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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 27, 2010**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz**



## Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.)):** I will call the meeting to order.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. This is our last hearing on the Canadian firearms program and the long-gun registry, the motion that was introduced, Bill C-391, by Mrs. Hoepfner.

Before I begin, there had been an agreement, as I heard, that in the absence of the chair, who could not be here today for personal reasons, when the chair stood in, there would be a corresponding decrease in the number of Conservative members. I see the Conservatives are not abiding by that.

What I would request, given that the committee had ended the previous session with a simple motion requesting the Canadian firearms program evaluation of February 2010, the internal audit... There was a motion that was not completed. I think we should simply take a vote on that matter. It's just a simple document—supposed to be a public document—that was requested. I would request that we take a vote on that.

What I can do, as that's the only matter before the committee that needs to be voted on, is I can abdicate the chair for that vote so that the agreement between the whips can be maintained.

Mr. MacKenzie.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC):** Could you please explain what the document is that you're talking about? We have some—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** It's been referenced by both the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP and also by the chair of the Canadian chiefs of police.

The specific document is the Canadian firearms program evaluation of February 2010 and the internal audit that was produced at that same period of time. We've had now three or four witnesses reference that.

These are to be public documents. They have not been released. We've had many witnesses referring to them. I'm simply seeking that those documents referred to by the Deputy Commissioner and others be turned over, particularly—there shouldn't be any controversy—given the fact that they are in fact going to be public documents.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** With all due respect, I believe we have Deputy Commissioner Sweeney talking about one document and Chief Bill Blair talking about another document.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I'm very specific on which document is being requested. It's the Canadian firearms program evaluation of February 2010 and the internal audit of the same period.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** And who was it directed to?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** This was done by the RCMP.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** And...

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** We would be making a request of the Commissioner of the RCMP for these said documents.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Who is the document directed to? Is it a Treasury Board document?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** It's an audit that was conducted by the RCMP to evaluate the effectiveness of the long-gun registry and the registry in total. It was conducted by the RCMP.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** If that's the document that—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** It was conducted in February of 2010. As far as we've been made aware, it is supposed to be a public document. It has not yet been released because they hadn't had the opportunity to translate that document.

The suggestion is simply that the document be given to the committee. If it's not available in both official languages, there would be the opportunity to translate it before it was distributed to members of committee.

It seems like a pretty simple request.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Well, the problem is that—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** What I'll do, Mr. MacKenzie, because we've had an opportunity to debate this matter—

**An hon. member:** No we haven't.

**An hon. member:** I'm not even on the... Fine: put me on the list.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** What I will do—because we do have witnesses waiting, and we carried this matter over from the other day—is I will allow five minutes of discussion. Then I'll turn the chair over to a Conservative member for the taking of the votes, and we can maintain the agreement that was made.

I'm sure the Conservative members would not want to stand in the way of an RCMP document—

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** That we don't know about; that's the problem.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** —that is supposed to be public.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** You're talking about something that nobody else has. You've talked about dates and translation. We're not aware of it, with all due respect.

You started this meeting off by saying that we hadn't abided by the agreement between the whips. The agreement between the whips that we have is that either we have our full complement on this side or we take the chair and we have five, and then you're balanced on the other side.

With all due respect, Mr. Holland, you have changed the rules today.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** That is certainly not my understanding or the understanding of the other whips from the other parties.

As I said, to facilitate the progression of this meeting, I am happy to abdicate the chair for the purposes of taking the vote. If there wants to be a discussion about why you do not want an RCMP report on the effectiveness on the registry, then, as I say, I'll entertain that for the next five minutes, and then I'll abdicate the chair for the taking of the vote. Then we're going to be able to proceed with the witnesses.

On my list I have Mr. Rathgeber.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Just for clarification, this report that...we're not sure what it is, but this is the report that is not available in both official languages? That is the report that you're requesting?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** At this time we've been made aware of the reason why this report has not been released yet publicly: it's not yet available in both official languages.

The committee would then take this report and take the opportunity to have it translated before its dissemination to members.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** You appreciate the problems that causes for certain members of this committee. I have sympathy for the concerns of Ms. Mourani and others that the distribution of a document—if we can ever ascertain what the document is—that's not in both official languages would seem to fly in the face of the normal procedures of this committee.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. Rathgeber, to be clear, the document would be received by the clerk, it would then be translated, and then it would be given out to committee members. No committee members would receive a unilingual version of the report.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** I'd certainly like to hear Ms. Mourani on this point, if she's on the list.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Ms. Mourani, would you like to make a comment?

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** If we receive the French translation, there is no problem having it go through the clerk.

• (1540)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** *Merci.*

Ms. Glover.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC):** Once again, Mr. Chair, I believe that you're supposed to follow the speakers order. I'm quite surprised today to see your behaviour with regard to committee once again, trying to skew whatever you possibly can to the favour of a partisan party.

Today we have witnesses, and I would like to hear from the witnesses, but I have to say that I want to know who referenced these documents. You continue to say that it was a number of witnesses. I would like to know who exactly referenced them. At this point, it's unclear as to who exactly referenced them or why they referenced them. I'm not clear as to what this document is, exactly.

Frankly, as the parliamentary secretary for official languages, I'm quite disturbed that we would even venture into accepting a document that is not in both official languages. It's not the typical practice of committees when documents are brought forward. Typically, specifically when they are from departments or from federal organizations, they are expected to be in both official languages before they are tabled. I would be completely against the tabling of them without their being in both official languages, respecting the fact that we are a bilingual country.

I would like to know from you, Mr. Chair, who are the three people or the four people you've indicated have referenced this document during testimony?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** The two who have directly seen it are both the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP and the chair of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Chief Bill Blair.

[Translation]

I am going to make sure that the report is distributed in French and English, in both official languages. There is no problem in that regard. The clerk will receive the report, after which it will be translated.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Who else referred to that document? You mentioned three or four people, but so far you have only named two.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I clearly stated that two people have read the report, Mr. Blair and the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP.

Now, Mr. Norlock—

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I have not finished.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** You asked a question and I answered it. That is it.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** You referred to three or four people. I would like to know who has read the report.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. Norlock, just to warn you, I'm going to give about two more minutes before we have to turn to witnesses and have a vote.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** On a point of order—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Yes, Mr. Rathgeber.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** —I do not believe it's the prerogative of the chair to set time limits on debate. I think that's the prerogative of the committee and the Standing Orders.

I think you are grossly exceeding your authority, Mr. Deputy Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** You have the opportunity to challenge the chair. We have witnesses who are before us today who would like to testify, and there's a very simple motion with respect to receiving the report.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Why don't we do this at the end of the meeting?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** We had ended the previous meeting on this, and I had made the determination that... given that I thought this would be a relatively simple matter of asking for a report.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Well, clearly it's not a simple matter, so maybe we should hear the witnesses—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** That's not the decision I'm making.

Mr. Norlock....

Yes, Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** On a point of order, having been in the chair at the end of the last meeting, I think it's worth you knowing that at the end of the last meeting, I had flagged five individual committee members on my list as wanting to speak to this motion. That was at the end of the last meeting.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** With all due respect, Mr. McColeman—

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I'm just making you aware of it, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** —that's not a point of order. And a new list begins at the start of every new meeting.

I'm going to cut the list off at Mr. Norlock and then Mr. McColeman so that we can commence this meeting.

Mr. Norlock.

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You have clarified some of the questions.

My first question is this: has the chair read the document?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** If by that you mean me, no, I have never seen this document.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** You say that you know that the document exists, and you know that it was Deputy Commissioner Sweeney... and who conducted the audit under the authorization of the chief of police of Toronto.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** No, that's not true.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Well, that's what I need to understand.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** What I had said— hopefully I can make this as clear as possible—was that the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP appeared before this committee and made reference to this report. Then, in questioning yesterday, I posed a question to Chief Bill Blair, president of the chiefs of police, on whether he himself had seen this internal audit. He said that he had.

That's what I'm referring to.

● (1545)

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Okay. Thank you very much.

The RCMP operates under the Government of Canada. Can anyone in Canada demand that the RCMP...?

Some of these could be rhetorical questions, but the chair can feel free to answer them.

The RCMP does an audit of itself. Therefore, it's operating under the purview of the Minister of Public Safety. One would assume that the Minister of Public Safety, or a person authorized by him or her, would commission a document to be done, or commission an audit to be done. Or if the RCMP does its own internal audit, to whom do they provide that audit? Who is the appropriate authority?

I would suggest that it's the government, and if that's the case, then I would suggest that the appropriate person we should have here is the person to whom the audit is designed to be seen by. Who is to see this audit?

From there, of course, once it's provided to the minister, it becomes, I would think, unless it's a matter of cabinet dealings, a public document. But I think we need to go down that route.

There seems to be, to me, some impropriety here, or the possibility of it. I'm not a lawyer, but I know something about the law. I don't want to make accusations; I just need questions answered so that those thoughts that we have, so that those possibilities that we have, are answered.

What you're trying to do, Mr. Chair, or at least what I see being done here, is the introduction of a document to further the advancement of a certain opinion. If that's the case, and if it is a Government of Canada document, then we should be able to make sure, as a committee, that it does not contravene some regulation of the Government of Canada. We can only do that if we know certain things, those questions that I just posed—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. Norlock, perhaps I can interject and very quickly answer your question. Then, since I'm sure you don't want to stop our witnesses from testifying—

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Absolutely I don't, Mr. Holland, but just a minute: you're making an accusation—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** —we can move to a vote.

If I may, the Speaker made a very clear ruling about Parliament's ability to request documents. That ruling, I think, was eminently clear. What is even more clear in this case is that these are documents that are to be released publicly.

I'm sure, Mr. Norlock, that neither you nor the Conservative Party would want to stand in the way of this committee, while undertaking its hearings, to be able to look at the most current and relevant information from the RCMP in terms of the efficacy of the firearms registry.

Now, this is a very clear, simple request. There are two documents. One is the Canadian firearms program evaluation of February 2010 and one is the internal audit of the same date. We've been waiting since February of 2010 for those documents.

This committee will begin its clause-by-clause considerations next week. I'm sure no one wants to stand in the way of this committee being able to have all the information before it.

Again, I have Mr. McColeman on my list for one minute. Then I'm going to abdicate the chair so that we can have a vote and we can get to our witnesses.

Mr. McColeman...

Mr. Rathgeber, on a point of order.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** On a point of order, the debate ends when the debate ends. You cannot limit a member of this committee to 60 seconds of debate.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** That is my determination. You can challenge—

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Challenge to the chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Okay.

There is a challenge to the chair. A challenge to the chair is not debatable. The vote is on whether to uphold the decision of the chair: a vote for would uphold the decision of the chair; a vote against would overturn the decision of the chair.

Those in favour of upholding the decision of the chair will please raise their hand...

Madame Mourani, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I have a point of order.

I would like to know who is entitled to vote here, because I believe there was an agreement between the whips.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Yes, you are right to remind us of that. There is an agreement that each time a vote is held, we ensure that there are the same number of members from each party at the table.

[*English*]

For the vote I will abdicate the chair so that we can have a vote with an equal number of members.

So which government member will take the chair so that we can have the vote?

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Mr. Chair, we're challenging the present chair, not a future chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Right, but in order to maintain the same vote count, as the whips have agreed—

**An hon. member:** You can't vote on a challenge to yourself.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** You can't have it both ways.

**An hon. member:** No, *you* can't have it both ways.

● (1550)

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** The rules are the rules.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** The rules and the agreements that have been made between all parties are that in the event of a vote, we would maintain the exact vote count.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** You're being challenged.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Well, on that basis, there's no debate; the rule that's being broken is the agreement between the whips.

In any event, those who uphold the decision of the chair will please raise their hands.

(Ruling of the chair overturned)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** So the decision is not upheld.

**An hon. member:** Wait; he didn't vote.

**An hon. member:** He didn't put his hand up.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Well, it doesn't matter; I said the decision was not upheld. If you want to continue to filibuster and not hear the witnesses, that's your prerogative.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** We're not here to filibuster, Chair. You're the one who started this thing today.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** It's a simple request.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...answer and you didn't take it.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** My recollection of the documents, at least from the testimony that I heard from Chief Blair, was that this was more than an audit document. Audit was part of it.

I was very surprised, and frankly taken aback, by Chief Blair's testimony, in the sense that he'd had access to be able to read this document prior to coming here as a witness and we as committee members had not. In some ways, as a committee member, I think to myself, "Why would he have access to that document other than for the purposes of supporting his view?"

So I would suggest that we move back to the speaking order we had at the end of the last meeting for the balance of the discussion on this document, because I am totally confused about what this document is. There was confusion when the motion was put forward by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj at the end of last meeting, and I was confused in terms of what this document was all about.

I'd like to know more before I vote for either requesting the document or not requesting it.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I have Ms. Glover on my list, but before I go to Ms. Glover, let me be as clear as I can. The documents are twofold: one, the Canadian firearms program evaluation of February 2010, conducted by the RCMP; and, two, the internal audit of the same name, done at the same period of time, February of 2010.

I don't know how I can be any more specific than that. Both these documents were specifically referenced by witnesses who read them.

Ms. Glover.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** With all due respect, Chair, your specifics come into question when you reference three or four people and then you state only two people. I have to question whether or not you know exactly what you're talking about when you reference anything.

I would like to move, though, right now, that we put this item at the end of the agenda. With all due respect, we have witnesses here who are very important to this study. I would like to hear from the witnesses.

So I move that we put this debate at the end of our agenda and that we deal with the witnesses right now and listen to what it is they have to share with us.

**An hon. member:** Hear, hear!

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Is it your intent, so that we can save time, to continue to violate the agreement that was made between the parties that when there are votes before the House—

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** There's a motion on the floor, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** No, I'm just asking, because the agreement that had been made between all parties was that if there was a vote—

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** There's a motion on the floor.

**An hon. member:** It's not debatable.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Of course it's debatable; it's a motion, it's not—

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** You are misleading—

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** It's not addressing the motion.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I believe I have—

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** *Point d'ordre.*

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I believe I have the floor.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** On a point of order, Madame Mourani—

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** You are misleading the committee, and I believe we ought to hear from these witnesses.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Madame Mourani.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Chairman, we have people here today who have come from all over. We have a full delegation from Quebec. In my opinion, we should at least show some respect for them, whom we have a duty to hear from today. Please, let us hear from them!

Mr. Chairman, let us put an end to all of this. We could spend 10 minutes talking about this after hearing their testimony, if you like. But let us start hearing the witnesses. They did not come here for nothing. There are people from Abitibi who endured five hours on the road to be here. There is also a minister appearing today, so let us show some respect.

[*English*]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** *Je comprends bien.*

There's a motion moved...

Look, I thought this was going to be infinitely simpler than it was. Clearly it wasn't.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** You didn't expect a filibuster.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** No, I did not expect a filibuster.

In any event, I'm taking a vote. There's a motion on the floor.

All those in favour will please raise their hand.

**An hon. member:** Could you repeat it?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** The motion on the floor is that this item be moved to the end of the meeting.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I apologize to the witnesses. I thank you for your time and your patience.

We will now move to our witnesses, starting with the Government of Quebec,

[*Translation*]

the Minister of Public Safety Jacques Dupuis.

Mr. Dupuis, please proceed. Thank you.

● (1555)

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis (Minister of Public Safety, Government of Québec):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have no reason to apologize. I was watching the show, I didn't have to participate; it's almost like a vacation for me.

**Voices:** Ah, ah!

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** But I have to tell you that it bears a close resemblance to what happens from time to time back home. So, please do not apologize; we understand these things.

First of all, allow me to thank you for your invitation to appear. Since 2006, the federal government has shown clear signs of its intention to abolish the registration of non-restricted firearms. Indeed, three bills in pursuit of that objective have been introduced by the government, and two others have been introduced by Conservative members of Parliament. Moreover, in May of 2006, the federal government declared an amnesty, which it has renewed every year since then, thereby contributing to weaker enforcement of the Firearms Act.

The Government of Quebec has made known, on a number of occasions, that it considers the maintenance of the Canadian Firearms Registry, in its entirety, to be essential. Three motions to that effect have been passed unanimously by the National Assembly of Quebec.

In addition, my presence here today before your Committee is in keeping with the commitment I made to form a common front with the Quebec police organizations and with associations and various other groups which are demanding that the Canadian Firearms Registry be maintained in its entirety.

The Government of Quebec has been particularly proactive itself over the past few years in the area of controlling firearms. After the shooting that occurred at Dawson College, in Montreal, on September 13, 2006, Quebec passed the *Act to Protect Persons With Regard to Activities Involving Firearms*, commonly referred to as “Anastasia’s Law”, in memory of Anastasia De Sousa who died during that tragic event. The Act aims, in particular, to enhance the reporting of high-risk behaviours in connection with firearms. It also brought in a good many operational measures, including the creation, in 2008, of a joint investigation unit to combat trafficking in firearms, ammunition and explosives, whose work is coordinated by the Sûreté du Québec.

Contrary to certain claims that are being made, non-restricted firearms are not used exclusively by honest law-abiding citizens. From 2003 to 2009, these weapons were involved in nearly 2,000 violent offences in Quebec. During the same period, 45 homicides were committed in Quebec, and at least 534 people were the victims of robbery involving a rifle or shotgun. In 2009, of the 1,476 offences committed against persons, and considered to have been committed with a firearm in Quebec, 274 were perpetrated with a non-restricted firearm.

There are a number of reasons why the mandatory registration of non-restricted firearms should be maintained.

First of all, the Canadian Firearms Registry contributes to the prevention of tragedies and crimes against persons. In Quebec, between 2007 and 2009, we identified 169 spousal violence events involving shotguns or rifles, while there were 122 involving handguns.

The statistics also reveal that, of the suicides committed using a firearm, 9 out of 10 involved a non-restricted firearm. In fact, coroners have recommended that the Canadian Firearms Registry be maintained, following suicides committed with non-restricted firearms in Quebec.

When police officers respond in these situations, consulting the Canadian Firearms Registry enables them to quickly find out if the persons involved own one or more firearms, and if so, to remove them for preventive purposes.

The Registry also makes it possible to ensure compliance and monitoring of prohibition orders. Under the Criminal Code, orders prohibiting the possession of firearms may be imposed when a person is convicted of a violent crime or, for preventive purposes, when the person’s mental state poses a risk to that person or to others. In the past three years, 1,042 prohibition orders have been imposed upon owners of non-restricted firearms in Quebec.

In the event that the long gun registry were abolished, the police would have to carry out more in-depth investigations in order to determine whether persons covered by an order own a non-restricted firearm, which would involve additional costs for law enforcement.

• (1600)

The Registry also contributes to protecting persons who are mentally disturbed, and those close to them. Indeed, in Quebec, universal registration enables the Chief Firearms Officer to verify whether firearms are possessed by persons under an application for an order to confine them to an institution, or calling for a psychiatric assessment.

Under Anastasia’s Law, the Chief Firearms Officer is systematically informed of these applications. Between January 1, 2008 and March 31, 2010, 13,383 applications for orders were reported to him, and consultation of the Registry made it possible to conduct 1,193 interventions to ensure the safety of persons.

The Canadian Firearms Registry also constitutes an essential tool for police investigations and interventions. Consultation of the Registry assists in making informed decisions during police operations, in particular by making it possible to find out how many and what type of firearms belong to the individuals targeted by their interventions, and to act accordingly.

In fact, between 2006 and 2008, the Surety du Québec’s Tactical Response Unit intervened in 125 operations where a suspect was in possession of a firearm, 81 of these involving suspects armed with a non-restricted firearm—in other words, in two out of every three interventions. According to the latest statistics for 2010, the Registry is queried more than 600 times per day by police officers in Quebec.

The registration of non-restricted firearms is also an important tool for police investigations. Indeed, a query of the Registry may serve as the starting point of an investigation when a firearm is recovered at a crime scene, and also contribute to establishing the chain of possession.

Thus far, 1,507,874 non-restricted firearms have been registered by individuals in Quebec, accounting for 95% of all firearms registered in Quebec. Abolishing the registration of non-restricted firearms would cause us to lose track of these weapons.

Moreover, the importance of the traceability of firearms is recognized, under international law, by two treaties initiated by the United Nations and the Organization of American States, both of which have been signed by Canada. The purpose of these treaties is to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of, and trafficking in, firearms, particularly through “marking”, which facilitates the traceability and identification of each firearm.

Whereas at the international level, Canada has made a commitment to ensure the traceability of firearms that are subject to transnational transactions, it is paradoxical to note that, at the domestic level, Canada is pursuing a policy aiming to abolish a tool that facilitates that very traceability of firearms within the country.

The Registry is also a useful tool for decision-making by criminal prosecutors—for example, in setting the conditions for the release of an accused, so as to enhance the protection of victims and of the public at large.



In closing, Mr. Chairman, I think it is appropriate to recall the circumstances that led to the creation of the current firearms control system in Canada: the École polytechnique tragedy, and many similar events in the United States and elsewhere around the world. Abolishing the Registry would affect the international reputation of Canada, a country that is a leader in the area of firearms control.

I would also like to remind you that the Government of Quebec's position is supported by the police organizations in Quebec, by a number of organizations working in the area of public safety and security, and by the families of the victims of tragedies that have occurred in Quebec. Ms. Suzanne Laplante-Edward and Ms. Louise De Sousa, the mothers of Anne-Marie and Anastasia respectively, are, in fact, with us today.

I also wish to underscore that although the Government of Quebec is against abolishing the mandatory registration of non-restricted firearms, it in no way questions the legitimacy of activities such as hunting, when practised in compliance with the law. The registration of a firearm may take only a few minutes, and is free of charge. The amount of effort required of farmers or hunters is far outweighed by the resulting benefits for society as a whole in terms of public safety.

I have laid out before you the many reasons, with supporting statistics, which have convinced me that the cause defended by Quebec today is important and just.

• (1605)

Yet as a backdrop to this sometimes theoretical argument stands the suffering and dismay of those affected by tragedies caused by firearms—those who are still grieving over the loss of loved ones, or who daily relive tragedies that they will never be able to forget.

As I mentioned, some of those people are here with me today. You are no doubt aware that Quebec has been particularly hard hit by tragic events that have forevermore left their mark on our collective memory.

I will close on this; I promise.

From that perspective, if the registration of non-restricted firearms were to save just one life, from a moral standpoint, its maintenance would be justified. And if you have any doubts about the relevance of that assertion, I invite you to speak to Suzanne Edward and Louise De Sousa.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much. We will now hear from the Auditor General of Canada, Ms. Sheila Fraser, for 10 minutes, please.

[English]

**Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting us to discuss our previous audit work of the Canadian firearms program, notably chapter 10 of our December 2000 report and chapter 4 of our May 2006 status report.

Accompanying me today is Wendy Loschiuk, Assistant Auditor General, responsible for our audits of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

At the outset, I would like to note that we have not conducted detailed audit work on the program since 2006. We therefore are not in a position to discuss events or issues that have arisen since that time. Nor have we audited the effectiveness of the program or the social implications of the firearms policy. We therefore do not have a view on the proposed legislation.

[Translation]

Our 2002 report examined the changing costs and scope of the Canadian Firearms Program, from its creation in 1996. One of our major concerns was the lack of information that was provided to Parliament on the costs of the program and on the escalation of these costs.

At the time of our audit, the Department of Justice Canada estimated that it had spent about \$688 million, and told us that it expected this to reach \$1 billion by the end of the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

However, we found problems with the recording of the costs of the program, in that the full costs were not estimated and reported. In addition, during the preceding years, the Department had changed its costing methodology along with its financial systems and could not provide us with consistent cost information.

In our 2006 audit of the Firearms Program, we examined whether the government had made progress in recording and reporting on the full costs of delivering the Firearms Program since our 2002 audit. We also examined the management of the Canada Firearms Centre.

[English]

We found that the government had made satisfactory progress in recording and reporting the full costs of the program. At that time, we noted that the annual expenditures for the centre had decreased from \$117.3 million in the 2002-03 fiscal year to \$71 million in 2004-05. We also noted improvements in the handling of the large volumes of applications, as well as in reporting to Parliament.

In May 2006 the responsibility for the Canadian firearms program was transferred to the RCMP. As I mentioned previously, we have not conducted any detailed work on the firearms program since that time.

Mr. Chair, I thank the committee for their attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee members may have.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you very much.

We will now go to the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs, to Monsieur Alain Cossette.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Cossette (Director General, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs):** Thank you very much for your invitation. I want to thank everyone for being here today. Since Ms. Fraser took a little less time than expected, we will be very pleased to use the remaining time.

Our organization represents hunters and fishers in Quebec, and I am Executive Director of the Federation. It also represents volunteers in the field. I am accompanied today by Mr. Bernard Pelletier. Mr. Pelletier is from the Abitibi region. He is an instructor who trains trainers in Quebec to teach the Canadian Firearms Safety Course and an introductory course on gun hunting. He has held that responsibility for some 30 years in our organization.

The Federation has a presence in every region of Quebec and represents more than 200 associations. Presidents in each of the 14 regions are appointed by their local associations, which ensures that there is appropriate feedback. There is also a board of directors composed of 21 members, the chair of the board being elected at the annual general meeting.

Our mission is to ensure that hunting and fishing will continue to be practised as traditional and heritage activities for generations to come. I am thinking, in particular, of my daughters; I hope they will be able to engage in these activities the same way I did, and generate the attractive economic spinoffs that they represent.

In terms of our engagement in the area of firearms, in 1968, the provincial government agreed to introduce a pilot training program for a three-year period that would force hunters to take safety courses. We did that throughout the three years of the pilot program; the results were excellent and, since 1972, this has been mandatory in Quebec.

But our commitment goes even further. When Bill C-68, the Firearms Act, was passed—

In fact, I would just like to point out here that we have always been in favour of firearms licensing. That is the key, in our opinion. People confuse firearms licences and firearms certificates.

There are 500 volunteer instructors in the field, including 80 Aboriginals, and 16,000 new hunters are trained every year in Quebec. The number of hunters in Quebec is on the rise. Women represent 25% of those taking the courses.

I will turn it over now to Mr. Pelletier, because we are running out of time.

• (1610)

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier (Volunteer Master Instructor in Gun Safety, Security Nature, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs):** Thank you for giving us this opportunity to appear today.

I would like to quickly review the Federation's position on this issue. We are resolutely in favour of abolishing the long gun registry. In our opinion, it is of no use. It is just about as useful as changing a flat tire when you run out of gas on the highway.

On the other hand, we are in favour of maintaining the firearms licence, because everyone wanting to obtain a firearms licence is subject to an investigation, and I know that people do a thorough job in that regard. We think that is very important.

I will not talk about training, since Mr. Cossette already addressed that, but we see it as absolutely fundamental when it comes to prevention. As far as we are concerned, the Registry ultimately does not target the right people—if you will allow me to make a

comparison, it targets honest citizens, whereas criminals do not normally register their firearms.

Someone needs to explain to me, because I still do not understand—despite the sorrow people may feel with respect to the tragedies that have occurred, and believe me, I am personally very alive to that—how a firearms registry would have prevented the events that occurred at Polytechnique and Dawson. I would just remind you that the guns used at Dawson College were all registered. What prevented the incident at Dawson from being even more serious was the fact that there were well trained police officers on site, who responded quickly, based on what we are told. So, the solution lies elsewhere. The Registry will in no way improve public safety. If it is used systematically, it will, in some cases, criminalize honest citizens who will end up with a criminal record. If we are talking about a system that is bureaucratic, heavy handed, and inefficient, particularly in these times of budget cuts, one can only wonder why there would be a desire to maintain it.

I would like to give you just one example; I have no intention of inundating you with numbers or comparing research. One very interesting study was done by Ms. Samara McPhedran, Ms. Jeanine Baker and Ms. Pooja Singh, who compared Australia, Canada and New Zealand. That study found that New Zealand is the country which is achieving the best results when it comes to public safety. And, of the three countries, New Zealand is also the one with the fewest laws and with the least stringent gun control regulations. By the way, it does not have a gun registry, and a firearms licence is valid for 10 years, not for 5 years, as is the case in Canada.

In terms of suicides and homicides, it is difficult, looking at the overall numbers, to actually measure the impact of the Registry.

If you do not mind, I would like to read a quote. Do I have time, Mr. Chairman?

• (1615)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Yes, you have four minutes left.

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** This quote is from a book entitled *Guns and Violence* written by Joyce Lee Malcolm. On page 125, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service says this:

[English]

Besides what would be gained by making such a register? The Burglar or thief who arms himself with a revolver...would certainly not take out a licence, and Public security against thieves would not be increased by any such modification of Licensing Act.

[Translation]

He said that in 1888. Back then, there may still have been some people with a little common sense.

I would like to move directly now to the Federation's recommendations.

The first is obviously that the Registry be abolished. The available funds could be recovered and used to fund social programming, particularly to help victims of criminal acts and support underprivileged youth. It is a well known fact that, if adequate steps are taken, it is possible to reduce crime rates in disadvantaged areas, and not only gun crime. There is also a need to provide more financial support to organizations that help people with suicidal tendencies. We also have in mind the development of public education and awareness programs regarding the use of firearms. With respect to promoting safe storage, a study carried out by Professor Jean Caron says that what led to a decline in the suicide rate in my area, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, was the introduction of rules on the safe storage of firearms. We also want to mention the need to combat organized crime, etc.

I would just like to close by mentioning the Small Arms Survey done in 2007. The director in charge of that committee clearly stated in his report that there is no clearly established link between increased numbers of guns and increased violence. As we see it, the firearms licence does what needs to be done. Let us not confuse licensing and registering the actual tool. As we see it, it is simply a matter of common sense.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Now we'll turn to the Canadian Shooting Sports Association, to Mr. Tony Bernardo.

**Mr. Tony Bernardo (Executive Director, Canadian Shooting Sports Association):** Ms. Cabrera is going to lead, please.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Okay.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Diana Cabrera (Member, Canadian Shooting Sports Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of this committee, for having invited my colleague and me to present our members' point of view on Bill C-391 and to answer any questions you may have in this regard.

My name is Diana Cabrera, former Canadian national shooting team member and currently on the Uruguay national shooting team. I am also a recipient of the 2009 athlete of the year award for Uruguay.

I would like to say that Canadian Shooting Sports Association fully supports the proposed changes in this bill. At this point, I would like to focus on the effect of the long-gun registration on sports competitors and users.

There is no question that the long-gun registry has deterred individuals from entering the shooting sports. The inclusion of specialized air, target, and muzzle-loading firearms in the registry seems predetermined to achieve those goals. These firearms are virtually never used in crime just by the nature of their physical makeup and cost, yet they are treated to the same legislative zeal as more common firearms. In Canada, unlike Britain and the United States, exemptions have been made in law for these types of firearms, as many are not even considered to be firearms. This situation often leads to an adult or a coach having to acquire a junior's competition firearm, being responsible for its possession and for the regulatory care of these firearms while in use.

The main issue for competitive participants is the fear of imminent criminality. We may easily find ourselves afloat of uninformed law enforcement or CBSA officers. Any paperwork error may lead to temporary detention, missed flights, missed matches, and confiscation of our property. There is a primal cringe every time I am asked for my papers, knowing what could be next and fearing what could happen as officers apply personal interpretations to our confusing laws.

Law enforcement and media coverage of firearm issues have made the situation worse. We are treated to spectacular press coverage of very ordinary firearms described as an arsenal, and taking guns off the street when in fact these belong to ordinary firearm owners who had simply failed to renew some paperwork.

How do you think these things make legal firearms owners feel? Am I next? Did I somehow forget some nuance of my paperwork that will bring police to my door? Will my face wind up on the six o'clock news, vilifying me to my friends, my family, and co-workers? Will I be targeted at a traffic checkpoint by a CPIC verification?

Firearm owners live with these fears every single day—all this to justify a failed system that never prevented a crime.

I thank you. I will now pass this presentation to my colleague, Tony Bernardo.

• (1620)

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members of the standing committee.

I would like to focus on the current and future costs of the long-gun registry.

First, it's important to establish a few basic facts. In 1998 the Canada Firearms Centre polling figures showed that there were 3.3 million firearms owners in Canada. When program results indicated poor compliance with the new laws, the CFC manufactured their consent for the new legislation with their fall 2000 survey. They indicated that gun ownership in Canada had declined since 1998 to only 2.3 million gun owners.

Over 1 million Canadians became instant criminals on January 1, 2001. This was done by asking the poll question, "Does anyone in your household own a functioning firearm?", the nuance—"functioning"—not being understood.

To accept this reduced number, one must also accept, without any evidence at all, that 1 million firearms owners and 2.87 million firearms vanished in two years. This would surely have been noticed either by used firearms sales or by police turn-ins. Coincidentally, that is a sufficient volume of firearms to bury every police station in Canada to a depth of 32 feet.

In 1976 Liberal justice minister Ron Basford tabled a 19-page document in Parliament, showing 11.2 million firearms in Canada, based on import-export, manufacturing, and RCMP data.

Using the same methodology, we can make a reasonable estimate of the number of firearms presently in the country, while allowing for lost, destroyed, and misreported firearms. This calculation results in the net figure of about 13.8 million firearms in Canada in the hands of some 3.4 million persons.

Why is this important? Because the Canada firearms program currently reports a total of 7,493,033 firearms registered in the hands of 1,835,319 owners—or approximately half of that estimate.

The above numbers of 13.8 million firearms possessed by some 3.4 million are now close to the 3.3 million firearms owners reported in the Canada Firearm Centre's initial 1998 study, each now known to possess four firearms each, for some 13.2 million firearms.

The long-gun registry is by no means complete. It's been stated often that the registry is virtually useless unless all or most of the firearms in it are properly registered. But there's a major discrepancy here between what is and what should be. It seems that numerous Canadians have withdrawn their consent to be governed through a mistrust of the motives of government and authority.

The firearms registry has exceeded the \$2-billion mark, and now supporters of the registry vow it will cost a mere \$4.1 million per year to maintain it and track down and bring the other 6 million firearms and their owners into the system.

If the total cost is not accounted for, what are we maintaining? A registry of half the guns in Canada, many improperly registered, so a police officer can be assured of maybe a 50-50 chance that the registry's right.

For the registry to achieve its creators' goals, the remaining 6 million firearms and their owners must be brought into the system. But is that possible? When the registry was created, we warned of unintended consequences. Many experts warned how enforcement of repressive legislation would lead to a breakdown of trust between government, law enforcement, and the firearms community. And now, in economic hard times, untold millions of dollars are contemplated being spent on an error-ridden registry, on registering an unknown number of firearms, into the hands of an unknown number of Canadians.

Two weeks ago, the Canadian Shooting Sports Association conducted an anonymous survey of 2,018 random legal gun owners from across Canada, with the results only being published in this presentation and not before. The survey is accurate to 2.2%, 19 times out of 20. The survey dealt with the respondents' opinions of the relationship between law enforcement and firearms owners, and asked the following questions and recorded the following answers.

Question one: as a legal firearms owner, who are you more afraid of, police or criminals? The answer: police, 63.93%.

Two: since the implementation of the Firearms Act, do you still trust Canada's police? The answer: no, 74.28%.

Three: do you believe police associations represent their members' views regarding firearms issues? The answer: no, 94.49%.

Four: do you believe police associations are misrepresenting the facts regarding Canada's long-gun registry? The answer: yes, 96.73%.

• (1625)

Five: do you believe police associations should be involved in the creation of law? The answer: no, 87.87%.

Six: do you believe police target firearms owners? The answer: yes, 83.26%.

And seven: do you personally know someone unjustly charged with a firearms offence? The answer: yes, 46.29%.

These numbers are shocking. How did people, the most supportive people of the law enforcement community, return these results? How did this serious unintended consequence come about?

Well, after hearing Chief Blair yesterday on his preference for the registry over additional personnel, the survey results may take on more meaning.

The spectre of confiscation has never disappeared, and truthfully, why should it? When the Canada Firearms Act was enacted, 585,000 registered firearms were instantly put on the prohibited list. Recently the RCMP moved two types of registered firearms to the prohibited list, with no explanations to their owners, demanding their surrender or else.

In short, the firearms community has much to fear regarding confiscations. When firearms owners come into your constituency offices and complain about aggressive law enforcement, apparently they're telling the truth: 46% say they personally know someone charged.

How will the remaining millions of unregistered firearms and their owners ever get brought into the system? It's clearly going to require huge commitments of financial and human resources. When one begins with the premise that guns are bad, that legal gun owners are potential criminals, that firearms ownership is, of itself, a questionable activity, the system is doomed to fail. Experts have warned you about this repeatedly.

The long-gun registry is a hugely divisive issue, a decade-long tear in the social fabric of the Dominion. The passage of Bill C-391 is a demonstration of faith in lawful, trustworthy Canadian firearms owners, and would go a long way towards healing this gaping wound in our society.

Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you.

I will now turn to the Canadian Paediatric Society, to Dr. Leonard for 10 minutes.

**Dr. Katherine Austin Leonard (Member, Canadian Paediatric Society):** I'm Dr. Katherine Austin Leonard. I'm a pediatrician. With me is Ms. Marie Adèle Davis, executive director of the Canadian Paediatric Society. Thanks very much for asking us to testify today.

I am representing the Canadian Association for Adolescent Health as well as the Canadian Paediatric Society. These two organizations appeared in favour of the legislation that created the long-gun registry, and we're here to encourage you to maintain the long-gun registry, as it is important for the safety and well-being of Canadian children and adolescents.

It's been several years since we discussed these matters, so I want to review for you the problem of firearm injuries in Canadian youth.

Developmental qualities of childhood and adolescence make kids more vulnerable to the risks of having a firearm in the home. Impulsivity, difficulty comprehending the consequences of their actions, lack of experience, sensitivity to peer pressure, experimentation with substances—all of these problems make kids less safe around guns. We recommend to parents that guns not be kept in homes with children and teenagers. If they must be kept, they should be stored in strict concordance with the safe storage provisions of the federal regulations.

We divide firearm deaths into three categories: suicides, homicides, and accidental deaths. We call the accidental deaths "unintentional injuries". Males are disproportionately affected. In 2005, 87% of the Canadian youth firearm victims were males, and adolescent males were especially hard hit. More 15- to 19-year-old boys died from firearm injuries in 2005 than from cancer. More died from firearm injuries than from falls, drowning, fires, and unintentional poisoning combined. Of the firearm deaths in youth in Canada, suicides are the leading category, followed by homicides, and then unintentional deaths.

We argued in 1995 that registration of long guns would result in better compliance with the safe storage regulations due to an increased sense of personal responsibility on the part of the firearm owners. Also, we felt that the registry would likely result in a decline in home ownership of firearms. An Angus Reid study at the time had shown that half of Canadian gun owners had not used their gun in the previous year, and we postulated that many gun owners would reconsider home ownership if asked to register their firearm. We predicted that safer storage practices and reduced home ownership of firearms would result in reduced availability of firearms to teens and children, thus lowering their firearm death rates.

In 1995, that year, there were 105 deaths from firearms in Canadians under the age of 19. In 2005, the most recent year for which statistics are available, there were 62. Youth mortality from all types of firearm injuries—suicides, homicides, and unintentional injuries—have decreased in recent years.

In a study of firearms mortality in Canada published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Dr. Pan, from the Centre for Chronic

Disease Prevention and Control in the Public Health Agency of Canada, analyzed this decline in firearm deaths in young Canadians and found that it was statistically significant. The firearm suicide rate declined significantly. There was actually some increase in suicide by other methods, but it was not enough to compensate for the decline in firearm suicides. So the overall suicide rate in 15- to 19-year-olds declined.

An adolescent suicide attempt is often an impulsive act, and the availability of a firearm is a risk factor for successful completion of the attempt. If a lethal method is not available, the adolescent may either reconsider the attempt or use a less lethal method, increasing the likelihood of survival.

The significant decline in adolescent suicides in the last 15 years is consistent with the theory that reduced availability of firearms would prevent some adolescent suicides. The study I quoted earlier confirms that both the firearm suicide rate and the total suicide rate in adolescents declined, along with declines in firearm homicides and unintentional deaths.

I'd like to point out some important changes in the pattern of firearm homicides in Canada. In 1990 two-thirds of firearm homicides were committed with long guns. That was always the traditional pattern. However, since that time, long-gun homicide rates have declined and handgun homicide rates have increased. So now, two-thirds of firearm homicides are committed with handguns and one-third with long guns. This pattern of change in the types of homicides is also consistent with what we originally predicted would be the outcome of tightened control over long guns. The rifle and shotgun registry would not be expected to have an effect on handgun violence.

● (1630)

Pediatricians understand that violence in the home affects children even if they're not physically injured. It's very important to note that the majority of homicides in Canada are not gang or crime related. They're committed by a family member or acquaintance.

To quote from a Statistics Canada publication, *Juristat*, in "Homicide in Canada, 2008", of all the solved homicides that year, "about 40% of victims were killed by an acquaintance and 33% by a family member". The result of the violence between acquaintances and family members is devastating for children and their families. That same *Juristat* publication also noted an encouraging finding, that in 2008 there was the lowest number of female homicide victims ever, and spousal homicides had declined significantly.

Clearly there were problems with implementation of the registry, but especially considering that it was expensive to set up, all the more reason not to do away with it now. The online registry is being used extensively by police. The cost savings of abolishing the registry have been estimated to be only \$4 million a year. A *Canadian Medical Association Journal* study estimating the costs of firearm injuries in 1991 in Canada concluded that because of firearm injuries, \$6.6 billion that year was spent on services that included medical and mental health care, public services such as police investigations, and productivity losses, as well as funeral expenses.

I'd also like you to compare the cost of the registry to the cost of some other life-saving governmental initiatives. The cost of seasonal influenza immunization in Ontario alone is \$40 million a year. In 2007 the federal government budgeted \$278 million to help the provinces pay for human papillomavirus immunization programs. The Public Health Agency of Canada spent \$403 million last year to purchase H1N1 vaccine.

As physicians....

I'm concluding.

• (1635)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I'm just letting you know that you have two minutes.

**Dr. Katherine Austin Leonard:** Oh, okay. Thank you.

As physicians, we recognize that preventive and public health measures are as important as and more cost-effective than medical treatments. The long-gun registry is a preventive measure. In children and teenagers, suicides, homicides, and unintentional deaths have declined. Spousal homicides and homicides with women victims have declined.

The cost of the registry is extremely reasonable compared with the cost of other public health measures. We urge you to maintain this sensible public health and safety measure.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you very much.

Now I'm going to turn to committee members for questions.

Committee members, I'll give you a warning at both two minutes and one minute so that you can prepare to keep your comments under, in the first round, seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Proulx, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Good afternoon, ladies, gentlemen—doctor.

[Translation]

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Committee.

Mr. Chairman, I would particularly like to convey greetings to my favourite Auditor General, Ms. Fraser.

Good afternoon, Ms. Fraser. Greetings as well to Minister Dupuis.

Mr. Dupuis, you mentioned something quite quickly earlier. You are accompanied today by a number of people, and I would ask that you tell us again who they are.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Thank you for asking that question, Mr. Proulx. It is often said that politicians have big egos, but it is important never to forget humility. One must never forget one's humility and the need to remain humble. I would never have thought that my appearance before the Committee, as Minister of Public Safety for Quebec, would have been adequate had I not been accompanied by a number of people whose position is exactly the one I laid out. I mentioned earlier to the Committee that I am accompanied today by Ms. De Sousa, whose daughter, Anastasia, died tragically during the events that occurred at Dawson College. She is here today with her husband, Nelson. Ms. Suzanne Laplante-Edward is also here with her husband. She is the mother of Anne-Marie, who tragically died during the events at the École polytechnique. Both are fervent advocates for the maintenance of the Canadian Firearms Registry. Mr. Bruno Marchand, Mr. Luc Massicotte, Ms. Marie-Ève Plamondon and Ms. Julie Herman-Lemelin are also with me today. They are four members of the Quebec Suicide Prevention Association. Other individuals accompanying me today are Mr. Yves Morency, President of the Quebec Police Chiefs Association, Mr. Denis Côté, President of the Quebec Municipal Police Federation, and Mr. Yves Francoeur, President of the Montreal Police Brotherhood. The only person you see in uniform behind me is the Chief Firearms Officer for Quebec. He is responsible for operating the Registry.

I will just conclude by saying that, when the Conservative government announced its intention to abolish the Canadian Firearms Registry, I wanted to act as a focal point and ensure that these individuals would work together in opposing the abolition of the Registry. They have supported us throughout this struggle, and that is the reason why they are here today. Indeed, they will be available to answer reporters' questions. It is important that they have a chance to present their views. Thank you.

• (1640)

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Thank you, Minister, and welcome to all the people accompanying you. Welcome to our Parliament.

Minister, you are probably aware of some of the commitments that have been made by the Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada with respect to the future. I invite you to comment on that. I am thinking, in particular, of the fact that people would not be charged per se, that there would be a fine instead, that the fees would be abolished, and so on. Could you just take 30 seconds to address that?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** I have been in politics for almost as many years as you have. So, I will be very pleased to answer your question, while I also try to avoid falling into a trap.

In appearing before you today, I am aware that the minority government is seeking to have a bill passed that would abolish the Canadian Firearms Registry, something that is contrary to our position. So, my purpose in being here is to present my arguments to these members of the minority who introduced the bill, and also to meet with members of the Opposition, be they Liberals, Block members, or NDP members.

This is how I see the Liberal leader's suggestions. First of all, I am satisfied with them, for two main reasons. The first is that he asked his caucus to vote unanimously against abolition of the Canadian Firearms Registry. That is the first source of satisfaction, obviously, from our standpoint. Second, without judging the merits of the measures Mr. Ignatieff has made public, I would say that they seem satisfactory for the following reason: they are aimed at people who feel frustrated by the existence of the Canadian Firearms Registry, particularly our friends—and I say that with a great deal of affection—who are hunters. Mr. Ignatieff has brought forward suggested amendments which would mean that these individuals would no longer feel victimized by the Canadian Firearms Registry: no ongoing fees, simpler registration procedures and no criminal charges the first time someone neglects to register a gun. They are aimed specifically at these individuals.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Yes, because you are out of time.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** I am out of time? Do you think so? All right, then; I will be quiet now.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Very quickly, you referred earlier to Anastasia's Law. I am curious about this and would like you to briefly tell us what it is all about. I would also like you to tell us in what way Quebec is different from the other regions and provinces in terms of gun control.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** The extremely tragic events that occurred where guns were used have caused tremendous suffering and distress. Of course, I refer to Polytechnique, but also the incidents at Concordia and Dawson College. Following the events at Dawson College, the Premier of Quebec, Mr. Charest, was very concerned about the situation and, despite the fact that the federal government has jurisdiction over gun control, Mr. Charest wanted to do something to better protect the public in general in Quebec. So, Anastasia's Law was introduced, and we succeeded in prohibiting the possession of firearms in educational institutions across Quebec. We also made it an offence to possess a firearm in an educational institution. Furthermore, we added measures dealing with the control, acquisition and possession of a licence. I would just like to give you one example.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I am sorry, Mr. Dupuis, but the time is up.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Sorry, my apologies.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** All witnesses have an opportunity to forward additional information to us following our meetings.

Ms. Mourani is up now, for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, one and all. I would like to convey special greetings to Mr. Dupuis, who is my neighbour. We are good neighbours.

Welcome, Ms. Fraser, and everyone who is with us today.

I also convey my greetings to the entire delegation and want to express my thanks to them for coming today to tell us a little about Quebec's vision.

I would like to follow up on what my colleague, Mr. Proulx, was saying. You mentioned earlier that suggested amendments to the bill might be coming forward from the Liberal Party that would, in particular, remove the possibility of criminal charges. I must admit that I have been thinking about this for some time and I really do not understand how that could be done under the current bill.

I have asked a number of stakeholders about that. They say the bill cannot be amended, and that it must be defeated. Could you help me understand?

• (1645)

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** If you are asking me to give a legal opinion on the potential amendments proposed by Mr. Ignatieff, I have to say that I have not reviewed his first proposed amendment in terms of its constitutionality or otherwise. My only comment is—and this is a political answer that I am giving you—that it is clear to me, having heard the comments made by Mr. Bernardo, Ms. Cabrera, Mr. Pelletier and Mr. Cossette, who are in favour of abolishing the Canadian Firearms Registry, and who are hunters who practice target shooting, that they are frustrated and feel that their rights are being infringed. Their first argument is that they feel as though they are being treated like criminals, because they are required to register their guns. One fact is inescapable, however, and we cannot ignore it: unfortunately, long guns are used to commit homicides and suicides and cause injuries to innocent people. That does not mean that the people who own these guns are criminals; not at all.

When Mr. Ignatieff suggests that if an individual neglects to register a gun once, there could be some mechanism whereby... I do not want to get involved in the legal argument, but Crown prosecutors could decide—

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** So, we are not talking about the bill.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** —not to prosecute in such cases, for example.

In proposing this, Mr. Ignatieff is responding directly to their concerns and frustration, and it seems to me that these amendments could encourage these individuals to rally to the suggestion that the Canadian Firearms Registry be maintained.

However, Ms. Mourani, I do not want to argue with you about the legal meaning of the amendments; I am giving you a strictly political answer.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Thank you.

I have some questions for Mr. Cossette or Mr. Pelletier.

I was listening to your comments earlier—particularly the ones made by Mr. Pelletier. You work in the field; I believe you teach courses and that sort of thing. You are surely a hunter yourself, I imagine.

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes, you could say that.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** How could it be otherwise, right? What I would like to know is, when hunters go hunting, do they use a vehicle?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes, usually.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Is it registered?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Do some hunters travel in ATVs?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Are they registered?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** I see where you are going with this. Would you like me to answer right away?

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** No, no; wait a moment. Are their hunting dogs registered?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** That depends.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** My dog is registered, even though it is not a hunting dog. Dogs are normally registered in municipalities, but that may depend on the municipality. The hunting catch is counted, is it not?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** It depends on the type of hunt.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Fine.

There is one thing I do not understand. I will be straight with you: I, too, have been thinking about all of this. What is the problem with registering a gun? Everything is registered. Naturally, we register our vehicles, boats—everything is registered, but guns—

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** I can apply your same reasoning. We all know that everyone has to die. So, we should prohibit people from being born, and that way there would be no problem.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I do not see the connection.

• (1650)

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** It is the same kind of argument.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Let me ask you another question.

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** If the Registry served some purpose, we would support it. I remember debating this, and other issues, with my member of Parliament at the time, Pierre Brien. I said to him: give us the money that will be spent on the Registry. We wanted to do some education and prevention, but our means were very limited. At the same time, we were witnessing an appalling waste of public money.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I agree with you, especially—

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Then help us, and we will help you. I agree with you that homicides and suicides are a problem. But look at the statistics for the last few years. Overall, there has been no change in Canada.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Pelletier, I agree with you on one point: there is enormous waste, particularly for security at the G20 meeting. I consider one billion dollars to be excessive.

I would like to know one thing. You said you are against registering long guns, right? Your problem is long guns; you support abolishing the long gun registry.

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Are you in favour of abolishing the handgun registry?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** That is not our issue; I represent hunters.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Are you for or against its abolition?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** You cannot hunt with handguns in Canada. So I am not going to take a position on that.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Fine. Do you own any prohibited weapons? Is that part of your issue?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** In the courses we teach, we tell people not to discuss their firearms, so that people will not be tempted to go and steal them. So, I will not answer that question.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** All right, fine.

I will move on to Ms. Fraser, if that is all right.

Ms. Fraser, you said that you have not conducted detailed audit work on the Canadian Firearms Program since 2006. Why have you not?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** It simply was not a priority. There have been changes. In fact, the Centre itself has been dismantled and operations have been transferred to the RCMP. When we performed the last audit, in 2006, we noted satisfactory progress with respect to the recording of costs—which was a concern in 2002—and operations as well.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Will it be included in future studies? Is it included in your plans?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** That is certainly possible, but it is not included in our plans for the coming years.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Fine, thank you.

I have one final question for Mr. Dupuis. If memory serves me, we heard from Mr. Boisvenu on Tuesday. He told us that, in his opinion, the Registry is not a tool for prevention. What do you think?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Well, obviously—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Unfortunately, you have only 10 seconds left.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** How many?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Ten seconds.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** I do not agree with him.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Great. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that if certain members of the National Assembly could hear me today, they would say that I am far more disciplined here than I am there.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. Comartin, you have seven minutes. Thank you.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Fraser, perhaps I can start with you. You've left it open a little bit: have you looked at the registry at all since it's been with the RCMP?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** No, we have not.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** All right.



There's been a figure thrown out by the RCMP that it was costing at the current rate, just for the long-gun registry, about \$4.1 million. You found in your 2006 report—you did a breakdown between the licensing, the restricted weapons, handguns in particular, and the long-gun registry—some problems with the handgun registry as well as with the long-gun registry.

Have you at any time since 2006 done any analysis on that aspect of it—not on the financial costs but on the way it's being managed?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** No. The last audit work we did particularly on the firearms—the registry or the program as a whole—was the follow-up report of 2006.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Okay.

How long would it take you to do an assessment of the...in the same way as you did the initial study in 2002, was it, or 2003?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** In 2002 that audit was really related to the costs, and the disclosure of the increasing costs to Parliament. We did not do a lot of work on the actual operations of the program.

In 2006 we looked to see if the recording of the costs...and the allocation of the costs as well was an issue we looked at in 2006. We saw that had improved. We looked at the centre, because it was really a separate department that had been established, and at how the operations of that centre were operating. We found again that there had been improvement.

Generally a performance audit to look at that program would take us a year to a year and a half to do.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** All right.

If I understand your mandate, the Minister of Public Safety could ask you to do that.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** The minister could ask us, the parliamentary committee could ask us, and we would have to assess whether we had the resources to do it...and, obviously, given the other audits that were under way.

For example, in the RCMP we are doing some follow-up work on other audits that we have done in the RCMP, but it is not specifically related to the Firearms Centre.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Okay.

Just to go back, in 2006 you found that it was satisfactory, the performance with regard to cost.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** Yes. We found that they had made good progress in assessing the costs and including...

One of the problems in 2002 was that they were only reporting direct costs. A lot of the indirect costs weren't being included. They had changed that. As well, the allocation between the licensing and the registering activities had also improved.

So we were satisfied at that point. There were a couple of, I guess, more technical issues around year-end costs that we raised at the time, but generally we were satisfied with the progress that had been made.

• (1655)

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** And at this point you have no intention long term to do another assessment.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** It is not in our plans currently, no.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** How far ahead do you...?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** We plan ahead three years.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Mr. Dupuis, what is the current population of Quebec?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Quebec has a population of seven million.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** The population of Ontario is approximately 12 million.

You are the Attorneys General of the two largest provinces and you have the same views on this issue.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** The two provinces have taken the same position—you want firearms to continue to be registered.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** That is correct.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** And when you hear Mr. Cossette and Mr. Pelletier say that this makes no sense, how do you respond?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** I would say to Mr. Cossette, Mr. Pelletier, Ms. Cabrera and Mr. Bernardo that I am sad to see that they are frustrated, feel aggrieved or have the sense that they are being judged by Canadians simply because they are required to register a firearm. That is not the case.

I understand that it is a nuisance, a bother. That is what they are arguing. It is a nuisance to have to register a firearm. But we would like the process to be as little of a nuisance, as free and as easy as possible, so as not to burden people with red tape.

On the other hand, there is the issue of protecting the public and human life. You heard Dr. Leonard's comments. I was a defence lawyer for 12 years and I worked on cases involving crimes of passion where, unfortunately, in all the cases I argued before the courts, the victims had lost their lives because of injuries caused with long guns. Consequently, if we are comparing public safety to red tape, it is obvious that one clearly outweighs the other—public safety must take precedence.

Having said that, Mr. Comartin, I would just like to add that, with all due respect for hunters, these individuals register their firearms and obtain acquisition licences with the best possible intentions. Unfortunately, however, we do not live in a cold, subjective world. We have human emotions and situations arise where, unfortunately, the line between mental health and mental illness is easily crossed. That is part of life, and it is important to acknowledge that.

However, we have no desire to stigmatize these people; we like them. When they practice their sport, they do so correctly. It is unfortunate that they feel—

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** I agree with you.

[English]

Dr. Leonard, this is just a quick question. When you hear Mr. Pelletier say that it doesn't make good sense, and the statistics don't show a reduced number of deaths, what do you say to him?

**Dr. Katherine Austin Leonard:** Clearly there has been a reduction in the pediatric age group and in overall firearm deaths. When I first looked at Canadian firearm mortality statistics from 1991, there were 1,400 firearm deaths in Canada. Recently those numbers are down to around 800 firearm deaths.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you.

Now for seven minutes, Mr. Norlock.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming.

Since Ms. Fraser's on the news every night lately, let's just say that every party here appreciates the work that you and your department do.

Thank you, Minister, for coming from the province of Quebec.

Let me just say to all the witnesses that no matter what side of this issue we are on, we still have the best interests of the health and safety of Canadians...

We can throw statistics back and forth, but since I'm limited by time, I'm just going to ask this of Ms. Cabrera: have you ever had your picture taken with a firearm in your hands and perhaps a smile on your face?

**Ms. Diana Cabrera:** Yes, I have.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Do you think a person holding a firearm and pointing it in a direction, with a smile on their face, should be someone who should be looked at as feared, or demeaned, in any way?

• (1700)

**Ms. Diana Cabrera:** No.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Thank you.

Would I be out of line to suggest to you or to Mr. Bernardo that a great number of firearms owners, because the registry comes under the Criminal Code of Canada, and because there is such a...?

You know, when we're dealing with licences, we're dealing with a department of highways, we're dealing with other things. When you don't register your vehicle and you're stopped by the police, it's a provincial offence and there's a fine attached. But when you don't register your firearm, you are automatically a criminal.

Would I be out of line to suggest that's why the majority of firearms owners feel that they're being criminalized by the very fact that they own a firearm?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Yes, I think that states it pretty well. There is also, of course, the stigmatization that society has now been presenting to firearms owners based upon the unbelievable amounts of media we've been seeing since the Firearms Act came into effect, demonizing them. This is something you don't talk about with your neighbours anymore.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Thank you.

Mr. Bernardo, how many members do you have?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** We have 15,000 individual paid members coast to coast, and approximately 100-plus clubs.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Mr. Bernardo, we've been told that the registry helps track stolen guns and forces firearms owners to be more responsible in storing their firearms.

I'd like to imagine that your members are overwhelmingly responsible citizens to begin with.

What do you make of this claim?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Well, we are definitely overwhelmingly responsible citizens. That's how we got firearms licences in the first place; half the people out there who don't have them probably couldn't get them.

However, to say that the registration encourages or forces owners to be more responsible is airy-fairy, wishful thinking. You can't take a piece of paper, put it beside a firearm inside the closed doors of one's own domicile, and expect that to have any kind of an effect.

In terms of tracing lost or stolen firearms, it is a federal offence right now to not report a lost or stolen firearm. You must do that whether the gun is registered or not. Very few of those guns traced actually make it back to their owners in spite of the fact that we've had judges issue court orders repeatedly to police services to return the firearms, and they aren't returned.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Mr. Bernardo, we've also heard conflicting reports that the information on the registry database is secure, and then other witnesses say it's not secure. We've been told it's safe from access by the criminal element.

What do you make of that claim?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Again, wishful thinking. I have a document here in my hand, and it's a portion of an interview done with the webmaster for the Canada Firearms Centre. His name is John Hicks. He says that a 13-year-old with an Internet connection and half an hour can get into the national firearms database; it's that simple.

Now that it's been moved under CPIC, well, that's great, but I also have two RCMP access to information requests showing 306 breaches of CPIC between the years 1995 and 2003. If you can get into CPIC, you can get into the gun registry. That's 306 breaches, according to the RCMP. Secure? No, absolutely not. And worse, the information that you can get out of that computer could get somebody killed. There are people out there, bad people, who will kill you for your guns.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Thank you.

We've been repeatedly told here, and told again today, that the money that's already been spent to set up the registry should be considered, and that it's foolish to dismantle it now.

Can you comment on that?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Half of the guns aren't in the registry; they're only halfway there. The second half will be harder to get than the first half. If you want the second half—and if you're going to make this thing work, I think that has to happen—be prepared to spend more than the \$2 billion you spent the first time, because people won't come forward anymore.

In my office we get calls two or three times a week from people: “I was going through Grandad's stuff. I found this old World War I handgun. What do I do with it?” We tell them to take it to the police department. Then when they ask us, “Will they register it?”, and we tell them, no, they'll destroy it, they're not allowed to register it, we'll hear them say, “Oh. Okay. Thanks.”

Click.

• (1705)

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Following up on that, in your experience, how are firearms owners treated in the courts, or by the courts?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Thank you for asking that question.

A firearms owner is somebody who has never been in trouble with the law before; otherwise they wouldn't have a firearms licence. But when they get into court, they are put through the entire court system like they're John Dillinger. They have a crown attorney pounding on the opposite table, saying, “We want two years of jail time”, or three years, or four years.

This is someone who has never even been in a courtroom before. They are terrified. They spend \$8,000 or \$9,000 out of their pocket to get acquitted on something like an unsafe storage charge.

They're also given a firearms prohibition immediately. We've even had firearms prohibitions given out to our members for things that were totally unrelated to guns. We had a guy get a dangerous driving conviction and they gave him a firearms prohibition for ten years, which is the equivalent of a lifetime prohibition.

This stuff is happening in courtrooms right throughout Canada. We started out, at the beginning of the Firearms Act, with no such thing in Canada as a firearms lawyer. There are now six of them working full time.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you.

Now we'll go to Madam Jennings for five minutes, starting the second round.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I would like to share two minutes of my time with Mr....with Borys.

I'm not going to try to pronounce your last name.

[Translation]

I would like to begin by thanking all the witnesses for being here today. I particularly want to convey my greetings to Ms. Suzanne Laplante-Edward and Ms. De Sousa. For me, you are both heroines; you are models of excellence, determination, devotion and commitment to society, acting in the best interests of our young women and our youth in general. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you have done and continue to do as passionate advocates for the maintenance of our Firearms Registry in its entirety.

Ms. Cabrera, you were asked whether you have a picture showing you holding a firearm. You said that you do. I have one as well. It is posted on the wall of my office on Parliament Hill, and I am very proud of it. Although I know how to handle certain firearms, both

long guns and handguns, I am a fervent advocate for the maintenance of the Canadian Firearms Registry in its entirety, and I will not abandon the fight.

Mr. Dupuis, I would like to thank you for being here. I have some questions for you. Because I probably only have about two minutes left, I will be brief. If you do not have time to answer, you can always forward your answers in writing through the Chair. Do you think the Conservative plan to abolish the Canadian Firearms Registry is consistent with the Conservatives' law and order agenda?

Also, they would like the provinces to build more prisons and for there to be more guns out there. That is the American style of justice, is it not? Has that model failed? How do you explain the fact that Conservatives from Quebec are voting against the Quebec consensus? In the final analysis, the Conservatives are endangering the lives of Canadians and Quebecers to please the gun lobby. Is that not the only conclusion that can be drawn from their determination to abolish the Canadian Firearms Registry?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chairman?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thirty seconds.

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Mr. Comartin is telling me to say yes.

I just want to say that it is clear to me that the desire to abolish the Canadian Firearms Registry—which prevents crimes and attacks on innocent victims using long guns—does not jibe with the Conservative view, which supports what could be called—for the purposes of our discussion—a law and order agenda. There is a dichotomy between those two positions. That is about all I can say without getting myself in deeper.

• (1710)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Mr. Wrzesnewskij, for two minutes.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Bernardo, are you familiar with the website “canadiangun-nutz.com”?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Yes.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij:** And do you make postings onto the website canadiangunnutz.com?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Infrequently.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij:** I'd like to know if you made this posting: We have done significantly better than our brethren in Australia and Great Britain; no wonder Wayne LaPierre, executive vice-president of the NRA—that's the American lobby for long guns—told me that with legitimate administration, you Canadians are the best guerrilla fighters we've ever seen; he wasn't kidding.

Is that—

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Now, that's coming as quite a high compliment.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij:** I'm just curious; is that your posting?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** So do you feel like a guerrilla fighter, fighting for your freedom?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you.

That actually corresponds with... Have you acted as a spokesperson for the NRA?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** No, sir.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Well, you're on an infomercial of the NRA's, and you're quoted as stating that if you view this problem as strictly a Canadian problem, you have your head in the sand; you've got to get behind your organizations that are defending your freedom; without the NRA, you'd be sunk.

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I'm aware that this might be hard for you to understand, but I was acting as an advocate for Canadians.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Yes, but this is an infomercial for the NRA.

Did you receive any sorts of gifts from the NRA?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** No.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Finally, you supported the private member's bill, Bill C-301, that would have relaxed controls on prohibiting restrictive weapons—

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Yes.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** —including semi-automatic tactical and some military assault weapons. Do you still support such a move?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I would support any move that provided for public safety for Canadians without unduly restricting people who are legitimate.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I'm sorry, that's the time.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** This is my last question.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** That's the time—

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Would you support that move that would remove semi-automatic tactical and military assault weapons?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I believe I stated that I would support any move that didn't compromise safety.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** *Monsieur Petit, pour cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon everyone.

Good afternoon, Mr. Dupuis.

Good afternoon, Ms. Fraser. You may be looking into our affairs at some point. We will be gentle with you, because you never know.

Mr. Cossette, you are the Executive Director of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs. How many members are there in your organization?

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** We represent 200 associations and 125,000 members overall. I want to point out that our organization has always been in favour of the safe storage of firearms. It is something that we have always advocated, and continue to advocate. That is the key to preventing suicides, as this lady was saying earlier.

I would like to say something about red tape being a nuisance. Having a criminal record because of a technical error is not a nuisance, in my opinion. It may be for you, but not for me. There has been some demagoguery with respect to this issue, particularly in terms of the difference between a firearms licence... When someone applies for the first time, an investigation is made. People are required to take courses and checks are made. When the licence is renewed, further inquiries are made. That is the way it should be.

The red tape surrounding the registration certificate is exactly that. There is one thing that we consider to be quite unfortunate. In Quebec and Canada, budget cuts are currently being made. We have even asked to work in cooperation with the government. The money from increased fees for hunting and fishing licences should be reinvested in the community, because there is no money. We are proud of that proposal. If the money can help certain groups and young people from underprivileged backgrounds... We need to find the money for that, because that is how we will avoid problems later on. I am glad you asked me that question.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** I am going to have to stop you there, because I have very little time. I was trying to catch your attention!

Mr. Cossette, does your association have a presence all across the province of Quebec—in other words in all the ridings of Quebec?

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Yes, we cover the entire province of Quebec. Certain years, there are associations in very remote regions. They start up, then disappear and come back again three years later. We are all over—in the Magdalen Islands, the Matagami region, Estrie and Montréregie, the North Shore and the Lower North Shore, Natashquan... Everywhere.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** So, you cover all those areas.

You may have heard Mr. Bernardo, I believe, say earlier that, before a firearms acquisition licence is granted, there is an investigation and the applicant must not have committed a criminal offence or have been convicted of one. Is that correct?

• (1715)

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Right from the outset, when the legislation was first under consideration, we said that the firearms licence was a necessity. An investigation is required for every individual who wants to acquire a firearm or who will be using one. You have to have a licence in order to buy bullets. All of that is necessary.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Perhaps I could make a comparison. A car thief has the right to register an automobile; no one asks him questions. If he goes to the motor vehicle registration office, he will be given a licence even if he has a criminal record. In the case of firearms, could someone who has committed a criminal offence be given a licence?

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Generally speaking, that should not be possible, but I am not that familiar with the justice system; I am not a lawyer by training.

I would just like to add one thing. There are lots of different gadgets and chemicals out there. Are we going to register everything? What about propane gas cylinders? Do you know of anything that poses more of a hazard to a family? They can be used in all kinds of ways. At some point, you have to take responsibility for the choices that you make. Firearms licensing is very important.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** How much time do I have left? One minute? Thank you.

Could you tell us about your members? Can you tell us whether they live in rural or urban areas, or whether they are farmers and so on?

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Our association includes all different categories of members—doctors, people who like the outdoors, unemployed, etc.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Does it also include police officers?

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Yes, and some of them teach courses.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** You said a little earlier that a major focus for you is education. I think it is important to educate people.

Mr. Pelletier, for how long have you been teaching these courses? You seem to have done a lot of teaching.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** You have 10 seconds left.

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** I have been teaching these courses since 1979. Our ultimate goal is to develop healthy management in the family setting and in areas where firearms are stored.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Are you talking about education?

**Mr. Bernard Pelletier:** Yes, and we are not frustrated, contrary to what was stated earlier.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you very much.

Ms. Mourani, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Chairman, I would first like to say to Mr. Cossette and Mr. Pelletier that we like hunters and fishers. You must not believe—

**Mr. Alain Cossette:** Good, then support our activities!

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** The Bloc Québécois has a number of hunters among its members. Personally, I like fishing. As I see it, however, the debate is not at that level.

My questions are addressed to Mr. Bernardo. Mr. Bernardo, you are part of a firearms advisory committee established by the former Minister of Public Safety, Mr. Day, if I am not mistaken.

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** That's correct.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** That committee includes Mr. Torino, Mr. Gary Mauser—who seems to be an expert in that area who is often quoted—yourself, Mr. Cossette, Ms. Linda Thorn, if I am not mistaken, and Mr. Farrant, whom we saw yesterday. A lot of people sit on that committee.

Is it true that it is composed solely of individuals who support this bill and who, in a way, support the deregulation of firearms?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I cannot tell you what the consensus of the committee is in that regard, ma'am, because we report to a cabinet minister. You would have to ask him what the consensus on that is. We have not met recently.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** When was your last report? You say that you report to a minister. Do you do that in writing and submit the report to the minister?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I'm sorry, but I am bound under a confidentiality agreement to the minister. You would have to ask him that question.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** As I understand it, there may be a report.

Mr. Bernardo, please tell me if what I say is incorrect. The day after the tragedy at Dawson College, the Canadian Press quoted you. You apparently said that you have a Beretta CX4 Storm. Is that correct?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Continue, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** So, I am not mistaken; you do actually own a Beretta, do you not?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** What's the question?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I am asking you whether you own a Beretta CX4 Storm. Do you own that gun, yes or no?

• (1720)

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I don't remember if I did say that or not.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** No: do you have a Beretta Cx4 Storm?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Do I have that gun?

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Yes.

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I'm sorry, ma'am, but—

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** You don't have it?

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** —that isn't any of your business, okay? Firearms information could get my family killed. I will not do it in a public forum. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** That is what you told the Canadian Press. It says that you own a Beretta CX4 Storm.

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** I may have had one at that time, yes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** You said, and I quote: “To be perfectly honest it's a lot of fun to shoot. The little pistol calibre it comes in gives virtually no recoil. It's very accurate. The firearm is just one of those firearms that's just a lot of fun to spend a day at the range with.”

Do you remember saying that?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Well, let me ask you, ma'am, why else would anybody spend \$1,200 to buy one? That's what it's for. It's a target firearm. People would spend \$1,200 so they could go to a range and enjoy the pleasure of shooting it. That's what it's for.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** What do you think of the fact that this firearm, in particular, was used during the shootings at Dawson College? Should it be regulated? Do you think there is a need to register it? Are you in favour of registering handguns? Is it only long guns that pose a problem for you?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** Ma'am, which question are you asking me? You asked me three questions there.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** All right; I will be more specific. Are you for or against the registration of handguns?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Bernardo:** The registration of handguns is a different thing from the registration of long guns. Handguns have been registered since 1934. The registrations were done by police officers. When a handgun is registered now, it is a verified firearm, which means the information that's entered into the system is way more accurate—way more accurate—than the information that would be entered initially about a potential long gun.

Answering that question with a simple yes or no is not really doing anybody, including you, a service.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** We'll have to leave it there, I'm sorry.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Well, it is more—

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** I'm sorry, we'll have to leave it there. That's five minutes.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Five minutes?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** The five minutes is completed.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Oh, okay. *Merci.*

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Now it's Mr. Rathgeber, I understand, for five.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** I'll be splitting my time with Mrs. Glover, Mr. Vice-Chair.

Minister Dupuis, I have a question for you. I was quite intrigued by one of the answers you gave to Mr. Proulx, when you indicated that the assertion or the compromise, alleged compromise, by Mr. Ignatieff regarding a proposed amendment to this bill would earn favour from the Province of Quebec.

Did I understand that correctly?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** No, I said that, because I was addressing the Opposition parties, because we are appearing before the Standing Committee and because I had heard the comments made by my hunter friends, I noted that the latter feel as though their rights have been infringed and that they are being targeted—that may not be the correct term—by this requirement to register their firearms. I also note that all the amendments suggested by Mr. Ignatieff would have the effect of reassuring our hunter friends, if the Registry retains its current status.

[English]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** This is a very simple question, and I just need a yes or no: would you support registration without criminalization, which is what I understand Mr. Ignatieff was talking about?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** As long as the registration of long guns continues to be mandatory and that information is contained in that Registry, I would agree with that.

[English]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Thank you.

I'm having trouble with that answer, because if there's any province that jealously protects its constitutional rights, it's yours. And you no doubt are aware that your province is suing the federal government over our legislation to provide a single national securities regulator.

So would you not agree with me that Quebec would disagree with that proposed amendment in that it would violate section 92 of the Constitution Act?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Yes, Mr. Proulx.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** On a point of order, I'm being misquoted, because there was never a mention of an amendment to this particular bill.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** I agree with that. I withdraw that. It was not an amendment; it was an idea put forward by your leader.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Mr. Rathgeber, I came here to present the Government of Quebec's position on this issue. Like the members of the coalition who are with me today, my comments are addressed to the Conservative government. I am asking the Conservative government to maintain the Canadian Firearms Registry and to continue to require that long guns be registered. That is the only reason I am here today. I am not here to quarrel about the Constitution.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Thank you.

Ms. Glover has a question.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to express my disappointment that there's been so much misleading information, so I'm going to cite numbers from our *Juristat* from 2008 with regard to homicides. There is a reason I want to do that.

Much like our chair said recently, that there were three or four people quoted during a specific debate, and then he went back to two... I don't like misinformation. I'm a police officer, and I like facts. The facts are these. In terms of homicide victims in 2001, which is when the gun registry came into place, the total number was 553, according to our *Juristat*. Now, as I look at the list in the *Juristat*, never, ever did it go underneath that number except once, in 2003. In 2008 we were at 611 homicides.

There have been some people who've come here and told us that homicides have significantly gone down, and the long-gun registry is being thanked for that. But I am a Métis woman, and I'm here to say that we have 580 missing and murdered aboriginal women. We have thousands of other missing women and missing children and missing men across this country. If tomorrow we found them and they were all victims of long-gun murders, all of these statistics wouldn't matter. Statistics are only that: they really don't show a clear picture. I would want you to take that into consideration, all of you, when we start to evaluate this, because they are only a small snapshot of the real picture, which is an immense picture.

I've been a police officer for 18 and a half years, and I tell you, there are thousands of police officers who agree with me. I have a Montreal police officer who is begging me to make sure this gets through. She believes the long-gun registry caused the death of another police officer because it is so inaccurate and so unreliable.

I will do my best, as my colleague across the floor has done, to protect Canadians. I will support this legislation and I will support making sure that we become a safer community and that we do everything we can to protect not only women but all Canadians.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** There's not time for a question there, I guess.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I don't have to ask a question, Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** For the remaining three minutes, Mr. Kania.

**Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.):** Mr. Dupuis, Chief William Blair is president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. He has said, referring to this issue, that this is about public safety: "The registry has made Canada a safer country. The registry has saved lives. We lose it at our peril."

Do you agree with that quote?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Okay.

Now, police officers who have testified have given examples of how it's very helpful. It's helpful in terms of the enforcement of court

orders, obviously, so that when police officers go into a residence they know how many guns to look for. They know that's a minimum that they should keep looking for. In terms of domestic violence, it's the same situation; they know, at a minimum, how many guns to look for and to not stop looking until they have found that. For suicide it's the same idea, to prevent people who are at risk of suicide. There's also helping with the elimination or the reduction of possession of stolen firearms and smuggled firearms, and accountability for gun owners, because obviously, if they know that the gun is registered, they're responsible for that if it goes into other persons' hands. As well, for police investigations, as we were told even yesterday, it could cost a couple of million dollars for a police investigation; if, as part of that, they have to find out who owned the gun or where it came from, that adds to the cost.

You would agree that the registry helps all of that in terms of police officers, correct?

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Yes.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** I'm going to read a quote. The sponsor of the bill, Ms. Hoepfner, indicated on September 28, 2009, when she was introducing it, "That is why if I believed that the long gun registry would help reduce crime or make our streets even a little bit safer, I would be the first one to stand up and support it."

Mr. Dupuis, you would agree with me that obviously the gun registry helps make our streets a little bit safer, at a minimum, and I assume you would agree with me that, based on this, she should be seeking to withdraw her bill.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jacques Dupuis:** Mr. Kania, it will be very easy to answer that question.

Will you allow me to respond, Mr. Chairman?

I am glad that Mr. Kania talked about the safety of police officers, because we do not talk about it often enough. I was listening to Ms. Glover earlier, when she said that she was a police officer. There is no doubt in my mind that if Ms. Glover had to answer a call at a private home, it would be very useful, for her own protection—because police officers do get killed when answering calls—for her to know whether there was a firearm or not in the house she was about to enter. That is the purpose of the Registry.

● (1730)

[English]

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Well, we're out of time...

Is it a real point of order or is it a point of debate? If it's a point of debate, we're out of time.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** If you're going to say that we're out of time and bang the gavel, go ahead.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** Okay.

The only comment I'll make is that—

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** I thought it was a point of order.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** No, no, I'm thanking the witnesses—

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** All right, then.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland):** —as is traditionally done.

I want to thank the witnesses for their time and for their appearance here today.

On the matter that the committee was dealing with earlier, I had a conversation with Mr. MacKenzie, and we'll hold that discussion over until Tuesday.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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