

[English]

• (1740)

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, it is true that when we discussed the house order for a vote at 5:30, the possibility was raised that, with unanimous consent, the vote might be advanced. Indeed, the proposition was put forward by Senator Prud'homme at that time. I do not foresee at the present time that that vote would be advanced to earlier than 5:30 because of the number of honourable senators on both sides of the house who have indicated that they would like to speak to this very important piece of legislation. I would anticipate, at least from this side — and I would await comments from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition — that we will be debating Bill C-68 almost up to the time of the vote tomorrow afternoon.

Senator Berntson: Honourable senators, I think we have more interest in this debate than we have time for the debate. I agree with my colleague opposite, and I suggest that we put all musings aside and decide now that we will have the vote as previously indicated.

Hon. Consiglio Di Nino: Honourable senators, Canadians from across the country have passionately presented their views on both sides of this issue. I have attempted to listen to all, and have tried to keep an open mind.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, could I please ask for some silence so that the honourable senator may continue?

Senator Di Nino: Thank you, Your Honour.

Honourable senators, before I go any further, let me confess that my personal opinion on gun ownership is both extreme and unreasonable. I do not own nor do I intend to own a gun. If I could, I would ban all guns. But, alas, my Pollyanna stance ignores the Canadian reality.

Over the past several months, I have heard supporters of this legislation, an impressive list of respected Canadians and Canadian organizations, put forth positions with which I can identify. I must admit that, at the outset, I generally supported their arguments.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, could I please ask honourable senators who need to have conversations to please have them outside of the chamber, so that the honourable senator may be heard.

Senator Di Nino: I appreciate your direction once again, Your Honour.

I generally supported their arguments as I did during the debates on the previous gun legislation, Bill C-17. However, unlike 1991, this time I decided to listen to arguments of Canadians with opposing views. I have tried to read all that has come across my desk. I do not think that I have succeeded, but I

tried. I have talked to Canadians from Whitehorse to Port Perry; from Toronto to Iqaluit; and from Saint John to Regina. I was surprised to discover that millions of Canadians oppose this bill.

Rosemary Kuptana, President of the Inuit Tapirisat, eloquently expressed the concerns of Canadians living in remote, isolated communities and, in particular, the effect that this legislation, if passed, would have on the lifestyle and, in many cases, the survival of natives in the Northwest Territories. John Williams of Port Perry, Ontario, was as eloquent in his representation of millions of Canadians who are law-abiding, contributing members of society who strongly and honestly believe that this bill is an unnecessary and serious infringement on their civil rights. Doctor Judith Ross who, when asked if this bill would marginalize gun owners the way smokers have been and make them second class citizens in the eyes of many, replied that Bill C-68 will not only marginalize gun owners but also criminalize them.

An organization which carries a lot of weight that would influence my opinion is the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. I support, and I want to continue supporting our police forces. Too often in the past, we have not backed legitimate police concerns, especially in Metro Toronto. When speaking to rank and file officers, I discovered that many, if not most, oppose this bill. One officer with whom I spoke told me that the 40 officers in the unit for which he is responsible unanimously oppose Bill C-68. We know that the Ontario Police Association also opposes this bill, as do other police forces across Canada.

We have heard numerous arguments with supporting statistics which do not appear to stand up to scrutiny. I am tabling a copy of an article entitled: "Off the Mark," written by Karen Selick for the magazine *The Next City*. Among other things, it raises some interesting questions and challenges a number of assumptions put forth by Mr. Rock.

Because of time constraints — and I do not think the time allowed would permit me to quote fairly from this article in a balanced and just manner — instead of cherry-picking from the article, I would rather just table it. I hope that you will all read it. I do not necessarily agree with all she writes, but the article is thought provoking, and I recommend that you look at it before deciding how to vote tomorrow.

Honourable colleagues, the committee and Canadians have heard from four provincial governments and both territorial governments, including my own province of Ontario. They all oppose the passage of Bill C-68. Their arguments are well founded and thoughtful, and deserve our attention.

Mr. Rock dismisses their arguments unceremoniously. Mr. Rock has also turned a deaf ear to the millions of Canadians who disagree with Bill C-68. They believe that he has treated them disrespectfully and contemptuously, even though these millions of Canadians share the same concerns as Mr. Rock and ourselves about crime and criminals, but disagree with Mr. Rock as to whether this legislation will solve any of the problems created by those who misuse guns.