen sanctions and by contemplating a separate statute, the firearms act, to deal with the regulatory aspects in relation to firearms acquisition, use and ownership.

Further concerns were raised in my constituency from the gun clubs and target shooters. These are highly skilled people, very law abiding and conscientious in their sport. These Canadians want to continue in those sports.

The justice minister has assured this honourable House that when Bill C-68 goes to the justice committee following second reading debate he will ask the committee to look at specific changes in the law. This is unprecedented and should be commended for being open to change and scrutiny of a government bill. The Minister of Justice stated in *Hansard*:

First of all, to ensure that we are accommodating all of those sporting competitions with handguns, we have already made it clear that the .22-.32 calibre Walther used by Linda Thom at the 1984 Olympics will not be covered by the ban. We want the