

Some Hon. Senators: No!

Hon. Eric Arthur Berntson (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I should like to accommodate everyone. However, the rules say that the speeches must be limited to 15 minutes. From here until the bell commences, we should follow the rule book as strictly as we can.

I know that some people have an argument to make that they could not make in less than 15 minutes, but I would urge all senators to stay within the time limit of 15 minutes, if they can, in an effort to accommodate all senators to the extent that we can. I expect that both leaders would want the opportunity to wrap up for their respective sides. That leaves us little more than half an hour.

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, bearing in mind what the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has said, we on this side would be quite comfortable in limiting future speeches to 10 minutes. However, if the opposition prefers to go by what is provided under the rules, namely to the maximum of 15 minutes, then that is fine. In any event, we should be mindful that at 5:15 p.m., all debate ceases; the bells will begin to ring, and all votes will be taken at 5:30 p.m.

Senator Berntson: Honourable senators, in keeping with what is the Canadian way, could we find a reasonable compromise and limit to ten minutes the speeches of those who do not hold our respective leaders' chairs, as it were? I am sure that your leader would want to have more than ten minutes for her wrap-up on this bill, and I am sure that in the case of my leader, he would want to have more than ten minutes. Perhaps at quarter to the hour, or 20 minutes to the hour or whatever, we could agree to have our respective leaders wrap up the debate, taking whatever time is left.

Senator Graham: My leader assures me that she will not go over 15 minutes. She could whittle it down to ten, but if the Leader of the Opposition would like to have 15 minutes, we are prepared to accommodate him, perhaps at the appropriate time.

The problem I am having right now, however, is that we are using up valuable time in discussing this arrangement. Could we agree that others participating in the debate be limited to ten minutes, and that the leaders have the regular 15 minutes?

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is it my understanding that we are agreed that I will call each speaker at ten minutes until quarter to five, at which time I will be prepared to recognize the Leader of the Opposition; and then at five o'clock, the Leader of Government. Is that understanding agreed?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: On that understanding, then, I recognize Senator Atkins. I will need to be very strict on that limit of ten minutes. I appeal to honourable senators. If they can

keep their speeches to less than ten minutes, that would accommodate other senators who will then have a chance to speak.

Hon. Norman K. Atkins: Honourable senators, in common with most citizens, I favour a form of crime prevention legislation. I am even in favour of the registration of firearms. However, I have some real difficulties with this bill, unamended, because I believe that it is seriously flawed.

The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has proposed a number of amendments to Bill C-68, the firearms bill. I would like to express some of my concerns regarding this bill.

• (1610)

I wish to state clearly at the outset that these changes alone will not resolve all the difficulties which have been brought to our attention through the thousands of letters received, the testimony heard by the committee and the meetings which have been held with concerned citizens.

The first issue we need to address is the constitutionality of Bill C-68 as it relates to the aboriginal peoples. The first part of that issue is whether the consultation process has been adequate and meaningful. It is clear that the aboriginal people are united in expressing their dissatisfaction with some aspects of this legislation. Senator Andreychuk has made a very strong case with regard to this point.

While in Canada we have some of the toughest gun control legislation in the world, there is a presumption that a citizen is entitled to possess a firearm such as a rifle or a shotgun. Citizens owning such firearms are not, in general, presumed to be criminals-in-waiting or criminals of the day.

Bill C-68, unamended, will change that. It will become necessary for our citizens to prove, on demand by authorities, that they have not committed a criminal offence, by producing both a licence to possess the firearm and a registration certificate. The ability to provide such proof should clearly be administrative, not criminal.

It has been said that for a long time Canadians have registered their cars, dogs, marriages, births, et cetera. However, failure to do so does not result in a charge under the Criminal Code. If this bill passes without amendment, the consequences of not registering a rifle or a shotgun will be out of proportion to the seriousness of the offence. I believe that these offences should be moved from the Criminal Code to the Firearms Act, unless the offence involves a prohibited or restricted firearm.

As a summary conviction offence, failure to register a firearm still carries a substantial penalty. The maximum jail term is six months and the maximum fine is \$2,000, which is administered at the discretion of the judge. The penalties allow sufficient flexibility to impose suitable punishment. We should bear in mind that these charges are independent of any other offence an