

*Government Orders*

In my own riding of Red Deer, the minister has told me by letter that 67 per cent of constituents support his universal gun registration program. Unfortunately though, when I invited the minister to test his theory by participating in an open town hall meeting in Red Deer, he would not come to my riding. Why not? If the minister believes his own claims then he should receive overwhelming support. I will tell you why not. The minister will not come to Red Deer because he knows my constituents do not support his registration process. He will not come because he knows his claims are ridiculous.

How do I know my constituents do not support universal registration? I have had over 5,461 constituents sign petitions against this legislation; I have had over 1,200 letters in the last two months; I have had hundreds of phone calls and contacts out on the street; all of this against universal firearms registration.

Some might ask whether I have had any from the other side. Yes, I have. My office has received fewer than 20 letters and I have received fewer than 10 phone calls supporting this bill. That is over 230 constituents to one against this bill. I ask: What clearer indication can I have as an MP? It seems astonishing to me that the justice minister could make such an outlandish claim that the people of Red Deer support this legislation by a margin of 2:1.

I travelled my entire constituency this past 10 days from early morning until late at night. I had six town hall meetings and many other meetings. I met many people. All of them are opposed to this legislation. Not one person has told me he is in favour of it.

There is no doubt in my mind that Bill C-68 will cause many problems if passed in its current form. Even with major amendments in committee this bill will still turn thousands of Canadians into criminals.

It has been made very clear that a number of justice ministers, including those from Alberta and Saskatchewan, will oppose this legislation and the enforcement of it. It will cost hundreds of millions of dollars if we count the enforcement costs. It will impose a tax on legal gun owners through registration fees and will threaten the private property of approximately seven million Canadians.

This legislation is unacceptable. Therefore I urge the House to act responsibly and adopt the motion of the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. Let us split the bill into two portions.

The first part will contain those parts of the bill dealing with crime control. We will send out a tough and unified message that violent criminals and smugglers will be punished severely for their crimes. That is what the Canadian people are saying. I have heard that message in Montreal and Toronto, and I have certainly heard it in the west. It is the same message. They are against crime and are demanding crime control.

The second part of the bill will deal with the government's very unfair universal firearms registration system. In the interests of Canadians we will strike down that proposed legislation. I believe that will be right across the board as well.

We have an opportunity to clarify what the minister has mixed up. It is our responsibility as members of Parliament to do this. I request the support of all members for the proposed motion.

**Ms. Roseanne Skoke (Central Nova, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to debate at second reading Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons. Bill C-68 is 124 pages long and contains 186 legislative provisions which include amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada and creates a new separate statute, the firearms act.

• (1250)

Moreover this bill would completely reorganize the gun control system putting provisions of a regulatory type in the proposed new firearms act while leaving the Criminal Code penalties in part III of the Criminal Code. It would also reorganize the classification of firearms and other weapons and the means by which controls are imposed on their acquisition, possession, use and transportation.

The three pillars of the existing system, controls on access, controls on particular kinds of firearms, and criminal penalties, would continue to exist but their forms would change. In particular much of the balance of the system would shift to controls focusing directly on persons rather than on kinds of firearms.

The Minister of Justice in opening the debate at second reading stage urged this hon. House to adopt the legislation in principle before sending it to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs for detailed consideration clause by clause. The justice minister outlined three principles that motivated this government to introduce Bill C-68.

The first principle is that Canadians do not want to live in a country wherein the people feel they want or need to possess a firearm for protection.

The second principle is that if we are to retain our safe and peaceful character as a country, those who use a firearm in the commission of a crime will be severely punished. For example, those who smuggle illegal firearms, those who traffic in illegal firearms and those who profit by putting guns into the hands of criminals must know that penalties for such conduct must be certain and significant.

The third principle is that as a government we must acknowledge and respect the legitimate use of firearms by law-abiding Canadian citizens.

It would include but would not be limited to the respect for our Canadian heritage and culture regarding the traditions of hunting not only as a favourite pastime but as a very important economic activity contributing directly to the prosperity of many regions in Canada, and those whose livelihoods are solely