There is no question that the levels of support vary in different regions of this country. That has been expressed forcefully and well in this debate. I, too, have heard those variations firsthand for months in my own province of Alberta, particularly in the southwest corner where I live. That is predominantly a rural area. Honourable senators, the views that I have heard are strong and forcefully expressed, but they are also mixed. They are not monolithic.

The thing that strikes me, when we are engaged in debate and argument on issues such as this, is that we very often communicate in extremes such as: "This bill will do nothing to solve our crime problems." Or, as Senator Lawson said earlier, when he suggested that other people were speaking in extremes: "The day after this legislation is passed, there will be no shooting." That is an extreme as well. Obviously, we concede that.

Other extremes are: "The registration system will not work at all"; "The law will not work"; "The money budgeted, no matter what it is, will not be enough"; "The government is really out to confiscate firearms from individuals"; "The museums automatically will be charged fees"; and "There will never be consultation sufficient enough or sensitive enough for the needs of aboriginals and northerners."

Honourable senators, all of those comments are extremes. We have heard these messages, not just in recent days but for months and for years.

• (1710)

I do not believe that this bill is built on extremes but, rather, it does seek consensus and compromise on what is clearly a very difficult issue for Canadians and for each individual senator in this house. We know that our political institutions and those who serve in them are viewed with scepticism and even distrust by many Canadians. Sometimes that occurs because we take it for granted that our messages are heard beyond Parliament Hill and that we are clever enough to make them easily understood.

Sadly, while communication should be a political strength, all too often we do a very poor job, both of listening and explaining. In the case of this bill, and the emotion and the controversy which surrounds it, the messages sometimes are confused, and they are contradictory.

I would suggest, honourable senators, that a great deal of effort has gone into the groundwork and the preparation of systems proposed in this legislation. This has not been a careless exercise and it will not be a thoughtless implementation.

I was not part of the committee which studied the bill, although I followed its work with very keen interest because it reminded me a great deal of Bill C-17, of which I was the sponsor when our party was in opposition back in 1991. The issues were similar; the testimony was similar; the frustration and the controversy were similar; and there was a great desire at that time to propose amendments to the bill to reflect some of the testimony which we had heard.

My honourable friend opposite is absolutely right: It was a good bill, and it was not just a good bill because it came from the former government; it was also a good bill because senators on both sides of this house worked strongly together to make it so and to support it. In the end, the committee chose to report the bill without amendment but with very strong recommendations to then justice minister, Kim Campbell. We did not see that bill as the final word on gun control but, Liberals and Conservative together, we put forward recommendations, and some of them, honourable senators, involved safety, training, and registration.

I believe that we should give the bill before us today a chance to prove itself to Canadians. We should give this bill a chance to work. Let us cooperate — not condemn but cooperate — with the justice department to inform our citizens, to ease the implementation process, and to demonstrate that Canadians and their governments have the ability, the creativity and the determination to make our laws work properly. Let there continue to be the broadest consultation with our aboriginal people so that the law will be implemented in a way that respects the realities of their way of life and their special culture.

The Minister of Justice again today assured me that every effort will be made to ensure that section 35 of the Constitution will be respected in terms of implementation of this legislation. Let us build, honourable senators, on the goodwill and the conscientious practicality with which most gun owners approach their work, their hobby, their sport, and most particularly the means of sustaining themselves and their families. Let us help to provide the climate in which this bill can work.

Honourable senators, this has been a very important, a very provocative, and a very moving debate. Last night, Senator Doyle observed:

> We are Canadians all, with goals to share and hopes to achieve.

I believe, honourable senators, that this legislation takes us a step closer to achieving our common goals and hopes: namely, the building of a culture and a society where the safety and security of all Canadians is enhanced. It is for this reason, colleagues, that I sincerely hope we can pass this legislation today in this Senate, and thus take our responsibility seriously because, speculate as you will, we do not know what will happen to Bill C-68 tomorrow, and I would sincerely hope we can work together to pass it today.

The Hon. the Speaker: I wish to thank honourable senators for staying strictly within their time limits. It now being five fifteen o'clock, pursuant to the order of the Senate and to rule 67(3) I order the bells to be rung for no more than 15 minutes.

Please call in the senators.