

I should like to read to you an excerpt from a brief submitted at the Manitoba hearings on Bill C-68 by the Association of Women Shooters of Canada, who were not given the opportunity to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to express their views. This is what they had to say:

If women's health and safety are truly of concern then one might reasonably consider taking the enormous amount of money that the federal government is so eager to spend on universal firearm registration and use that money in ways that actually will benefit women. For example, research on breast cancer, treatment programs for abusive men, and treatment programs for alcoholism (alcohol is almost always involved in incidents of domestic violence). These are all ways which will help women far more than additional firearms legislation.

Honourable senators, at the root of crime and violence in our society are many social problems. This message was delivered loudly and clearly by many concerned citizens who appeared at the Manitoba hearings on Bill C-68. There is a consensus that the federal government should be introducing crime control legislation rather than gun control legislation. Firearms are not viewed as the major problem in many communities. Drugs, alcohol and related difficulties such as poverty and hopelessness are seen as being the root causes of the problems. These are some of the real problems leading to crime and violence.

I believe that, in order to enhance public safety in Canada, the federal government must deal with the social problems which exist now. We need to look at ways of reducing the amount of violence on television. I am not an expert on how to do that, but if you have watched some of the programs on television or in the movie theatres, you know what I am talking about. That is what the young kids see. Those young kids then grow up and commit the violent crimes about which we all complain.

We need to place more emphasis on education. If we have generation after generation of people living on welfare; if we have generation after generation of people living without hope, we will have violence no matter what we do with gun registration. It will have no impact. Attack the real problem.

The Winnipeg Game and Fish Association said the following in its brief at the Manitoba hearings on Bill C-68:

No significant evidence is in hand to show that any amount of gun registration applied against law-abiding gun owners has, or ever will, produce a safer public or crime prevention results. The justice system and police should be dealing with real criminals and criminal activity, and leave law-abiding citizens alone.

Honourable senators, Canada has a long history of effective gun control policies, and Canadian law has always recognized that legitimate reasons exist for the possession of firearms, especially in the more remote areas of the country where guns

are often required to hunt for food or to control predators and other animals, as Senator Sparrow has very clearly pointed out.

During the recent public hearings on this bill in Manitoba, the committee of senators travelled to both rural and urban communities in the province. During those hearing, the different realities which exist for rural and urban residents were made clear to me. Many witnesses testified that this legislation reflects urban needs, and reflects a lack of understanding of rural residents.

During the Manitoba hearings, rural resident after rural resident expressed disbelief at Justice Minister Allan Rock's comments regarding who should own guns. Many witnesses cited Minister Rock as stating that he believes the only firearms in Canada should be in the possession of the military and the police. This comment clearly shows a lack of understanding of farmers, hunters, trappers, competitive shooters and others.

Many farmers are worried about the federal government coming to seize their weapons, which are often used to kill varmints that carry rabies and other diseases, in order to protect their livestock. A farmer from outside of Brandon told us the following true story at the Brandon hearings: He had a problem with skunks in his chicken coop, which contained some exotic prize chickens. His gun was locked up in a cabinet, and the ammunition was in another location. A skunk got into the chicken coop and, by the time he had unlocked his gun and got the ammunition, the skunk had got away.

Some would say, "Three cheers for the skunk." However, there was more than one skunk; the farmer, in fact, had an infestation. Over the course of the summer, there were 10 skunks and one fox. Needless to say, the gun was no longer in the house under lock and key. The farmer broke the law; he had to do so in order to protect his livelihood.

Further to that, concerns were raised at the hearings that this legislation would make criminals of law-abiding citizens, which would be very unfair. It would appear that it is not politically correct at this time to own a firearm.

It is disturbing that one of the most prevalent statements made during the Manitoba hearings was that individuals would not comply with this law. Sidney McKay of the Swampy Cree Tribal Council of The Pas, representing 10,000 people, stated unequivocally that they will not obey such a law. You are on treacherous grounds when you pass laws that the public will not obey.

• (2100)

Honourable senators, one of the amendments which is before us deals with the wording of section 117(15) of the bill. This section permits the minister to add any firearms to the prohibited category except those which, in the opinion of the Governor in Council, are reasonable for use in Canada for hunting or sporting purposes. The concern which has been raised here is that this clause gives too much power to the minister, and that any decision by the minister to add a firearm to the prohibited category on the basis of this opinion as to its suitability for use in hunting or for sporting purposes is not subject to judicial review.