

The cornerstone of this proposed legislation is registration of those guns. While registration may indeed prove to be a nuisance, I have yet to comprehend why registration should be such an affront to gun owners. We live in a society that routinely registers everything, from my dog, to bicycles, to fishing boats. Perhaps, just perhaps, I am missing the point.

After listening to testimonials in town halls in rural Manitoba, I am still at a loss to understand how registering a deadly weapon is somehow un-Canadian or undemocratic. In these meetings the witnesses suggested some excellent, and quite reasonable, amendments to this bill.

Many gun owners feel that the bill targets law-abiding citizens instead of criminals. They argue that the first line of attack against gun crime should properly be directed at individuals who use guns in the commission of a crime. Of course, that is a reasonable argument. Many law-abiding gun owners have expressed strong support for much tougher penalties for the criminal use of firearms. I have to say that I am in agreement with these points of view. Although I feel that this bill inadequately addresses those concerns, I do not believe that is enough to defeat the bill.

All of us bring our own wish list of amendments to this bill. However, if we insist on the adoption of these amendments at this stage, we know very well that the bill may not survive another passage through the house.

It is not being overly dramatic to point out, honourable senators, that the lives of many people hang in the balance. These people are alive and well as we speak but they could well become victims of gun violence. They are people that you and I have probably met or may have known. They are tomorrow's victims, the people who appear as simple names and statistics in a game of political football.

One of them may be a woman with no job, no education, and a family of five children. She is in a long-term abusive relationship with a man who continually threatens her with a gun. By this time next year, she will probably have become another statistic.

Consider the 10-year-old boy alive, and well today, who will be killed while playing with a loaded gun. Consider the depressed teenager, the jilted husband, the mean drunk, the mentally deranged individual, and the 14-year-old gang member with something to prove. Consider that it is becoming increasingly easy for people like these to obtain firearms from across the border, from house break-ins or from the black market in unregistered guns. Consider the Canadians who must live with the consequences.

I am not speaking about people of privilege like you and me, honourable senators, some of whom live in the safest of society's enclaves. I am speaking about the victims: the person who earns \$12,000 a year driving a taxi at midnight; the police officer who

must ring a doorbell in the middle of the night in a domestic dispute, not knowing whether a gun waits on the other side of the door. We have all seen that officer's photograph in the newspaper, the handsome young father cut down in the prime of life. We will see that tragic photograph again.

That, honourable senators, is not in question. That is a fact. People will live or die as a result of our decision, and that is why this is an issue where ethics and personal responsibility must supersede politics.

In conclusion, I ask you to approach this vote as a matter of personal conscience.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Edward M. Lawson: Honourable senators, I am in favour of crime control, but I am opposed to mandatory gun registration.

It is somewhat ironic that in the next few weeks we will be asked to vote to decriminalize marijuana, and today we are being asked to vote on a bill that can criminalize decent, law-abiding Canadian citizens such as hunters, aboriginal people, and farmers.

Although I was impressed to some degree by Senator Johnson's presentation, two matters bother me. In the name of God, whatever happened to the word "compromise"? If we are dealing with crime control, we should have before us a simple bill with the toughest penalties, and it would meet with the unanimous approval of every farmer and rancher across the country as well as the whole Senate chamber. I repeat, "...whatever happened to the word 'compromise'?"

The other matter that causes me concern is that we talk about this being a life-and-death issue. If you take literally what has been said two or three times today, with the passage of this bill — from tomorrow forward — no one will die from the misuse of an unlocked gun; and no one will be killed by a crazed killer. All of that violence will disappear.

Honourable senators, it is fraudulent to suggest that to the Canadian public. They are being deceived because that will not be the case. The day following passage of this bill, or next week, or next month, people will die because guns are not being properly controlled. People will die at the hands of criminals and this bill will not prevent it.

• (1450)

I have been told that those of us who dare to oppose the legislation are somehow captive to the ideas of the National Rifle Association of the United States. I know something about the NRA. I know they are the largest political pack in the U.S. They raise more money than any other organization, including the medical association. They influence the election of more