

Government Orders

to appear before the standing committee, I propose to move a motion in the House during report stage debate.

[*Translation*]

We have all witnessed the atmosphere of suspicion and misinformation around discussions on gun control. Quite frankly, much of the problem is due to a lack of information about the repercussions of the bill. We should not be surprised that gun owners get upset when their members of Parliament are unable to answer very basic questions like: how much will it cost?

The question is a legitimate one, and I would like to be able to give a clear and precise. In the absence of detailed information, individuals and organizations that have a vested interest in giving Canadians the worst case scenario have been quick to provide their own answers to these questions, sometimes drawing alarmist conclusions that have been greatly exaggerated.

For instance, in my riding people say it will cost between \$86 and \$102 to register a firearm. However, the Minister of Justice figures that it will cost only \$10 for up to ten firearms. If we cannot prove they are wrong, many people will think these agents of the gun lobby have absolute credibility.

[*English*]

The firearm debate has had a very polarizing dynamic. We have very determined firearm owners on one side and equally determined people on the other side who would rather not see guns in society. Both have legitimate and compelling concerns.

It is for this reason we as parliamentarians must try to take the middle road. Although the middle of the road approach may not satisfy extremists at either end of the spectrum, it will be satisfactory to the majority of Canadians. Canadians pride themselves as a fair and just people, but we must not forget our heritage and that even today firearms activities such as hunting, targeting shooting and collecting are important components of the Canadian identity particularly in rural areas.

The proposals embodied in the bill were introduced last November. In response to input from individual firearm owners and organizations that represent them, the legislation we are debating today contains important improvements to the original proposals. For example, owners of firearms in the restricted category will now be able to buy and sell to others in the same category. In addition to other provisions for divesting of restricted firearms, this will ensure that owners of restricted firearms will have a reasonable choice of options if they choose to retrieve their investment.

These substantial amendments to the original proposal demonstrate there is still room for compromise without undermining the basic principles of the bill. That is why I am proposing an amendment to remove from the Criminal Code the penalties in

section 91 for non-registration in cases where the contravention is not wilful. The amendment will make the legislation more just and will increase the degree of compliance without reducing its impact.

In addition to universal registration, Bill C-68 contains many excellent provisions that will undoubtedly improve public safety. I cannot say that I support every aspect of the legislation without reservation, but if I had to give it a grade it would be a *b* plus, and that is a decent pass.

I intend to vote in favour of Bill C-68, but in respect of the legitimate concerns expressed to me by firearms owners in Simcoe North and in view of my personal reservations I am seeking remedial action in the form of the amendment I described.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, our concerns with regard to the legislation on gun control are shared by many of my fellow Canadians. We cannot, however, remain insensitive to the statistics on the number of shooting deaths.

● (1340)

Firearms are involved in over one third of the homicides in Canada. Most of the homicides in the past six years were committed with shotguns or hunting rifles. In three cases out of four, a murdered wife was slain with a hunting shotgun or rifle.

Closer to home, in Quebec, between 1990 and 1992, there were 1,293 deaths attributable to shootings—an average of 425 deaths annually. Three deaths by shooting out of four, in Quebec as well, were suicides, for a total of approximately 300 suicides annually. These sombre statistics are very eloquent. They cannot therefore be ignored. It was essential to ensure a strict application of the provisions of the Criminal Code on the use of firearms. Moreover the regulations in force under the old legislation governing the acquisition, storage and transportation of firearms were incoherent and difficult to apply.

The Minister of Justice had to make them understandable and accessible to everyone. But, did he do so? Let us take the time to consider a few paragraphs.

The Bloc Québécois favours gun control without discriminating against those who use firearms reasonably and responsibly. I gave some statistics earlier. Here are some more. A descriptive study on suicides, homicides and accidental deaths by shooting was done on a data base available in the files of the coroner. For example, a number of files were examined by the Quebec coroner. The tally of deaths caused by firearms: from 1990 to 1992, 38 accidental deaths; from 1992 to 1993, 572 suicides; from 1991 to 1993, 227 homicides.