

Government Orders

fact been given. Common sense and responsible conduct so demand.

The process by which this bill came to be has been hectic, sometimes controversial but absolutely necessary. Public reaction to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision was swift. Canadians are concerned that in striking down section 276 the Supreme Court decision leaves a void in the law which puts complainants of sexual defences at risk of having evidence of their sexual activities unnecessarily exposed and used indiscriminately. Clearly I could not put victims of sexual assault at risk of an uncertain application of the law. As I have often said, individual women and men who have suffered victimization must never be put in a situation where they are victimized again.

[*Translation*]

I, of course, was not alone in recognizing the urgency of this matter. Immediately after the Supreme Court's decision, I was called upon by national women's groups and by attorneys general across the country for prompt legislative action to fill the void created by the Supreme Court decision. I committed myself to an immediate consultative process, and to the introduction of legislation before Christmas. The response was very positive, and I can assure you this bill is keenly awaited.

The extensive consultations which have taken place with national women's and victims' groups, with provincial and territorial governments, and with the Canadian Bar Association have brought home to me and to many others the fundamental importance of public consultations.

Clearly the development of social policy benefits from, and indeed demands, the participation of those it will serve. The process we used in the development of this bill was very successful, and I intend to apply it in other areas of significant social policy development as well.

[*English*]

The Bill C-49 consultation process provided valuable information and insight into the problems faced by sexual assault victims. I believe that these amendments respond to many of these concerns. But it is also important to note that no single point of view has prevailed to the exclusion of the others. The bill is sensitive to the delicate balance between the rights of the accused to a fair trial in accordance with the

principles of fundamental justice and the right of the victim of a sexual assault to the full protection of the criminal justice system.

I want to assure those who have taken such an interest in the bill that the consultation process is not over. These amendments, some of which are no doubt novel and controversial, will be studied in detail by a committee of this House. Interested groups and individuals will have the opportunity to present briefs and make submissions.

I welcome a lively and stimulating discussion at committee stage and I am always receptive to improvements in the law. Sexual violence and the fear of sexual violence affects everyone in Canada.

I want to state unequivocally that the Government of Canada will not tolerate violence of any kind against any person or group of persons in Canada, nor do we condone the view that a certain level of violence is somehow acceptable or inevitable.

[*Translation*]

Our commitment to Canadians to address their concerns about violence in our society is ongoing.

Bill C-49 is an important part of this process. The federal government has made significant progress elsewhere as well, through such efforts as Canada's drug strategy and the federal family violence initiative, to address some of the fundamental causes of violence in Canada.

[*English*]

I also pledge to Canadians that we will continue to examine our laws to ensure that they are not only effective in addressing violence, but also fair, balanced and responsive to the needs, concerns and values of Canadians. Such responsiveness is absolutely essential if we expect Canadians to believe in, support and abide by the law.

The provisions of Bill C-49 are an important part of this endeavour and I trust that you will provide this bill with your support.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to be able to reply in this debate on Bill C-49.

I want to thank the minister for the introduction of this bill. I would say to her that this is one of the most important justice bills that has come before this House in