

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Robert Gauthier:** Honourable senators, I would like to express my support for Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons.

I endorse the arguments of my colleague Senator Carstairs, who has clearly analyzed the amendments before us and has followed this bill in committee in a most exemplary manner. I would like to thank her for her work and to tell her that I personally have greatly appreciated the way she has conducted herself. As you know, I feel that the Senate is the house in which regional considerations need to be expressed. I have no problem in listening to various senators eloquently defend the views of their regions.

In my region, I must tell you, there is majority support for Bill C-68. In Ontario, 82 per cent are in favour of the bill and 77 per cent support weapon registration.

Like all of the other senators, I have received briefs, letters, all manner of communications concerning Bill C-68. I am neither surprised nor inordinately influenced by letters that have sometimes been copied from other letters in mail-in campaigns. I believe that they do have a message to get across.

There is one thing I have noticed. In the National Capital Region, almost all letters and comments to me were in support of the bill. I must admit that the bulk of the other letters, from Western Canada, were against it.

I am an Ontario senator and therefore represent my region, and the views I express here in the Senate today will be those of a senator who believes strongly that this chamber has a duty to reflect regional considerations.

If I may, I shall read just a few examples of the testimonials received from people I believe to be credible and serious.

[English]

The letter is signed by Brian Ford, Chief of Police, Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services. I will read just one sentence:

I am writing to you... to convey to you our support for the passage of Bill C-68 on gun control. Gun control is to the police community a very important piece of legislation because it is both preventative and also gives a starting point for the investigation of crimes involving firearms.

I have a letter from Marion Dewar, Chair, Ottawa Regional Police Services Board, approving of Bill C-68.

[Translation]

I have numerous letters but I shall read only a few of them, otherwise it would take all afternoon. I would, however, like to quote a few sample comments from the President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who states as follows:

[English]

He writes to Senator Lynch-Staunton:

I am writing to express my considerable dismay that neither you nor the Caucus —

He is talking about the Conservative caucus.

— would meet with representatives of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

He goes on to say:

...the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police wishes to confirm and clarify that they support the passage of Bill C-68 by the Senate of Canada without amendment.

The Canadian Federation of University Women wrote to me on November 16 expressing their support for Bill C-68. I could go on — the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Public Health Association, and so on.

However, honourable senators, I have received from my region alone credible support for Bill C-68.

[Translation]

In the 1993 election, the Liberal Party undertook, in its Red Book, to provide a more rigorous control of firearms. This is what we said. I ran in those elections; I supported this measure then, and continue to support it now.

Revenue Canada and the RCMP have already implemented certain measures in the fight against smuggling. The passing of the bill before us marks another important stage in the commitments made by the government and supported by the people of Canada in 1993.

These measures include, among other things, minimum imprisonment of four years plus the prohibition in perpetuity of possession of restricted or prohibited firearms following a conviction for one of the 10 designated violent offences perpetrated with a firearm; the prohibition against future importing and selling of .25 and .32 calibre handguns, and handguns with a barrel length of 105 mm or less; the creation of a national system for the registration of all firearms, to be administered by the RCMP, in cooperation with the provinces and territories.

I do not need to tell you I have heard arguments against the registration of firearms. I have not heard or seen, nor have I seen in the amendments, a single proposal that would improve the system.

I have seen amendments eliminating certain things. I am sorry, but you cannot oppose a part and, at the same time, support the whole thing. National interest must prevail.