

the right to criticize the other House. I realize very few people are aware of this rule, but I do want to point this out.

[English]

Mr. Harold Culbert (Carleton—Charlotte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments on the bill by the hon. member across the way. The important discussion that is going on today has been going on for nearly a year now. I heard him mention the various things he has done in his area to garner input from all factions.

I would like to ask the hon. member a question from his perspective in the area he represents in Quebec. Knowing full well that Quebec has many hunters and many people who enjoy outdoor sports, especially in the wooded and northern regions of Quebec, has he received input from various groups that makes him believe the bill will impact on responsible firearms owners, owners of rifles and shotguns who are legitimate hunters in Quebec? Does he believe the legislation will impact on them, impede them or cause them any particular hardship in carrying out their sports and their competitions as target shooters as they have in the past?

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Crête: Mr. Speaker, when I met the people in my riding, I also spoke to members of the hunting community and people from the department of public health who argued in favour of the legislation. In the case of hunters and all people involved in outdoor activities who use firearms, there will be some changes that will be frustrating. That is quite true.

First of all, they will have expenses they did not have before, and they will have to understand the new rules and how these affect them. In this area, we have to deal with people's perceptions of the bill as well as with the bill itself. In fact, I hope that thanks to the timeframe provided under the bill, the first three years and then another five years to register, the government avoids what happened to the previous legislation, which was never operational mainly because the government at the time did not take the trouble to inform the public and make the legislation acceptable to all voters, to all citizens. I think this is a legitimate change that will require sensitive enforcement of the legislation.

I recall the amendment we proposed regarding criminalization and a number of other aspects, where we wanted to ensure that the minister would be flexible—I am thinking of the minimum sentence of four years. I think the minister will have to give this some serious consideration and perhaps, in the years to come, a number of technical amendments might be considered, because people may end up in the penitentiary system and become criminals as a result of a single misstep.

Government Orders

This morning the Leader of the Opposition gave the example of the young person who breaks into a cornerstore with a gun and as a result will get at least four years. Under the Young Offenders Act as applied in Quebec, under the previous legislation, he would have had a good chance of being rehabilitated. If he is sent to the penitentiary for four years, chances are he will acquire some bad habits before he comes out and by that time it will be too late. So there should be some flexibility on the part of the government to ensure the legislation is enforced correctly.

As for hunters who will have to change their habits, I think we have to look at the benefits to society as a whole.

We also have to be very clear about what the government intends to do about smuggling. If the money people spend on additional registration is used to cover the cost of the system, that is all right, but these people will need tangible evidence that they are not the only ones who are paying and that further action is being taken in society, so it is not just a matter of plugging one hole but making sure all the holes are plugged, like smuggling firearms into Canada across what is perhaps the longest border between two countries. The government has already announced significant initiatives, but I think that we will have to ensure that they are enforced because hunters will be most frustrated if they are forced to pay fees when, ultimately, all of the other measures end up not achieving their intended results.

We come up against the same things in this sector as we do in the environmental sector. The way I see it, to all intents and purposes, the real effects of a law are more evident 8, 10, 15, 20 years after the fact than they are immediately after its introduction. It is important to realize this. We are bringing in legislation today for the sake of future generations. We cannot talk about a piece of legislation like we talk about next year's budget, which can be corrected the year after.

• (1610)

This was one of the considerations which got me thinking and strongly defending the arguments put forth by the inhabitants of rural regions on the issue. All of this notwithstanding, I think that this legislation will allow us to distinguish ourselves, as a society, from the American model, for example, where violence is so widespread that certain states have decided to permit almost anybody to carry a firearm. I am not interested in this model. If I have a choice between the two, I would much rather choose the model proposed here.

[English]

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the justice committee which intensely and thoroughly examined the bill for over seven weeks, I should like to report more fully to the House of Commons.