

Government Orders

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be recognized but not very happy to be speaking at second reading stage of Bill C-68, the federal government's ill-conceived firearms control legislation.

I am especially not happy to be here speaking today now that the government has invoked closure on the bill. It has cut off debate in the House so the parliamentarians who have been talking to their constituents about the bill will not now have a chance to share all they have heard in their constituencies with other members of Parliament and, more important, with the Minister of Justice and his cabinet colleagues. Shutting off debate on the bill at this point is quite a shameful act. First, the government restricted access to the bill and now it is restricting debate.

I have listened carefully to much of the debate since the legislation was introduced. As emotional as it has been at times, there has been much said that is worthy of note. I hope the minister has been listening with a mind which will accept change. Unfortunately I find that the minister, like many Canadians, simply accepts the idea of firearms control as an end in itself.

• (1610)

The legislation addresses firearms control. Therefore the minister seems to be saying, for that reason alone it is worthy of support. It does not matter if this is a good bill, a bad bill or an inadequate bill. It should be worthy of support simply because it deals with gun control. We are all supposed to stand up and support it because of the premise. Whether it addresses all the problems facing Canadians and their personal insecurities does not seem to be relevant in the debate.

I believe these matters are relevant and I want to look at some of them today. I have heard many stories told in this Chamber over the past weeks, personal stories and quoted newspaper accounts of stories affecting people in various communities throughout North America. Each of these stories is told to gain support for the legislation. The stories are about individual tragedies of friends, relatives or people whose names appear in the paper because of some firearms accident or wilful event.

If one listens closely and reads between the lines, these stories are telling us that if we want to prevent the personal tragedies outlined, we must get rid of firearms and not register them.

The people who raised those stories in Parliament and the minister know that getting rid of firearms is not an option in the legislation before us today. For all intents and purposes the illustrative stories that have been brought to the debate, as important as they are to the individuals affected, are diverting attention from the real debate in front of us. The tragedies that they represent—and tragedies they are—can occur just as easily with a registered firearm as an unregistered one.

There is not enough time for me today, in 10 minutes, to outline everything that the legislation does. I will support the amendment before us which splits the bill into two parts because a good argument can be made for debating the two issues separately. My complaint with the legislation is the registration and the way in which it is being presented to the Canadian public by the government.

The universal registration of firearms is being presented for something that it is not. Persons with legitimate and legal uses for their firearms are being asked to pay for this misadvised purpose.

The government is telling Canadians that if all firearms are registered they can feel safer and have more security in their homes. They can feel safer and more secure on the streets. This is simply not true. Peddling false hope while doing absolutely nothing else to alleviate the fears of the Canadian public or to attack the root causes of crime and violence in our society is practically dishonest.

As members know, I believe in gun safety. Just because I do not support the legislation of the Minister of Justice, I have been criticized for not supporting firearm safety. Members will remember that this was one of the reasons why I supported the previous government's legislation on firearms. I supported that legislation against the wishes of many of my vocal constituents because it dealt with firearm safety. Today many of those who criticized me in the past have agreed that the safety course being offered is a good one, that the safe storage, handling and transportation regulations contained in that legislation were reasonable.

Bill C-68, the registration provisions in the legislation in front of us today do nothing to enhance or improve on the existing safety provisions already in place. The new legislation should not be promoted as if it does. Also, we must reduce the amount of violent death and injury. We as a nation must confront this issue from all sides, including its social and economic roots.

Bill C-68 and its registration provisions by themselves will do nothing to reduce violent injury, death or suicide for that matter. If as a nation we are serious about suicide, spousal violence or criminal street violence we have to do much more than talk about creating a registry.

We have to do all that we can to reduce suicides and homicides but as everyone in this Chamber knows, these suicides and homicides will occur with registered legal firearms as well unless other social and economic issues are dealt with.

• (1615)

Members of the Chamber will recall, because it was released a few weeks ago, that the royal commission on aboriginal peoples released a report on suicide among aboriginal people, particu-