

These are just a few of the problems which will also occur in the costly system which the government seeks to implement. This does not include the numerous people, including law-abiding citizens, who will just downright refuse to register their firearms.

Despite the concerns of some, including myself, the committee chose not to amend this section on registration.

To all the women's groups who fought against amendments to this section, I should like to say that I, too, want to see an end to violence against women. My opposition to registration does not contradict this position.

I was shocked and horrified, as we all were in the committee, when a group of witnesses revealed that a woman will go back to her abusive partner, on average, 30 times. Money would be better spent to ensure that these women do not have to return home to abusive partners, rather than on a registration system which might lead to confiscation of a firearm but which does nothing to address the underlying causes of abuse.

Every senator who has spoken against this bill has confirmed that he or she would support the bill if there was any indication or proof that registration reduces violence against women or violence in the home, or that it reduces homicides and suicides. Yet, honourable senators, we did not seek to amend the registration clause. We pray it provides the solutions Canadians are hoping for.

Honourable senators, I hope we can come together today to adopt these amendments, in order to give the government sufficient time for speedy passage of the improvements to Bill C-68.

Hon. P. Michael Pitfield: Honourable senators, this is a very important bill. It is, unfortunately, seriously flawed. I am deeply concerned about its insensitivity to farmers and outdoorsmen and, particularly, to the people of the North.

The recognition of the needs that flow from the interaction of great space and small numbers is the particular duty of Canadian federalism, and especially of its federal ministers. This bill does not meet that test: something poignant, indeed, in the circumstances of these days, in times immediately following yet another referendum springing from somewhat similar issues of insensitivity. Perhaps Ottawa is as arrogant as many people seem to think it is. Maybe we should examine our consciences.

The Attorney General of Canada and Minister of Justice is no ordinary minister when it comes to these issues of equity and the duties of political leaders in a federal structure. He has a unique position. I believe he should have found a compromise in this case. He has not. I find that most regrettable. I have never met the honourable gentlemen, but all reports are that he is an

extraordinarily intelligent man. We need such people in Canada desperately, but we must also preserve the capacity to compromise.

In that light, I simply do not understand why we must choose between a well-intentioned, largely useful, sincerely compiled piece of legislation on the one hand and, on the other, the legitimate interests of a significant group of our fellow citizens whose interests the bill certainly ignores, even encumbers.

• (1640)

To my mind, this bill shows that the Liberal Party still has to learn the lesson of the reversal it suffered in the 1980s. For those of us who think of themselves certainly as philosophical Liberals, this is very bad news. When liberalism came under attack, many, if not most, of its adherents seemed to think it was their principles that had somehow lost the support of the people. In fact, it seems to me that it was the way those principles were being asserted in a modern, complex society that people found objectionable. People simply rebelled against the monstrous mechanisms of policy and process that were being used by governments, even, and I might say especially, so-called conservative governments, to realize those principles. Again, it was not the principles of liberalism but the mechanisms of their realization that were unacceptable.

A decade later we now have a prime example of this same phenomenon. It seems to me that those concerned have not yet learned, and we ordinary back-benchers are pressed to try to sort the situation out.

This is not an easy question. I have thought it through as best I can. On the one hand, there are the undisputed benefits of the bill. On the other hand, there is its unbelievable, naive faith in machinery, its lack of a certain degree of ordinary sense, its blind reliance on bureaucratic process.

Perhaps I am unduly influenced by the scene last night when our colleagues denied, as I see it, the elected government the right to manage the government's business. Vote down the electoral boundaries, as some of us wanted to do, but do not refuse us the right to bring it out of committee so we cannot vote at all.

I might not make this judgment normally. However, it seems to me the message of these circumstances today is that if we are to have a bill at all in the current circumstances of divided power in this house, then we can only have a flawed one. I regret that. It is the role of the Senate to try to avoid that kind of situation. We are a chamber of sober second reflection.

The minister has not made our role easy. However, we have not made it easy for ourselves, either. I have reluctantly concluded that, in this instance, I will support the government's right to legislate.