

Government Orders

My private member's bill called for a minimum five-year sentence for the use of a firearm during the commission of an offence to be served consecutively to any sentence for the offence itself in a first offence and a minimum of 10 years for a second offence. The difference is very simple. Under Bill C-68 a first time armed robber will more likely serve a four-year sentence which is a decrease from the current going rate of five years. Under my bill a first time robber using a firearm would likely serve a four-year sentence for the robbery and an additional five years for using a firearm for a total of nine years.

• (1535)

Which one sends a greater message of condemnation of using firearms during the commission of an offence? Which one is likely to deter criminals from using firearms during the commission of an offence?

The concern I have in separating these two parts under C-68 is that part III will be left out of the discussion. It is very important to Canadians that part III, the criminal use of firearms, be dealt with separately from the national registration.

In dealing with C-41 there have been two words that have taken over the debate: sexual orientation. I would suggest that national registration is going to take over the debate of this gun control legislation and the criminal use of firearms is going to get lost in the discussion.

It is very important that we separate those two and allow for Canadians, the committee and all parliamentarians to take a close look at what this government is suggesting for maximizing the deterrence to the criminal use of firearms.

I feel it does not go far enough. We should have ample opportunity to deal with that and not just talk about the national registration program.

[Translation]

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our standard of living, our social and economic standing make us the envy of the whole world. The elevated status Canada enjoys is not a coincidence: it is the result of women and men of strong will who imprinted principles and values on our country as it grew.

[English]

If one principle has guided this House since the beginning, it is an unwavering commitment to preserve a peaceful nature in our society. At times this commitment has meant taking a stand on some very controversial issues. It has also meant introducing groundbreaking legislation such as this bill on firearms control, Bill C-68.

Controversy has never kept us from protecting the values and the ideals Canadians so rightly deserve and consider their own.

These values include the rights to liberty and personal safety which are now enshrined in our charter of rights and freedoms.

In this respect, the firearms control legislation introduced by my colleague the Minister of Justice will undoubtedly make history. Every effort has been made to ensure that Canadians who use guns responsibly will be able to continue to do so.

For example, the Minister of Justice has asked the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs to consider whether or not some handguns, for example those used in target shooting competitions, should be exempted from the proposed ban. This kind of careful consideration given by the minister will help ensure that the legitimate use of firearms is permitted.

However, we all know that firearms are often used irresponsibly. This bill addresses the use of weapons and the violence they inflict on our society. It not only deals with firearms but also with the shadow of fear they cast upon all of us. In fear and in violence there are no rights and no freedoms, just victims.

Some disregard violence due to firearms because they claim it does not reflect the Canadian spirit. Indeed, Canada does not have a tradition of individuals carrying firearms for self-protection. Hopefully what one might call the gun culture that prevails in the United States will never cross our borders. Nevertheless, violence is real. Statistics can only begin to describe the pain and suffering firearms inflict on their victims.

Over the last 10 years firearms were responsible for 32 per cent of all homicides committed in Canada. Every year on average, 1,400 Canadians lose their lives to them. Of those deaths, 1,100 are suicides. Many of those lives could have been saved if firearms were not so readily available to individuals in distress.

Since 1970, 470 children have died in Canada as a result of mishandled firearms. Those figures are shocking to most Canadians. Those children deserved a future. Those children deserved the right to dream. Those children should never have been exposed to this kind of danger.

• (1540)

That is why firearms control and registration are so important to Canadians. Denial will shelter no one from a stray bullet. Every Canadian will benefit from this legislation.

Statistics show that Canadian women support this legislation wholeheartedly. From statistics we know that in this country every six days a woman loses her life to a bullet, most often at the hands of someone she knows. Almost always it is in her own home.

In the years between 1974 and 1992, 42 per cent of women murdered in domestic incidents were shot by their husbands. Eighty-five per cent of domestic murders with firearms are committed with either a rifle or a shotgun. Eighty-two per cent