

*Government Orders*

It is an honour to make the point that I am speaking on this bill with the desire to pursue a fair and equitable bill that permits reasonable and equitable use of firearms in our society.

• (1610)

Having said that, I do feel that the bill the minister has presented goes a long way in achieving those types of social goals. Therefore, I deem it an honour to rise to speak on this bill respecting the use of firearms and other weapons.

The extended discussions and debates have waxed and waned throughout this country. Western Canada is certainly no exception. The first meeting I attended was with the minister and the executives of most of Manitoba's firearm associations coming together in Winnipeg in July, 1994.

In a short time thereafter I had what I cannot say was necessarily a pleasure. I have never been yelled at by 2,000 people at the same time before, so it was a unique experience. There was a rally in the Keystone centre in Brandon at which time the organizations in favour of not producing any more firearm controls brought together a number of people and we heard their concerns. Fundamentally they were persons who were trap shooters, recreational pistol shooters, but in the main they were ordinary hunting members of the public just like some members in this House.

After attending these forums I visited several clubs and ranges. I continued to meet with concerned individuals on an individual basis as well as in small groups. Any new regulations concerning firearms have deep cultural implications, gender bias and some rural-urban division of support. As well, many citizens did not wish to see our nation reach a situation where they feel we must have access to a firearm in order to feel safe.

We have had some information coming forward. I will quote a couple of excerpts. One is from the *Western Producer*, January 26. It was entitled "Most women for gun control: pollster".

The Saskatchewan Women's Agricultural Network had an annual meeting on January 21 and debated a resolution to oppose gun control. The resolution was not passed. The director, Elaine Kacsmar, said they were not totally against the registration of guns but that they were against having to pay an enormous amount of money to register guns.

The second point I would like to raise is that the now famous Alberta poll done by the present Government of Alberta is registered in opposition to gun control. It in turn did not believe the federal polling that was done in that province. I am sure the member for Yorkton—Melville was possibly thinking of these results when he made his remarks earlier.

On February 2 the data seemed to indicate in Alberta that there were different pockets and regions but rural Alberta was in some regions as high as 72 per cent in favour of registry. Central Alberta was about 50 per cent; we will even drop a couple to 48 per cent. Northern Alberta was 56 per cent. Overall the data would indicate at that snapshot of time that over 65 per cent were in favour.

I have enjoyed many open and frank discussions with the Minister of Justice and my caucus colleagues as well on the entire issue of the firearms proposals. Throughout these caucus discussions, some formal, some not so formal, at no point was I ordered, threatened or instructed to vote in favour of or against this bill.

Unquestionably I will be voting in favour because I sense it does show some movement to allow for a middle of the road position for all members of society.

• (1615)

I believe that our caucuses, regional and national, provided every member on our side of the House every opportunity to contribute and develop those components that were of concern to them.

Bill C-68 reflects the November 30 action plan but has been changed to accommodate some legitimate handgun owners' concerns. Like all other owners of prohibited firearms, individuals who possessed handguns on or before February 14, 1995 will be able to buy and sell in the same class those firearms which are now listed as prohibited.

Owners will be able to use the handguns for the purpose of which they were originally obtained whether target shooting or collecting. Might I comment that to the very avid target shooters in my riding that is the same as golf is to me. They fire off 300 rounds in a very controlled, safe environment. They tell me that they feel great. I wish them well and I hope it continues. I am sure it will.

The bill is the outcome of consultations with many individuals, groups, organizations across Canada. It is intensive work involving the justice department, Revenue Canada and the Department of the Solicitor General, among others.

Owning a firearm is a privilege. It is not a right. As such, it is subject to regulation by government because firearms can be dangerous and it is only sensible to have some degree of regulation. People can lose a privilege. In fact I am informed that 40,000 Canadians for sundry reasons have lost the right to own firearms, about 700 in Manitoba and about the same number in Saskatchewan. Of course, it will vary with the level of population from coast to coast.

It has been my desire to see that reasonable guidelines are put in place where hunters will continue to hunt, recreational and competitive programming will continue to produce world class