

No nation can be free, no people can be free, living in a culture or society where people are scared. Closed doors are not the route of freedom. No nation living behind closed doors is free. The important thing to remember about freedom, honourable senators, is that it is really a state of mind. It is the openness of spirit with which we think of ourselves and others. That is why random violence and terror are so detrimental to liberty and democratic values. Such acts close the portals of the confidence citizens have in themselves and in their fellow human beings. Such acts have become part of the process of decay within peace-loving nations such as ours.

That is why, honourable senators, we must be as jealous of our responsibilities as we are of our liberties. Like the National Rifle Association, we must leave our weapons at the door or, to come to the present debate, we must register them because the fear of the unexpected, of the unanticipated, can ruin many a fine family, many a fine association, and many a country.

Someone once said that liberty means responsibility. Of course it is also true that many people dread responsibility. In lieu of the very focused opposition to gun control in some sections of our society, in some areas of our country, the gun control debate epitomizes the quandary that democratic governments must periodically experience in protecting liberty.

Somehow, governments must balance individual rights against the common good. This balancing act is never-ending. We must remember, as well, that the fight to make the streets of our nation safer has as much to do with things like literacy as it has to do with law. The security of Canadians is as much contingent on health as it is on gun control. Public safety has as much to do with living standards as with sentencing. It is in this regard, honourable senators, that I speak of the task of government as a continuing balancing act.

The important point to make today, however, is that gun control means the preservation of the common good, even though there may be some concessions individual gun owners will have to make. In other words, gun owners must consider coming to the association meeting with empty holsters, a concession, in my opinion, to the preservation of the common good of the community.

• (1800)

No one who loves liberty can fail to be impressed by the arguments of farmers, of hunters, of northerners, and of firearms enthusiasts generally. I have followed the debates very closely. They have mounted a significant and well-publicized campaign. They fear that gun control could mean prosecution of innocent Canadians for failure to register their weapons. They fear the loss of constitutional freedoms. They fear the loss of important sources of traditional incomes and the impact on livelihoods. In many instances, they fear the inconveniences and the costs associated with the registration plan. I recognize and empathize with what I am sure those individuals feel are their very legitimate concerns.

[Senator Graham]

However, honourable senators, there is a greater fear at work in all of this, and it is the fear which can destroy freedom, the closed doors which lock out the spirit of liberty from the hearts and the minds of Canadians. I must say that, for those victims of violence inflicted by guns, and for all those who live behind closed doors in fear of violence inflicted by guns, and for all those who have witnessed violence inflicted by guns, all other fears must be secondary. They have one simple request to make of Canadians: When you come to the meeting, leave your guns at the door. The common good of Canadians rests on the fact that we recognize that it is people with guns who kill people.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it is now a few minutes after six o'clock. If it is the wish of the Senate, I will not see the clock. Under the rules, I am to leave the chair at six o'clock. What is the wish of the Senate?

Hon. William M. Kelly: I believe we are about to recess until eight o'clock. I am the next in line to speak. I hope that senators will indulge me and allow me to speak at eight o'clock. I am an old man and have to get to bed early.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it being six o'clock, I leave the chair, to return at eight o'clock.

The Senate adjourned until 8 p.m.

• (2000)

At 8 p.m. the sitting of the Senate resumed.

Hon. William M. Kelly: Honourable senators, I apologize to Senator Doyle. I did not realize that he had a question which he wished to direct to Senator Graham. Therefore, providing that I can retain my place, I ask that Senator Doyle be allowed to ask his question now.

Hon. Richard J. Doyle: Will you accept a question, senator?

Senator Graham: Absolutely; especially from you, Senator Doyle.

Senator Doyle: In that spirit, allow me to say how impressed I was with your contribution to this debate. From time to time, we all need reminding that we do not come to this chamber to be strangers. We are Canadians all, with goals to share and hopes to achieve. I have not spoken to anyone on either side of this chamber who does not wish for the wisdom to devise more effective gun control.

The question which disturbs me is this: Could we not have been closer than we are today to that goal had we come together at the beginning without legislation already passed in the other place and already assumed to be beyond improvement?

Would the honourable senator, in the spirit of his message, say to his colleagues that the time has come for a return of prestudy of bills in areas in which the public good would be best served by giving our committees the opportunity to work with open minds and empty holsters?