

The wording of this clause has sparked enormous concern. Concerns were expressed by a vast majority of witnesses who appeared before the committee at the Manitoba hearings, including the Selkirk Game & Fish Association, The Pas Firearms Association, the Dauphin Handgun Club and many other concerned groups and citizens. Quite clearly, all of these witnesses asked that the Senate try to have this clause changed. I fully support this proposed amendment.

Honourable senators, there are some aspects of the bill which I do support. I believe that enhanced control of crime should be supported, and I agree with the measures in this bill which would work towards that end. For example, I support increasing sentences for people who use a firearm in committing a crime. I am also in support of the provisions of the bill which control the possession of firearms by those who have been convicted of an indictable offence.

These are the areas of the bill which I support. However, I want to make it very clear that the package of amendments which we have proposed will do a great deal to improve the legislation before us. As a senator, I see it as my job to deliver to Canadians the best legislation possible. The changes being proposed will substantially improve this bill. It is for this reason that I intend to support these amendments.

Hon. Landon Pearson: Honourable senators, ever since I arrived in the Senate a year ago, I have been aware of the controversial nature of Bill C-68, which was then in the drafting process. How could I not be? The issue of gun control raises such very strong emotions. All along, I paid close attention to the arguments which have been raised, both for the bill and against it, so that I could better understand the issues which seem so important to so many Canadians.

The question I posed to myself was: Where does all the emotion that surrounds this issue come from?

I believe it comes more from the symbolic nature of the debate than from its details. Symbols that have power are those that focus people's deepest feelings, especially when these emotions are related to their personal identity. It seems to me that the force of the gun control controversy derives from the fact that guns, because they are designed to kill, have come to symbolize power, ultimate power, the power of life and death. There are those who do not want this power to be curbed, not because they are criminals but because it has come to have such deep personal meaning for them. There are those who feel equally strongly that it must be curbed because they have directly experienced its misuse.

Let me reiterate, honourable senators, that I have no objection to the legitimate use of firearms for hunting, for culling, for protection, for the armed forces, for the police. It is not the

killing of animals that disturbs me; I am not a vegetarian. It is the killing for pleasure; the unjustified and unjustifiable taking of life, and the use of guns to threaten, intimidate and humiliate.

Today, honourable senators, I would like to give voice to those who have spoken in support of Bill C-68; those who have written to me personally or to the committee; and those who have come forward as witnesses to the need for greater gun control because they have experienced in one way or another the misuse, by accident or intention, of a weapon that kills. These include women, health professionals, city administrators, the police, individuals who feel disempowered by the gun lobby, children and youth. Please listen to what they say for they, too, are ordinary Canadians.

Let the women speak first. Linda Taylor from the Children's Home in Winnipeg writes:

I do not think Bill C-68 is the answer: it is only a beginning. It presents a message to Canadians that ownership of guns is a responsibility, and one to be taken seriously. Perhaps there could be better bills. Certainly there could be far stronger ones. As a woman living in Winnipeg, I would support that... Bill C-68, however, is a small and necessary first step if we are serious about creating a society free of violence.

[Translation]

Mrs. Simone Baron, the mother of a victim, wrote us from Rosemont, Quebec:

I am the mother of a girl who was a victim, at the age of 19, of a criminal act involving a firearm... Bill C-68 is good and we support it very strongly. It should have been passed long ago.

[English]

Jennifer Allen Simons writes from Vancouver:

In the interest of public safety, I ask you to give Bill C-68 speedy passage through the Senate... This bill does not impede any lawful use of a firearm. It does, however, provide a tool for intervention where there is a reason for concern. Surely the prevention of any death or injury justifies the adoption of this legislation.

The YWCA of Canada writes on behalf of the National Council of Women; women's shelters and transition houses in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario; the Action Committees on the Status of Women in Manitoba and Saskatchewan; and many other women's groups: