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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, meeting number 15. We are today focusing on Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry).

Our first witness is the mover of Bill C-391, Ms. Candice Hooppner, the MP for Portage—Lisgar.

We agreed on April 28—I'll read from the motion of Mr. Holland. He makes the comments, "...just so it's clear that she's getting special consideration..."—referring to Ms. Hooppner—"that the mover of the bill, Mrs. Hooppner, be granted 30 minutes at the beginning to present her private member's bill, and that she be included in the list of 15 witnesses afforded to the Conservative Party."

That's taking away one witness from the Conservative Party and giving Ms. Hooppner 30 minutes. That's the motion. We had a recorded vote on that. It was in public.

Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you.

Mr. Chair, to be very clear, when we said a presentation, it would be that there would be a presentation such as given by any other witness. This would mean we would have a period of time for questions. On that basis, if it wasn't clear before, I'll give you a motion that the witness before us now, the mover of the motion, be granted 10 minutes, and that each party have a round of five questions.

Some hon. members: Five minutes.

Mr. Mark Holland: Five minutes, excuse me.

The Chair: That motion is already out of order, because we made preparations—

Mr. Mark Holland: I challenge the chair.

The Chair: —for this meeting. It says that she's getting special consideration.

Mr. Mark Holland: I challenge the chair.

The Chair: I'm explaining my ruling to you. We already said clearly that she was going to get special consideration. It's what your motion—

Mr. Mark Holland: A motion to challenge the chair is non-debatable and it has to be voted on. I had the floor and I'm challenging the chair.

The Chair: I don't accept that.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Chair, you have to. I had the floor. I spoke. I'm challenging a decision of the chair. You made a ruling.

The Chair: I'm going to pause for a moment here.

This motion is completely out of order.

Mr. Mark Holland: I challenge the chair.

The Chair: It was your motion to begin with.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Chair, you made a ruling.

The Chair: You didn't give us 48 hours' notice. You have to do that.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Chair, it's because it's a matter before us immediately.

Mr. Chair, you've taken a very twisted interpretation, in my opinion; therefore, I'm challenging the chair.

The Chair: How can you twist the—

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Chair, I'm challenging the chair. It's a non-debatable motion. You've made a decision. I'm challenging it. That is in order.

The Chair: I don't accept this.

Mr. Mark Holland: You cannot ignore a challenge to the chair, Mr. Chairman. Ask the clerk if you can ignore a challenge to the chair. You've made a decision; you made a ruling. I'm challenging it.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend this meeting for a moment to consider this.

• (1525)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1540)

The Chair: I think we're ready to reconvene now. I think the parties have worked out a bit of a compromise agreement.

It's my duty as chair to uphold things the committee has agreed upon. I think the misunderstanding has been worked out.

Can we forgo the challenge to the chair and simply move to have Ms. Hooppner present for approximately 10 minutes? Then we've agreed to four minutes per party for questions and comments. Is that okay with everybody?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Let's move ahead immediately so we don't waste any more time.

Ms. Hoepfner, please go ahead.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did prepare, as I was requested, a 30-minute presentation. I will do my utmost to shorten it, but I would ask your indulgence. It's very short notice for me to have to shorten this. I will do my very best.

First of all, I want to thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to present my private member's Bill C-391, which would end the requirements for individuals and businesses to register their long guns.

Before I begin, for the record, I would like to indicate my deep disappointment that I was not allotted the same amount of time at this committee that is given to every other member of Parliament who is presenting a private member's bill. It's normal practice for members of Parliament to be given one full hour to present and introduce their private members' bills. In my case, the opposition members of this committee fought hard to win the ability to limit my time. It's highly unusual.

I would suggest that if the tables were turned and a Liberal, Bloc, or NDP woman had introduced a private member's bill that had garnered the attention of the nation, as this one has done, and if she were silenced by Conservatives the way I have been silenced by the opposition, the outcry would be deafening.

In the short time I have, I want to tell you why I introduced this bill, what it does, and why it merits your support.

Mr. Chair, although I am not a gun owner, I grew up in a loving and peaceful home where there were long guns present. I had no reason to fear guns or view them as bad. I respected their potential to cause a dangerous situation, just as I respected and knew that the sharpness of a knife, the heat from an oven, or the speed of a car could cause harm and even death if not respected and treated accordingly. Some in this room may find that hard to believe. Doesn't everyone fear guns? Aren't all guns dangerous and to be feared? I don't believe so, Mr. Chair, and I have no doubt that is because I grew up in rural Canada. In rural Canada we view firearms very, very differently than some would in urban Canada.

I will tell you I am very much afraid of guns if they are in the wrong hands. If I were to walk on to any farmyard in my riding and the farmer walked out of his barn holding a rifle in each hand, I would not be the least bit worried or concerned. However, if I were walking home today to my condo in the city of Ottawa and I saw someone walking around waving a gun, I would be very, very concerned. The difference is who is in possession of the firearm.

What makes these situations very different—one frightening, the other commonplace—is, as I said, who is in possession. The same can hold true for knives, bats, chains, ropes, and any other object we can name that has a legitimate function but can also serve as a weapon. I believe that firearms hold a legitimate function for millions of Canadians, and in those instances they are not used as weapons to hurt people.

Statistically, individuals who have a licence to use and/or possess a firearm are actually 50% less likely to commit a crime with a gun than individuals without a licence. If we look around this table, and let's say by a show of hands we would indicate who has a licence to own a firearm and who doesn't, those who raise their hand and have a licence are actually 50% less likely to commit a gun crime than those who don't.

The point is that legally licensed long-gun owners in Canada are by and large law-abiding individuals who are not committing crimes.

I introduced this bill because I don't believe firearms are inherently bad. I believe people can be, and in the wrong hands firearms do become weapons. We need to focus on the person, not the firearm. Licensing is the place where real gun control happens. I believe it's vital because it is the only way to help ensure that guns don't get into the wrong hands. That's why my bill does not touch licensing at all.

However, the long-gun registry does not provide any such function. The long-gun registry is not gun control. Clearly the sole result of a long-gun registry has been that it has created an inventory list of long guns in Canada. It only works and it is only complete if all firearms owners comply with it. Of course, we know that hasn't happened, and it never will, because criminals don't register their guns.

Even as a partial inventory list, its only functional purpose has been reduced to being a partial investigative tool. Even as a partial investigative tool, police officers know they cannot rely on the information provided in the long-gun registry portion of the data. Police will all agree, whether they support the long-gun registry or not, that much of the data is inaccurate and out of date. Because of that, and because of their police training, their tactics when approaching a potentially dangerous situation are not dependent on what the long-gun registry may tell them.

• (1545)

The long-gun registry at best is a minimal and unreliable investigative tool for some police, and at worst it's an expensive and faulty system that does absolutely nothing to make sure that guns do not get into the wrong hands. It's also an extra burden on police who have to enforce compliance with it. The long-gun registry focuses on the long gun, rather than the person, and that's why I believe it needs to end.

There's no logical process in the government approving a person to own a long gun by allowing them to have a licence and then forcing them to report to the government each long gun they own. I would understand and accept the argument that maybe we need a database of those who are prohibited from owning a gun; that would make sense to me. Maybe we should be tracking individuals who are dangerous and should never own a firearm. Interestingly enough, we don't do that. Instead, under this current system, we follow, track, and many times even harass Canadian citizens who are not criminals. They don't have a record, they've gone through every police background check, and they are not contributing to gun crime, yet we spend precious police time and resources making sure they have registered each long gun they own.

We've seen recent examples of this in the city of Toronto. The Toronto Police Service spent hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of police hours poring over lists of those who have a licence to own a firearm, but were past a deadline on the registry, or vice versa. Then more police hours were spent going to each individual's home to tell them that their paperwork was not compliant and that they needed to surrender their firearms. In the end, not one arrest was made, not one gang member was discovered, not one drug dealer was found, and not even an outstanding warrant for a traffic violation was served. After hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours of police work, the only people found were law-abiding gun owners who didn't have all of their paperwork in order. None of these people were selling drugs, they weren't involved in gang activities, they were not contributing to gun crime, and yet they were targeted by a massive, labour-intensive police hunt.

I want to say that I believe the Toronto Police Service had the very best intentions in mind when it undertook this investigation. But I think if we look at the larger picture, their time could have been much better spent investigating and tracking down real criminals and real gang activity in the city of Toronto. This illustrates the fatal flaw of the long-gun registry and the primary reason why I believe it needs to end: it forces law enforcement to focus on the wrong people when trying to fight crime.

I know the defenders of the long-gun registry say that police do use the registry when they go on a call. They say the police use it to check to see if there might be a firearm at a location they are at, if they are there for a domestic dispute or another type of call. I want to address this on a couple of levels.

First of all, I'll repeat that my bill would not end licensing; therefore, police will still be able to check and see who may possess a firearm, based on their having a licence. I already know some are saying, yes, but the police won't be able to see exactly how many firearms are at a specific location. I would argue, and have already pointed out, the fact is that the police currently know that the registry, especially regarding gun-specific information, is not reliable. Even defenders of the registry admit it is a mess and needs massive work. But there's another reason that police are, and should be, very cautious when it comes to checking the CFRO, and I'm going to give you one example.

Did you know that people who are licensed to own a firearm can lend their firearms to other individuals who have a licence to own a firearm? That means that if I am licensed to own a firearm and the chair is licensed to own firearms, but he actually has three registered firearms, he can legally lend those firearms to me. So the police would pull up my name up in the registry and it would tell them that I was in possession of zero firearms, whereas in fact I was legally in possession of three. That's all completely legal, according to the system as it is set up now. That's one reason the licensing portion is so important and why police, I believe, should be—and I believe they are—looking at who has the potential to own or be in possession of a firearm.

I also want to bring up another point. There's also the argument that police are checking the long-gun registry 10,000 times a day.

• (1550)

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: On that, there are the facts and there is the truth, and sometimes the facts don't always make up the truth. The fact is there are almost 10,000 hits or checks on the CFRO per day. The truth is that many of the police agencies in Canada have set up CPIC so that it automatically hits the long-gun registry, but they are not purposely checking the registry. We know a hit is also generated if somebody does any type of administrative work. Any type of activity contributes to the 10,000 hits a day. It's a misleading argument. It doesn't accurately tell us when police are checking the registry.

There are also some defenders who say it will only cost \$4 million to keep the registry. I want to remind you of a couple of facts.

There are currently 6.8 million long guns legally registered. We know there are estimates of up to 16 million long guns in Canada. There are still a lot of long guns that would have to be registered if this registry remains intact.

You can add to that the cost of making the data current and correcting the data and the police hours that will be spent enforcing its compliance. We were suspicious about 15 years ago when the Liberals told us not to worry and that it wouldn't cost very much. I would say we have to be very suspicious of a \$4 million cost when we take into account updating and making the registry completely current.

In closing, I want to address the very real and valid issue of the emotional connection there is for some to the long-gun registry. I'm not talking about a political attachment. I'm talking about individuals who have lost loved ones to gun crime. I'm talking about individuals who don't care about the politics of this issue. All they care about is that a loved one has been killed or murdered because somebody took a gun and shot that person. I think we have to be very aware of that. We have to know this registry was created with some of these people and their loved ones in mind. I think it's something that has to be taken into account.

I would say to these people that the long-gun registry is not gun control. The man who went into the Polytechnique had a licence to own a gun. He should never have had a licence. We need to toughen up licensing. We need to do something to make sure that people who are dangerous, violent, and full of hate don't get guns. The long-gun registry does nothing to address that issue. The long-gun registry only makes an inventory list.

I would ask that we keep those facts in mind. As members of Parliament, we should try to look past the emotional attachment we might have and look at the facts of the long-gun registry and what it has not been able to accomplish.

I have a lot more I'd like to say, but I will close with that.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that.

On behalf of the committee, I apologize that we changed our minds here this afternoon, after passing the motion allowing for 30 minutes, but I have no control over that.

We'll immediately go to the Liberal Party for four minutes, please.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Hoepfner.

I'm sure you appreciate that our time is very short. I have a number of questions. I wonder if you could address them succinctly.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has come out and said the registry is vital to their jobs and it's vital to community safety. They've taken a very strong position. They represent 431 active members. How many individuals of the 431 support your bill?

• (1555)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'm not the political leader of an association. I would think it would actually be a very good question to ask the head of the association. I would think that if you're a political leader of an association, you should poll your members to find out.

I will tell you this. Police are completely divided on the issue.

Mr. Holland, one of the facts that I think is very important to look at is how many times police check the long-gun registry when it comes to serial and specific certificate information, which would be where they would investigate—

Mr. Mark Holland: Sorry, I hate to interrupt.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: It's 2.8%. They're using it as an investigative tool less than 3% of the time.

Mr. Mark Holland: If I could, we have a system of representational democracy. You represent a riding. We asked you to speak on behalf of your riding.

Police chiefs are speaking on behalf of the members they represent. Three of 431 supported your bill, that we know of. All the rest are supporting the registry. It represents less than 1% of chiefs of police supporting your bill.

The Canadian Police Association represents 150 associations across the country. Again, we have a system of representative democracy. Of those 150 associations, how many support your bill?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Holland, this is a much bigger issue than what you're trying to bring it down to.

Mr. Mark Holland: With respect, it's a simple question.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Sorry, can I finish?

Mr. Mark Holland: These are the people who are charged with the safety of our communities. How many agree with you?

The Chair: Mr. Holland, please, I think you need to show a little respect to our witness. You asked a question. You don't like what she's saying, but you have to respect that she gets the opportunity to answer, please.

Mr. Mark Holland: Absolutely, Mr. Chair. I'm just looking for an answer to my question.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Holland, my job was not to poll every single police association or every single member. My job was to find out, do police overwhelmingly support this, and why, or do police overwhelmingly not support it.

I can tell you, the information that I have received has been by hundreds and hundreds of e-mails and by police approaching me. I don't know how many e-mails you've received from police, saying, "Good job, Mr. Holland, we like what you're doing." I can tell you I've received thousands.

Have I polled police officers? No, that's not my job. But when I look at this issue and the broad spectrum of how police view this issue, and how farmers, hunters, women, our constituents, and taxpayers view this issue, I am very confident in my position.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay, this is the problem I have. You have no empirical evidence, so I'm just going to go on what we do know.

We do know that there has only been one police association of 150 members, that's 0.06%, who say they support your bill, and that one association is now saying it might be changing its mind.

So we have the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, with 99% of their membership; the Canadian association representing police across the country, with 99% of their membership; the Canadian Association of Police Boards; the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP; medical organizations such as the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and l'Institut national de santé publique du Québec; victims groups such as the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime; the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime; the student victims at Dawson College and l'École Polytechnique; mothers such as Suzanne Laplante-Edward, whose daughter was one of the 14 women who died at l'École Polytechnique....

I'll go on. There are many other victims' groups and women's groups that deal first-hand with the effects of domestic violence, including YWCA Canada and le Regroupement des maisons pour femmes.

I could go on and on. The Canadian Bar Association and the Barreau du Québec....

They all say that your bill is wrong, that the registry is vitally needed to protect public safety in Canada.

So I'm sorry if I side with all those organizations, but let me ask this one last question.

The Chair: There is no more time. You're out of time.

Mr. Mark Holland: The Auditor General and the RCMP say the cost is \$3 million. Do you disagree with the Auditor General and the RCMP?

The Chair: You're out of order, Mr. Holland. You have used up four minutes.

Ms. Mourani, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Good afternoon, Ms. Hoepfner.

While I was listening to your speech, three things jumped out at me. You compared the heat from an oven to that from a firearm. All of a sudden, an image came to my mind. Could someone take an oven and mow down 14 people in a school? I do not think so. I must admit that your analogies seem very strange to me.

You are also saying that individuals who have a license are half as likely to commit a crime with a gun than individuals without a license. First, where are those numbers from? Are you trying to say that people who own firearms are less likely to commit crimes than those who do not own them?

• (1600)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes, actually that's what I'm saying: statistically, individuals who are legally licensed to own a firearm—

I have a report, and I believe you will actually hear testimony from the author of this report. But individuals who are legally licensed—we're not talking about criminals but about individuals who have legally obtained a licence to own a firearm—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You are talking about a report, but which report is it? What is that data? What is the study you are talking about?

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: It's a report that I have from Professor Gary Mauser. I have it. You'll hear testimony from him. It's my own report, but you will hear from him.

But statistically, when we look at who has been convicted of gun crimes over the last several years, individuals who are legally licensed to own firearms are 50% less likely to be among those individuals who are convicted of gun crimes. That's the statistic that I'm telling you.

You made a comment about the objects, about a gun versus the heat of a stove. I completely respect what you're saying, and that's what I'm hoping to help you, and all of us, understand, because we come from different backgrounds and different areas. Somebody could set something on fire and kill a lot of people with a fire, for example, just like they would take a gun and tragically kill innocent human beings.

What I'm saying is that where I grew up—this might not be your experience, but where I grew up—guns were not an object to be feared; they were to be respected. We knew they could be dangerous, but I never thought that somebody with a gun was going to shoot me. That was just my experience growing up. And I understand that's not everybody's experience, but that was mine.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand. You are saying that this is part of your values. That is what you are saying.

But you still have to realize that there are a number of reports, be they police reports, reports prepared by groups that deal with women or suicide, or be it the Public Health Agency.

Everyone is unanimous in saying that, when an individual loses their head and has access to a firearm, suicide risks are higher. Spousal and domestic violence risks—killing one's partner and children—are also higher. We cannot deny that controlling access to firearms is fundamental for combatting violence.

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes. I'll say two things on that.

First of all, the majority of homicides in this country are committed with knives. The second way that people are killed in Canada is with beatings, then strangulation, and the fourth is long guns. But I agree with you that we need to make sure that people

don't get guns who shouldn't. I'm a huge supporter of licensing. Licensing is where we make sure that guns don't get into the wrong hands. That's what we need to strengthen. We need to make sure that it's in place.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: It is about values.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Comartin, please, you have four minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): As is so typical with this issue, Mr. Chair, Ms. Hoepfner's last statement of course ignores the reality that the incidence of using knives to commit murders has increased in proportion to guns committing murders since the licensing was tightened up and since the registry came into effect. If you go back before that time, the reality is that guns were used to commit a greater number of murders than were knives.

Mr. Chair, I just want to make a statement before I ask what will probably be my only question.

What is going on here today—and I want the Canadian public to know this—is really a farce in terms of democracy. If this government were serious about dealing with gun crimes in this country, they would have continued, as opposed to sitting back and not proceeding, as they should have.

They introduced a very similar bill in June of 2006. We then had the election in 2008, so it died on the order paper when it had made absolutely no progress at all; it never even came for debate. They then reintroduced it as Bill C-24 after the 2008 election, and it had exactly the same fate: it just sat there. It has now been introduced again in the Senate, after one of the prorogations that this government has called, and it's sitting over there doing nothing.

The farce of democracy that's going on here is that the person sitting in that chair where Ms. Hoepfner is should be either the Minister of Justice or more likely the Minister of Public Safety and National Security, with whom we should have sufficient time—perhaps even having him come back more than once—to deal with the types of factual inconsistencies that we're getting from Ms. Hoepfner today.

We're not going to see that. We're going to proceed in a way such that there is no way the Canadian people will actually be able to hear enough evidence to make a logical decision on this bill and on the registry as a whole.

Let me finish with this question.

You have raised the issue today of the... I'm assuming you don't know this, but the reality is that in 2009 there were four million inquiries to the Canadian firearms registry online—not to CPIC, which received 67 million inquiries. There were four million inquiries: police officers in this country asked four million times about whether there were firearms, including long guns, in the residences they were going into.

Do you not think that this alone justifies keeping the long-gun registry in place?

•(1605)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: First of all, I want to address your initial point.

For the record, I want to say that as a duly elected member of Parliament for Portage—Lisgar, even though I am a backbencher, I'm very proud that I've been able to bring this bill forward. I think it's important that a free vote was allowed on this issue, which we've seen to be a very important piece of this whole issue: how are members going to vote?

I think for the sake of democracy that my bringing it forward as a private member's bill is very positive for Canadians. I think that as this discussion continues, whatever the outcome is, we will see much more positive effects because it was a private member's bill. I proudly represent this. This issue is something I believe in, and I certainly won't take a back seat to anyone on it.

As far as the queries to CPIC are concerned, what I would suggest you do is look at what police are actually looking at. They want to see whether there is a potential for a firearm to be there. If we look at when they are using it as an actual investigative tool—for example, how many times they are putting a serial and a registration number in so that they can see gun-specific information—it accounts for under 3%; it's 2.8% of the time.

Mr. Joe Comartin: That's four million times a year, Ms. Hoepfner—four million times.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: But overall—no, no. That's the name; under licensing they will be able to see—

Mr. Joe Comartin: That's the only inquiry that they ask for when they're going online to the registry: the information is about firearms. That's what their inquiry is about.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: No, it's not. I have the information right here, and it's not—

Mr. Joe Comartin: Well, we'll hear from Detective Sweeney when he comes up next.

The Chair: The time is up. I would just ask those who are asking questions to allow the answers to be given.

We'll go over to the government side.

Ms. Glover, please.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that I'm absolutely appalled—appalled at the treatment of women in this committee here today, by Mr. Comartin and first by Mr. Holland. The press have said—

Mr. Mark Holland: Shame, shame.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Excuse me, Mr. Holland, but you're being disrespectful. I'm a woman as well and I have the right to be here just as much as you do. So if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to speak.

The media has reported that women are being ignored in this debate. Time and time again in this committee, Mr. Holland and the opposition have completely ignored some of the statements made by women like you, Ms. Hoepfner, and by me. This bill was put forward by you because you believed in it, and I have every faith in

your ability to defend your position. I just wish that the other members would give you an opportunity to do that.

I would like you to address the fact that you were provided with a 30-minute opener. It was something that was voted on by this committee, even though we knew at the time that this was already limiting you, because most movers of bills get one hour. So already the female backbencher gets limited by the opposition to half an hour. They put forward a motion, we voted on it, and of course it's for 30 minutes uninterrupted to allow you to make your point, and we are told we are not allowed to ask questions. We didn't like that either on this side, but the opposition insisted, and it's in the minutes that this is what they wanted us to vote on.

Today we arrive, and once again the woman is bullied by the male Liberal, who seems to think he can walk all over women, and Canadian women in general. I am completely unsatisfied with the way this has regressed. This is something we believe in and this is something that—

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

I believe it's unparliamentary for another member to be characterizing in such a negative fashion the conduct of another parliamentarian. I believe that Ms. Glover, if she wishes to characterize her own colleagues, may do so, but the way in which she is characterizing other members of this committee is unparliamentary—

•(1610)

The Chair: I'll give you extra time, Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I maintain that Mr. Holland has been bullying not only the committee but the women who are on this committee, and I don't appreciate it.

I want to know how you feel about the fact that the Liberal members not only have tried to whip this committee, but that the leader of the Liberals has whipped his members into not following what they believe is the right thing for their constituents. I want to know from you how you feel about the fact that you are once again being told by a male member of the opposition that your rights don't count, that your rights here in this committee don't count.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'll just begin by saying that obviously I had prepared for a 30-minute presentation; that was what had been explained to me. I was actually quite surprised. I looked at the blues. I read it myself; it did say 30 minutes. I can tell you, I worked all weekend on my 30-minute presentation and that's what I was prepared to make. Frankly, it doesn't surprise me...

Ms. Glover, you've heard what I've heard. When we're speaking on this issue, how many times are Liberals yelling at us, "sit down and shut up"?

Now, I will just say this. I won't sit down, I won't shut up, I'm not a victim, I'm not weak. They can do what they want. It's not going to stop what we're doing. This is politics, so I guess if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen. I'm in the kitchen and I'll take the heat, thanks.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good. Now, part of the whole reason for our proceeding is that we know there are a number of people who are speaking out on this. I want to know your opinion on the impact that the passage of this bill will have on the safety of women.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Well, I think that's a very good point, and it's something that I think has to be taken into consideration.

Part of what I would like to see us do is end the registry and focus very strongly and precisely on licensing. I've seen, as I've been working on this bill, that one of the things I think we need to look at is how we make sure that individuals...maybe there are red flags, maybe they should never have a gun because they're violent, they have some emotional problems, maybe they have family abuse in their history.... We need to look at real ways to make sure that people who have a chance of being violent towards their families don't get guns. That's why I believe we need to look at licensing.

The Chair: Unfortunately, the time has expired. We're going to suspend for a moment and bring in the next set of witnesses.

Thank you.

• (1610) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1615)

The Chair: I'd like to reconvene this meeting.

We have four groups before us.

There is the Canadian Association of Police Boards, with Mr. Alok Mukherjee. I'll allow you to start. You can introduce yourself and the person who's with you.

Then we have, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Mr. William Sweeney, Senior Deputy Commissioner. You can go second, sir.

Then from the YWCA, we have Ms. Ann Decter. You can introduce yourself at that point.

We did have a fourth person, Mr. Hanson, with the Calgary Police Service.

Go ahead, Mr. Mukherjee. You can introduce yourself or whoever is going to speak.

You have 10 minutes. I should have explained that.

Dr. Alok Mukherjee (Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Association of Police Boards): We'll split it five and five.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Alok Mukherjee. I am secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Association of Police Boards and chair of the Toronto Police Services Board.

Ms. Carol Allison-Burra (Director, Canadian Association of Police Boards): I am Carol Allison-Burra. I am a director on the board of the Canadian Association of Police Boards as well as chair of the Kingston Police Services Board.

On behalf of the CAPB and our members, I'd like to thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to appear before you on the important issue of Canada's firearms registration system, which Bill C-391 would eliminate for all firearms that are not restricted or prohibited.

We are especially pleased to appear before you at the outset of the committee's hearings, and we have prepared a brief that we hope will be of assistance to you as you proceed in your important work.

The CAPB is the national association for police boards and commissions from across the country. Our members provide governance and oversight of more than 75% of municipal police in Canada. These boards and commissions are made up of ordinary residents as well as elected members of local municipal councils, and often provincial appointees as well. As such, they give voice and respond to the concerns and expectations of their specific communities.

One concern that has been expressed by communities throughout Canada pertains to violent incidents involving firearms. These include both handguns and long guns. Firearms are used in a wide spectrum of violent incidents, such as domestic disputes, bystander shootings, robberies, homicides, as well as drug- and gang-related activities. While different kinds of guns are more or less frequently involved in different kinds of crimes, the communities we represent understand that crimes involving guns of whatever kind or classification are especially serious and require special attention.

I'm sure that committee members know all too well that these kinds of firearms crimes have cost many innocent lives, including those of young people, women, and police officers. It's important to appreciate that not all the perpetrators of these violent criminal acts were people with criminal records or self-professed risks in their community. Many were ordinary people who for any number of reasons committed or were involved in the act of using their firearms illegally. Equally, in many of these instances the firearms that were used were legally owned or had once been legally owned.

By having a national firearms registry that records the existence and identified locations of all firearms, we have created an important preventative and investigative tool, as well as one that enhances police officer and public safety. Our brief to your committee identifies the specific preventative investigative and public safety benefits the registry currently provides. We believe you will receive tangible examples of identified benefits of the current registry from the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

We urge the committee to explore, in the course of these hearings, whether these benefits are real or illusory. We are confident, frankly, that such an objective analysis will lead you to the same conclusion we have been led to, which is that the current registry performs cost-effectively and provides important public and police officer safety benefits.

Although we can discuss this in greater detail during questioning, let me take a moment to identify what we have determined to be irrefutable preventative officer safety and investigative benefits of the current registration system. I know that the advocates of Bill C-391 dispute many of these suggestions, but I hope that from this day forward the committee will receive accurate information, ask pertinent questions, and discern for themselves fact from fiction.

From our association's perspective, the current system's benefits include: increased officer safety through more detailed awareness of the existence, quantity, and type of firearms at specified locations; preventative awareness of potential access to firearms involving persons with mental health issues; dramatically improved ability to enforce court-ordered prohibitions to firearms possession made through bail, sentencing, firearm prohibitions, licence revocations, or preventative orders. The alternative seems to be to ask the offender or any other intimidated third party what guns they have.

● (1620)

Other benefits include the enhanced ability to detect and return stolen firearms; the enhanced ability to investigate and prosecute crimes involving stolen firearms, which saves resources; the identification of an accumulation of firearms that could potentially harm public safety; the enhanced ability to investigate crimes through links established by the registry; the reduced ability to traffic stolen firearms and reduced illicit export or import of firearms; the reinforcement of the inherent public safety interest; and the responsibility inherent in firearm acquisition and possession.

Let me add that the reported annual cost of the registry today is \$4.1 million.

In the weeks ahead, you will be hearing from law enforcement officials directly, and we encourage you to seek specific details.

I hope our submissions before you will assist you in ascertaining from proponents of Bill C-391 the reasons they discount these benefits. I sincerely hope that you have more success than we have had in trying to get a straight answer.

In light of the clear benefits of the firearms registry, it is important to understand the articulated rationale for its elimination as proposed by Bill C-391. In order to do this fairly, the CAPB has reviewed the public statements in Hansard made by the bill's sponsor, which are, to say the least, noteworthy. If the assertions made to justify the bill are unfounded, then clearly the bill itself is unnecessary and ill-advised. This reality was recognized by no less than the bill's sponsor herself, when she noted on September 28, 2009, in the introduction of the bill, "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."

Should the committee reach the conclusions noted above, then even the bill's sponsor has indicated that Bill C-391 should not be supported.

We invite the committee to closely examine the objections to the current system put forward. In doing so, it's important to be clear that this necessarily means assessing the value and the cost-effectiveness of the firearms registry as it is today, not as it was previously.

Thanks to the fact-based inquiries of the Auditor General and the informed actions of this government since 2006, the firearms registry is a vastly improved, cost-effective, public safety tool over what it was when it was under the operational control of the Department of Justice. Bill C-391 would, however, eliminate today's firearms registry and not the one that it appears to target.

It is like a vein. The actual benefits of a firearms registry need to be candidly and objectively determined. False expectations of the past do not justify ignoring tangible results today. While asking the wrong question may be a successful political strategy, it is not an advisable basis for informed and effective police policy-making.

Regrettably, due to the issues that predate the current registry, the debate surrounding the firearms registry has become politicized to an extent rarely seen in Canadian public policy development. We have witnessed that already this afternoon. The sponsor of Bill C-391 has made the accusation that groups that support the registry sit "behind a desk trying to score political points or gain favour". This would be insulting were it not so patently ridiculous. The leadership of the CAPB are representative of the communities we come from and have a statutory responsibility to provide effective and efficient policing. We are accountable for public safety in our communities, and we are concerned for the welfare of our employees, the sworn officers on the street. Therefore, we are concerned about the development of a public policy that would jeopardize safety in our communities and the safety of the officers serving our communities.

● (1625)

We are here to contribute to a factual and respectful debate so that members of Parliament can make an informed decision on an initiative that seeks to significantly change an incredibly important public policy. The consequences of eliminating the registry are enormous. The current registry has value that this bill will eliminate.

No doubt there are improvements that can be made to the registry, and we will be the first to support the government in justifiable, fact-based, positive changes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the RCMP.

Mr. Sweeney, please.

[Translation]

Deputy Commissioner William Sweeney (Senior Deputy Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to you and to all the members of the committee.

[English]

As the senior deputy commissioner representing the commissioner and all of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to assist with the committee's examination of Bill C-391.

With me today I have Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak, the director general of the Canadian firearms program. He has brought along with him some select members of his staff.

During the course of your hearings you will hear from many witnesses who will present their perspectives on Bill C-391. We respect and appreciate the fact that all who appear before you today and in your coming hearings share a genuine and common interest in safe and secure communities, but there will be differences of opinion respecting how we can achieve this end state.

I hope that our presentation will provide you with factual information on the realities of modern policing and how police officers utilize the elements of the Canadian firearms program, including the long-gun registry, as they go about their day-to-day business of serving the Canadian public.

I would like to leave the committee with the following: the RCMP considers that the registration of all firearms enables individual accountability, promotes safety and life-saving measures, and is a proactive investigative tool in assisting law enforcement.

I will now turn this over to Chief Superintendent Cheliak to speak to the program.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak (Director General, Canadian Firearms Program, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

Good day, Mr. Chairman, and to all the committee members.

As a police officer with over 30 years of operational experience, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you and to assist with the committee's examination of Bill C-391.

The Canadian Firearms Centre was created in 1995 by the Government of Canada to oversee and administer the Firearms Act. Since its transfer to the RCMP in 2006, the centre has enhanced its efforts on support to domestic police law enforcement agencies and international organizations by providing information and expertise related to firearms, firearms registration, and the licensing of individuals and businesses under the Firearms Act.

In June 2008, the Canada Firearms Centre and the RCMP's firearms support services directorate were brought together to form an integrated organization called the Canadian firearms program. Today, aligned with the Government of Canada and the RCMP's commitment to safe homes and safe communities, the Canadian firearms program's mandate is to enhance public safety by providing law enforcement with vital operational and technical support. The information and expertise provided by the Canadian firearms program is vital to the prevention and investigation of crimes related to firearms. The program also helps to reduce firearms-related

death and injury in Canadian communities by enabling and promoting responsible firearms ownership, use, and storage.

The firearms licensing and registration system has now been in place for over 12 years and is meeting the CFP service delivery standards according to the departmental performance report.

No legislation or regulation will ever prevent all crimes; however, the Canadian firearms program does serve a very real purpose and contributes to police officer safety and the safety of all Canadians. The CFP, as a whole, delivers on numerous public safety fronts that are intended to serve as a basis for risk reduction. For example, the program delivered firearms safety training to about 90,000 Canadians in 2008 alone. The program conducted outreach initiatives and promoted safe storage of firearms, which can help reduce heat-of-the-moment crimes, firearms accidents, particularly involving children, as well as suicide by firearms. The program conducts screening of all new licence applicants. This includes a mandatory 28-day period to ensure individuals applying for a licence do not pose a risk to public safety. In addition, all licence owners are subject to automated continuous eligibility checks.

A "firearms interest to police" report, or FIP, generated anywhere in Canada regarding a licensed individual will automatically be flagged to the chief firearms officer of provincial jurisdiction for appropriate follow-up. This is how the program operates on a national basis to ensure high-risk individuals don't slip through the gaps between provinces. In 2009, approximately 7,000 registration certificates were revoked for public safety concerns.

Registration of firearms allows police to verify numbers and types of firearms subject to seizure. There are common misconceptions that criminals don't register their firearms and that firearms destined for criminal activity would not appear in the registry. In actuality, many firearms recovered by police at crime scenes turn out to be registered and the CFP has assisted in solving a number of crimes by tracing a firearm to a registered owner. In 2009, of the 4,000-plus crime-related firearms traced to an owner by the Canadian firearms program, approximately 1,600 were registered non-restricted firearms, 1,100 were prohibited, and 881 were restricted.

Registration of firearms also provides an accountability mechanism linking responsibility for a firearm to an individual. It encourages owners to safely store firearms, to report lost or stolen firearms, and it discourages illegal sales and transfers of firearms.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, allow me to speak to the value of the CFP to the public and police officer safety and to the prevention of crime.

Without the database of registered long guns, the door may be open to unlimited and unmonitored stockpiling of long guns for individuals and groups. The program continuously monitors firearms registration records for unusual or unexplained accumulations. Pattern recognition software allows for the identification of anomalies or specific situations that should be flagged for chief firearms officers in the provinces and inspected. An example would be if the same individual acquires 10 or more firearms within a 30-day period.

• (1635)

Through the Canadian firearms registry online, CFRO, the Canadian firearms program provides safety information that acts as a tool for risk reduction. This national database is available in real time, assisting investigators in tracing seized and recovered firearms by linking them to registered owners. It is queried, on average, 11,000 times per day by front-line police officers, as an individual tactical decision on their part. An example that clearly illustrates this comes to mind. In one case, family members requested that police remove all of the firearms from their home due to their father's depressed state. A Canadian firearms registry online query by local police indicated that there were 21 additional long guns in the home that the other family members knew nothing about. A warrant was obtained and all firearms were removed by police, preventing a potential firearms tragedy. Without the registry, there would not have been any knowledge of the additional 21 firearms.

The CFRO also enables law enforcement to provide investigational assistance at the municipal, provincial, national, and international levels. In the case of court-ordered prohibition or the execution of search warrants, law enforcement relies on pertinent information provided by the Canadian firearms program to determine what firearms owners have in their possession. Without the database, tracing firearms, both nationally and internationally, would be very difficult and very expensive. Guns connected to criminal activities would be almost untraceable as law enforcement would not have a place to commence an investigation. This current real-time database allows Canadian law enforcement agencies to trace firearms nationally within a matter of minutes. Canada is, at present, able to offer reciprocity in tracing to police partners in the United States of America and other countries as a part of its contribution to global public safety.

In conclusion, the Canadian firearms program, inclusive of the registry, provides useful information to law enforcement agencies, nationally and internationally, making it a global asset in contributing to public and police officer safety.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move over to the YWCA. Ms. Senior, you've indicated you are going to present first. Go ahead.

Ms. Paulette Senior (Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada): Thank you.

My name is Paulette Senior. I'm the CEO of YWCA Canada, and I'm here today with my colleague, Ann Decter, who is our director of advocacy and public policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our concerns today. We've been advised that YWCA Canada is the only national women's organization invited to present at these hearings. If that is true, we are honoured to take on this role, but we're also shocked that only one national voice for women has been invited on an issue that is ever so crucial to women's safety.

Women's safety, or the lack of it, is what brought Canada's gun control laws into being. The future of gun control cannot be debated without reference to violence against women.

We are the nation's oldest and largest women's service organization. Founded in 1870, we are 140 years old this year. The YWCA movement is as old as our country, and for well over a century has provided a strong voice for women, in particular for women in vulnerable circumstances. YWCA Canada is the country's largest provider of shelter to women and children fleeing violence.

We are here today because a tool of public safety is under threat, the non-restricted firearms registry. Each year more than 100,000 women and children in Canada leave their homes for "violence against women" shelters. Many of them come through the doors of the 31 shelters operated by YWCAs across Canada looking for safety, a roof over their heads, and support. Our member associations operate shelters in Canada's large and small centres. We serve rural populations in Sudbury, Brandon, Prince Albert, Lethbridge, Peterborough, Saskatoon, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit—places where shotguns and rifles are part of the culture.

Our member associations are opposed to Bill C-391 because it will put women and children in their communities at greater risk. Lyda Fuller, the executive director of YWCA Yellowknife, says, "I worry about Aboriginal women, who surely must have a right to protection. I'm asking rural and northern MPs to think about the safety of Aboriginal women and about rates of teen suicide."

YWCA Canada passionately supported the implementation of Canada's gun control laws, including the long-gun registry, because of the dangers and risks firearms pose to women experiencing violence. While there is much to criticize in how the registry was developed, we agree with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police that the registry has made Canada a safer country.

There are experts here today who can give you full details on the registry and how it works, but what we offer is the perspective of service providers working for women's safety, service providers who see the effects of violence on women and children day in and day out.

We see a modern database with real-time access from a patrol car to the location of almost 6.8 million long guns and rifles. Police forces across the country appear to be rapidly increasing their use of this database. Average daily inquiries for 2009 were more than double the usage in 2005. Annual queries increased from 425,000 in 2004 to 3.4 million in 2008, to over 4 million in 2009. It is not useless; it is very well used.

So what are we to think? While Google is busily scanning every book in the world to release online and businesses are ramping up iPhone apps, the Canadian government wants to erase 6.8 million database records locating firearms against the expressed advice of the nation's police forces.

Whose interests are being served here? We can say, without a doubt, not those of women vulnerable to violence. How many lives has the registry saved? No one really knows, but evidence clearly shows a continuing decline in homicides committed with rifles and shotguns coinciding with the increasing use of the long-gun registry by Canadian police forces. At the same time, the use of firearms and violence in general has increased.

Long guns are the most common type of firearm used in spousal homicides. Over the past decade, 71% of firearm spousal homicides involved rifles and shotguns; only 24% involved a hand gun.

● (1640)

While spousal homicides with rifles and shotguns have decreased, homicides by all other means have not. The average number of women killed annually by their spouses without using a rifle or shotgun between 1995 and 1998 was 52; the same figure for 2001 to 2004 was 56.

A central argument against the long-gun registry is that operating costs are excessive; money would be better spent elsewhere. This is not supported by current reports. While there is no question that development of the registry included exceptional mismanagement, set-up is complete and the registry exists. Millions of dollars have already been spent and unfortunately cannot be recovered. What can be recovered, with the right steps, is the continuing cost of violence against women, estimated by this government at \$4 billion per year.

We would be very pleased to return to the committee at a future date and discuss that public safety issue.

The question facing parliamentarians is not the mismanagement of the registry in the past but the future of a modern database that is constantly consulted by Canadian police forces in the course of their duties. Are we expected to believe that our police services would consult a useless system more than four million times in the year?

YWCA Canada is a national organization with broad reach, and we'd like share some comments from some of our members across the country. Earlier I mentioned Lyda Fuller, who is a director of YWCA Yellowknife, with shelters in Yellowknife and Fort Smith for women and children fleeing violence, groups for children who have witnessed violence, and workshops for teens related to dating violence. This is what Lyda Fuller would like for you to know today:

Women have told us that the guns used here [in the north] predominantly for hunting—long guns—are also used to intimidate, subdue and control them. We hear this over and over again, in small communities without RCMP and in larger communities with RCMP.

Women do not want these guns to be unregistered, but do not feel safe in expressing this opinion other than in whispers to people who may be able to voice these 'unpopular' opinions and who may be heard. Of course men in the communities don't want to register their guns.

When RCMP fly into a community to respond to domestic violence, they need to know where the guns are, and how many a household has. We've already had deaths of Mounties in the north.

Long guns, because of their prevalence here, are also used in suicides, which are epidemic in northern Canada.

I am just stunned that we have both the police chiefs, tasked with public safety, and vulnerable groups asking for protection—both wanting the long gun registry to continue—and that these voices may be ignored.

Please make it clear that it is not city-born, city living folks who are asking for this registry to continue; it is the voices of northern women who fear for their lives and their mental health who are asking for protection. We see women who have experienced years of brutal intimidation. These women cannot safely express their need for protection themselves, and it is up to Canada to understand this and respond in an appropriate way.

That is Lyda Fuller.

We have another message from the north. This one is from Iqaluit in Nunavut, where YWCA Agwik Nunavut is in development and provides shelter for homeless women and for women fleeing violence. It's from Caroline Anawak, the executive director there:

Having lost 3 brother-in-laws, 3 nephews, 2 nieces, two former students, 2 neighbours in Nunavut, I remind the Government of Canada that Nunavut leads all of North America in suicides.

The cost of this tragic loss of life is sorely under-estimated. The painful message it helps to send is a message no mother, no father and no elected representative should ever want to hear.

Do the "right" thing, not the expedient thing. Loss of life must be stopped.

On behalf of our 33 member associations across Canada, the thousands of staff and volunteers who make our work possible, and the tens of thousands of women we serve, we echo Caroline Anawak. Do the right thing. Protect mothers and sisters and daughters. Protect women and girls. Maintain the non-registered firearms registry. There are still lives to be saved.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our last presenter is from the Calgary Police Service, Chief of Police Mr. Rick Hanson.

Go ahead, sir.

Chief Rick Hanson (Chief of Police, Calgary Police Service): Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on this very important topic of the long-gun registry and gun crimes in Canada.

There has been a requirement to register hand guns and other restricted firearms in Canada since the 1930s. It is vitally important to maintain criminal sanctions for the illegal possession of restricted and prohibited weapons, but in my opinion, the registry only marginally addresses the broader issues of gun crime and violence in Canada. Canada requires a comprehensive gun strategy. There are parts of the current gun registry that are positive, but it goes too far. I believe that is why there is so much resistance to it. While the registry may be a useful investigative tool, it falls short of making the type of positive impact this country needs to be safer.

I can speak only for the Calgary area when I say that gun crime is steadily on the increase. We are also seizing a growing number of heavier weapons, including assault rifles. For me, it comes down to the risk versus the consequences of possessing or using a gun during the commission of an offence. Right now, in my opinion, and from personal observations, it appears to be worth the risk for criminals. The guns in the hands of criminals aren't registered. They don't care. They're probably stolen. They're probably obtained illegally, and in many cases, they are at least restricted and are occasionally prohibited.

Let's start dealing with the criminal activity of those who possess and use guns in the commission of offences, and let's make the consequences far outweigh the risk.

On April 29, 2010, at the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police spring conference, a resolution was passed regarding the firearms registry. As the group that represents the law enforcement community in Alberta, we asked the Government of Canada to develop a comprehensive gun strategy that considers the following points.

First is sentencing. The use of a firearm in any offence is serious and requires significant sentencing. It should reflect the gravity of the crime and should be sufficient to deter future offences.

On November 16, 2008, two warring gangs had a shootout in the middle of downtown Calgary. While in their vehicles, the gang members began shooting at each other. Four men in one of the vehicles suffered gunshot wounds. One of the gang members in the other vehicle was struck in the face by a bullet. In total, at least 19 rounds were fired, with some of the bullets piercing neighbouring businesses. After a lengthy investigation, which took up a tremendous amount of resources, arrests were made, and the guns, none of which were registered and none of which belonged to licensed gun owners, were seized.

On April 9, 2010, at the Court of Queen's Bench, all four accused pleaded guilty to the lesser offences of discharging a firearm with intent to endanger life and various other firearms-related charges. They were sentenced to between four and a half years and six years and were given lifetime firearms prohibitions. After consideration for pretrial custody and mandatory release, these sentences are insignificant, considering public safety and the fact that people's lives were literally put at risk.

In September 2008, a Brazilian exchange student, Jose Neto, was shot in the head as he walked in downtown Calgary with his girlfriend. He survived but was blinded in both eyes. The man charged in this case pleaded guilty to five charges, including two

counts of discharging a firearm with intent to wound or endanger life and one count of aggravated assault. The crown is seeking to have him declared a dangerous offender in a hearing that begins May 10. It should be noted that 10 years earlier, the same offender was sentenced to ten and a half years in prison for shooting a jewellery store owner in the neck and firing at two Calgary police officers during a botched robbery. His sentence included a firearms prohibition, which was due to expire in 2014.

In yet another example, on New Year's Day, 2009, an innocent bystander, Keni Su'a, was gunned down while attempting to run away from a gang-related shooting inside a Calgary restaurant. Unknown to Mr. Su'a, he was sitting close to two gang members, a decision that would prove fatal. Two gang members inside the eatery were also executed. Following a year-long investigation, four men were charged with three counts each of first degree murder. They are currently awaiting trial. Again, none of the weapons were registered; nobody was licensed.

The Criminal Code of Canada already has significant sentencing conditions built into the firearms section. What we need is to apply those sentences and prohibitions to a level that addresses them as deterrents.

● (1650)

The second issue is search and seizure. We ask that you streamline and rationalize the search and seizure powers of police officers in relation to firearms-related offences and use of firearms for the purpose of criminal activity. Recent court cases have made it increasingly difficult for front-line officers to do their jobs and take illegal guns off the street. For reference, I would ask that you look at *Regina v. Mann* and *Regina v. Grant*.

The third issue is point-of-entry registration. More than one-third of all crime guns recovered in Canada are linked to U.S. and Canadian firearms dealers. As it stands now, these firearms would only be registered at point of sale; however, we know that a number of weapons used in the commission of crimes, including crimes in the Calgary area, were obtained illegally prior to legitimate sale and registration.

In May 2009, more than 50 weapons were discovered missing from a wholesale sporting goods shop in Calgary. The vast majority of these guns remain unaccounted for. The firearms were shipped to the store and, unknown to management, sold under the table by staff to criminals, including gang members. They were unregistered weapons as they were yet to be sold in the store, and they have remained unaccounted for, for quite some time. As part of a broader firearms strategy, registration of all firearms should begin at the point of entry into Canada or at the point of production, not at the point of sale, as is presently the case.

Last is decriminalization. Simple ownership of unregistered sporting weapons, including rifles and shotguns, should not be a criminal offence. This is just a matter of respect. We're turning honest, law-abiding citizens of this country into criminals. As evidenced in Calgary over the past eight years, of the 877 firearms used in violent offences and subsequently seized by police officers, 88% were handguns. In Calgary, a large portion—more than 70%, in our case—of crime handguns seized by officers had been smuggled into Canada. Also, according to Juristat, over the past 30 years the use of handguns to commit homicide has generally been increasing, while the use of rifles or shotguns has generally declined.

No reasonable person would argue against firearms licensing. Most gun owners are just as anxious to hold irresponsible gun owners accountable. Responsible gun owners recognize that it is a privilege to possess firearms, and they should only go to citizens who would use them in a lawful manner. We still want to encourage registration, but this can be done through new regulatory and non-criminal penalties—for example, penalty, ticket, and fine—administered through individual provinces. To further encourage people to register, the process should also be streamlined and simplified.

In closing, I will say that no direct links have been made between the existing gun registry and the behaviour of criminals—true criminals. My colleagues and I ask that the Government of Canada conduct a thorough review of the gun registry. We urge a more practical solution that addresses the realities of policing and firearms-related crimes being committed in our country.

Thank you.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The usual practice of this committee is to give each of the parties seven minutes in the first round, so we'll begin immediately with Mr. Holland, please.

Oh, change that; Ms. Jennings, please go ahead.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you, Chair, and I'd like to thank all of the witnesses here.

I'd like to make an opening statement, because I do have seven minutes.

As a woman, I was appalled to hear the statements made by my colleague Ms. Shelly Glover and my colleague Ms. Candice Hoepfner. Those statements called one of the most ardent proponents for gender equality and women's rights, my colleague Mr. Mark Holland, a bully of women. I believe there may be a short memory on the part of at least one of my colleagues sitting on the

other side, because Mr. Holland was one of the members of this committee who actually brought a motion to hear from more groups representing women, and the Conservatives in fact voted against it. It's a recorded public vote. Ms. Glover was one of them.

I believe that if there's been any bullying happening in this Parliament, it has been by the government towards anyone who opposes their position, whether it be on gun registry, whether it be on women's equality advocacy, or whether it be municipalities saying they don't agree with a particular policy of the federal government. I think the statement made by Senator Nancy Ruth, as profane as it was, saying to women's groups not to push on the issue of abortion and to shut the eff up, actually demonstrates the attitude of this government towards anyone who dares to oppose a policy that they're proposing.

The Chair: Ms. Jennings, I think you're really way off the topic that we're discussing.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I do have questions.

My question is for Mr. Sweeney. I believe earlier this year, sometime in the neighbourhood of February, at a meeting of this public safety committee you stated that you and representatives of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police would be making a presentation to cabinet regarding the firearms program. I'd like to know exactly what happened.

I'm going to ask my questions so that each witness following that can give their answers. If you don't have time, you'll be able to submit it in writing through the chair to the other members.

Ms. Senior, welcome. You talked about how the money that's been spent has been spent, but that all of the studies, independent audits, are showing that the firearms registry as it now stands, including long guns, only costs about \$4 million a year.... No, I believe it was Ms. Allison-Burra; I apologize. You made the point that the Canadian Association of Police Boards is a strong proponent of the firearms registry, including long guns. I'd like to know how many members you have and how many police services that represents across Canada.

Ms. Senior, you talked about the shelters, the women who are victims of domestic violence, and how women of the north are asking that this registry continue, including the long guns. Can you talk about the kinds of costs that domestic violence, including attempted murder, and successful murder, using firearms, in particular long guns, costs the Canadian public?

Finally, Mr. Hanson, thank you so much for your presentation. I do appreciate the fact that you've informed the committee of the resolution of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I've read it very carefully. I listened to your presentation very carefully. My understanding from this is that the Alberta chiefs of police are not calling for abolishing the long gun part of the registry. What you are calling for is further improvements to that registry. Is that correct?

Thank you, and then if I have time—

● (1700)

The Chair: Who would like to go first?

Mr. Sweeney.

D/Commr William Sweeney: Thank you for the opportunity to clarify what I said. I said cabinet committee, but I misspoke; I meant parliamentary committee. I do apologize for that.

We have been working with Chief Bill Blair and others. Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak has been assisting in developing positions with respect to Bill C-391, but I think it's important for committee members to also understand that we're working with the Canadian chiefs of police on a comprehensive strategy, which, as Chief Hanson indicated, is really needed. Actually, Marty Cheliak has been very instrumental with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police in doing that.

The Chair: Mr. Hanson, go ahead, sir.

Chief Rick Hanson: By the way, as the president of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, and having just been at our meetings last week, I can tell you our resolution was passed unanimously. In order to get where we need to get to, the existing gun registry won't work because it criminalizes citizens' behaviour for doing nothing. We believe there are regional differences. It's a divisive debate within the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. As with any association, a 51% vote is required to get a resolution passed.

Where we sit in Alberta we recognize—and everybody we talked to says—that licensing makes perfect sense because responsible gun owners don't want irresponsible gun owners. But the issue around registration can be more than adequately addressed through provincial registries that recognize regional differences and that decriminalize something that ought not to be. We're making criminals out of normal citizens when the criminals are totally ignoring the laws that stand, and they're the ones wreaking havoc.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you, Mr. Hanson. I would like to call your attention to the actual resolution. I apologize for this; I have a sight problem.

To the other witnesses, I apologize, but as I stated in the beginning, they will be able to put through their responses in writing to the chair.

The resolution says to decriminalize the failure to register sporting weapons, including rifles and shotguns. Therefore, this does not call for abolishing the long-gun registry. What is does is call for certain changes that would improve, in the minds of the Alberta chiefs of police, the actual registry, but it would include sporting weapons, including long guns and firearms.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll give you a few seconds to respond to that.

Mr. Hanson, go ahead.

Chief Rick Hanson: However it's done, my fear, of course, is that the regional differences will be ignored. We're presenting what we feel is a reasoned approach to addressing the issues that does not create criminals out of regular citizens.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mourani, please.

Dr. Alok Mukherjee: I guess there was also a question for us?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but the time is up. She said you'll have to submit it in writing.

Go ahead, Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

Thank you all for being here. I would like to clarify that I am talking to Mr. Hanson.

I am trying to understand. You are saying that you are a director of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, that you had a meeting and you passed a resolution.

Does your resolution say word for word that you want to remove long guns from the gun registry? Is that what you are saying? Or do you want to improve the current registry, whatever the tools may be to do so? Because there is a clear difference there.

[English]

Chief Rick Hanson: What I'm presenting on behalf of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police is where we stand, that is, the long-gun registry as it sits today frequently is little more than a placebo for the serious crimes that occur on the street. When people in Calgary were being gunned down by criminals with illegal, unlicensed weapons, all we heard about was the need to enhance the gun registry, but that didn't deal with the issue.

What we're saying is that here's what we need, but how we get there remains to be seen. So if amendments can be made to address the issues that the Alberta chiefs see as the real issues, we would support those.

● (1705)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: So you are for keeping it. Your association wants to keep the registry, but it should just be enhanced. You are not against the registry.

[English]

Chief Rick Hanson: We're not against a registry that is properly administered and that decriminalizes the possession of sporting weapons.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

Mr. Cheliak, I am going to talk to you since you are responsible for the registry. You said in your speech that, in 2009, approximately 7,000 registration certificates were revoked for public safety concerns.

So, to understand this correctly, is it long guns or all guns, whether long guns or handguns, that were removed for public safety reasons? What were the numbers?

[English]

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Thank you for the question, Madame.

That was just for long guns. There were 7,000 registration certificates revoked for long guns specifically. Those would be 7,000 individual firearms.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: So they were firearms that legally belonged to individuals, and at some stage you decided that the firearms had to be removed for public safety reasons. Is that it?

[English]

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes, that's correct. Public safety reasons can be court-ordered prohibitions for psychiatric or mental health issues, for medical issues, or for other public safety issues.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Ms. Hoepfner told us earlier that individuals who have registered firearms—law-abiding Canadians, that is—who have a license, are half as likely to commit a crime with a firearm.

In your opinion, logically, would someone who has a firearm and “flips out” use the gun or not? In your experience, is it people who, at one point, lose control but are in good standing with the law?

[English]

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: There are a number of reasons that people have their firearms certificates revoked. Notwithstanding the fact that there are court-ordered prohibitions, there are prohibitions relating to mental health issues, when we receive medical reports and things like that. Those prohibitions are generally for people who are diagnosed, and the medical profession within Canada will alert our chief firearms officer as required. The officer will do a review of the licence application and make a decision to revoke the person's licence and their certificates.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: My understanding is that you can take away firearms from people who do not have mental health issues, but in cases where you have received reports of spousal violence, or about a depressed young person who makes the decision to go in a school with a firearm and shoot at all the kids. If a school notifies you about such a comment, you are going to check and remove the firearms as a preventive measure. You are not necessarily removing the firearms from criminals. It can also be anyone in the street.

[English]

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes, it's really about public safety. When we are alerted about an issue that has potential tragic consequences for public safety, we will take action through the chief firearms officer and our registrar of firearms.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Very well. I have another question.

Earlier, Ms. Hoepfner said that if Mr. Chair had three firearms—

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: —he could give them to Ms. Hoepfner and it would be legal.

Can an individual who has three firearms give them to someone else without notifying the Canadian Firearms Registry? The person could donate those firearms, without registering them as such, and it would be legal. Personally, I believe it is illegal. The moment the

firearm is given to someone else—whether it is sold or donated—it should be reported to the Canadian Firearms Registry. Am I mistaken?

• (1710)

[English]

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: That's correct. There's a requirement when the transfer of a firearm takes place, when it changes hands from one person to another.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I have a question for Ms. Senior.

Could you tell us about a specific case related to prevention and spousal violence—without giving names or other information—like Mr. Hanson did, where the registry saved a life?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Mourani, that was for 30 seconds.

Ms. Paulette Senior: Okay. We can send the answer in writing.

The Chair: Yes, you're going to have to do that. I'm sorry.

Mr. Comartin, please.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

Commissioner Sweeney, I'm going to ask Chief Superintendent Cheliak this question because I think he's better equipped to answer. I'm not slighting you.

I want to deal with the four million requests last year. When those requests come into your offices, are they for any purpose other than to ascertain whether a firearm is in that residence or place of business that they're going to?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: I'm sorry, I only have the 2008 statistics in front of me, but I would be pleased to provide the 2009 statistics to you in writing.

The 2008 statistics come from the commissioner's annual firearms report, tabled earlier this year. Of those 3.4 million queries per year, 2.3 million were specifically related to persons queries; 941,000 were related to address queries, which cannot be done on CPIC but are direct CFRO queries; 74,000 were done on firearms serial numbers; and on and on, down the list. So the 2.35 million could be a very objective number, or unobjective number, subject to why the query was made. At times there is an auto-link query, when a person's query is done, with CPIC, to query the individual to determine if they have a licence and firearms registered to them. All of the address queries—almost one million a year in 2008—were specific to addresses, that is, to ascertain if there were firearms in a residence.

When we go back to the 2.3 million queries per year, we have to remember that there were 66 million CPIC queries on persons in 2008 as well. So when we say every CPIC query generates a CFRO query, that's not the case.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Some of the CPIC inquiries would also be by officers seeking information with regard to gun licensing and ownership.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Even though they can't get the information, those inquiries would be included.

Does it vary in terms of where the inquiries are coming from? I'm going to be suspicious and suggest there are few coming from the chief of police's office in Calgary, given his testimony today. Does it vary in terms of the quantity across the country?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes, it does. I can't get into the specifics of Calgary. I don't have the information in front of me.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Too bad.

With regard to, again, the figures that we heard from Chief Hanson, of the number of weapons that were not registered in his city, they clash rather dramatically. I think you used the figure of 88% that were unregistered. In the figures you gave us today, across the country, in 2009, the figure would have been somewhere around 40% to 45%, in fact, that were registered, of the weapons that you were involved with. Could you give us any explanation as to why there are so fewer registered weapons in Calgary than in the rest of the country?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: I have no idea. I would have to do some research on that, and I would be pleased to provide that to the committee in writing.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Chief Hanson, do you have any explanation for that? It's a 100% difference between your city and the national figures.

Chief Rick Hanson: I couldn't explain why that would be. I can tell you that our concentration, over the last, certainly, two and a half years, with the gang problems we've had, is focusing on the criminal behaviours.

• (1715)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Okay.

With regard to the suggestion, Mr. Mukherjee or Ms. Allison-Burra, that we set up regional or maybe province-based registries, can you comment as to what you think are the chances of that happening across the country, in terms of getting enough money to do it on a provincial or a regional basis?

Dr. Alok Mukherjee: It's a question that we haven't looked at because our view has been that the way the registry functions right now has been quite useful and relevant. However, at the same time, as we have said in our presentation, we are perfectly willing to acknowledge that there may be room for improvement. If, in the collective opinion, it was felt that regional registries might work better, we would be supportive of that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Chief Hanson, in regard to the changes you would like to see, it sounds like the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police wants to have improvements—certainly, decriminalization of the recreational guns. This is a proposal, by the way, that both my party and the Liberals are pushing, but it does not show up in this bill or in any government position. Would that be sufficient to get your association onside to continue to support the national registration?

I know you want more than that, but would that be enough?

Chief Rick Hanson: I would have to say that I can't speak on behalf of the entire Alberta association on whether that would be enough, because what we called for, I believe, also, was a review of all the components, to leave what works and take out what doesn't work. Certainly, a key piece would be that part about decriminalizing it.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Okay.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one and a quarter minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin: We can deal with the streamlining.

Mr. Cheliak, could you answer this as well? What are you actually looking at in terms of streamlining?

Chief Rick Hanson: I know there have been inroads into streamlining it, but there are also multiple stories out there, personal examples from people, from many police officers, as a matter of fact, who have their own personal stories about how they haven't seen the benefit of that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Superintendent Cheliak or Commissioner Sweeney, are there any additional steps being taken by the RCMP to streamline it, to make it even more efficient?

D/Commr William Sweeney: Absolutely. A continuous improvement has to be a constant state of affairs in policing. One of the significant initiatives Chief Superintendent Cheliak has undertaken is to provide better analytical reports that better serve chiefs and front-line officers, on the information that currently is collected within the data bank.

I will relate our early experience with FINTRAC. We would receive a lot of information from the agency that didn't allow police officers to capitalize on the full value of that information. I have to say that this has been a problem with the registry, but that is an issue that we should be working with our chiefs right across the country to resolve. In fact, last summer, at our association, Chief Superintendent Cheliak presented to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and as a consequence, an ad hoc committee has been created, in fact, to try to find these efficiencies that better serve our men and women on the front line.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move over to the government side.

Mr. MacKenzie, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the members who are here, because we do recognize it's an important issue.

I would like to let everyone know that our time is constrained, not because the government side decided to constrain the time.

Having said that, Ms. Senior, I wonder if you could tell Canadians the difference between registration of long guns and licensing.

Ms. Paulette Senior: The YWCA is most concerned about saving women's lives. That's the perspective from which we speak. That is the experience we have, and it is an experience that goes across the country. What we have noticed in terms of statistics is that since the gun registry has been in place, women—

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Do you know about Bill C-17 and when it came in and what changes that brought to guns in Canada?

• (1720)

Ms. Paulette Senior: I'm here to speak about Bill C-391.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay. You're talking about changes that have occurred in Canada, and I ask you if you know about Bill C-17 and what changes that brought about to guns in Canada.

Ms. Paulette Senior: What I can say is that the YWCA of Canada will be supportive of a registry that provides information to law enforcers where they're able to identify if there are issues in the home that can save women's lives. That's where we come from.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay. I appreciate that.

Chief Hanson, from one old chief to a young chief, when a police officer uses the information in the registry on a domestic, let's say, and the registry says there are three guns and the officer has made a decision to remove the firearms, what does he do when he's found the third gun, the firearm?

Chief Rick Hanson: When our officers go into any kind of dangerous situation, they make an assumption that there are going to be weapons there. When they go in to do a search, they wouldn't assume that if the registry says three weapons, there are three weapons. If they're going to do a proper search, they'd search until they were satisfied that any weapons were recovered.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That would indicate they don't trust the registry.

Chief Rick Hanson: It indicates that criminals don't use the registry, and you don't know who you're dealing with, so you err on the side of caution.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I appreciate that.

Mr. Chair, if I have time left, I'd like to share it with my colleague, Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Mukherjee, you're from the Metro Toronto Police Commission. We've met before, and I appreciate your being here. One of your former chiefs and the current commissioner of the OPP said:

...a law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them. None of the guns we know to have been used were registered...the money could be more effectively used for security against terrorism as well as a host of other public safety initiatives.

Would you have agreed with Chief Fantino when he made that statement?

Dr. Alok Mukherjee: I've the greatest respect for Commissioner Fantino, and he's entitled to his view.

We are here because we believe the registry performs an important function and the money spent on it is money that's spent profitably. We get value for the money.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: We believe that the time and energy is better spent in licensing. We agree with that. We believe in gun control. The difficulty is we're not seeing the benefits of the registry.

Anyway, I'd like to share my time, through you, Chair, if I could.

The Chair: Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Very quickly, Deputy Commissioner Sweeney, you indicated that a committee had been formed with chiefs of police concerning policies regarding Bill C-391.

I understand, Superintendent Cheliak, you've been meeting with some of the chiefs of police. I understand you were in Saskatoon last month and are headed to Winnipeg later this week and perhaps to Estevan later on this month.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: It's fair to say that you're advocating for continued and increased use of registration of long guns and the police officers checking the firearms database?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: I'm going to all the provincial associations and police association meetings, including the CAPC, to promote the Canadian firearms program, to introduce the program, how we manage it, and what the impact of it is.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay. We're looking at a deck that I understand has been used, and it indicates that effective gun control, in your view, relies upon regulatory licensing and registration of all firearms. I'm looking at page 6. You'll recognize this document.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: That's correct.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay. I've looked at this entire deck, and I'm curious as to why police chiefs need education on the benefits of the current firearms registry.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: The program is very new to the RCMP. It was transferred over to the RCMP from the Department of Justice in 2006. During that transitional period, in 2008 the firearms support services directorate, or the operational component of the RCMP's firearms service delivery, was amalgamated with the licensing and registration portion to form the Canadian firearms program.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So you'll agree with me that the new Canadian firearms program is a program that many chiefs of police are not entirely familiar with?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: That's correct.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You agree with me that their so-called unified position in support of the firearms registry and their opposition to Bill C-391 are not particularly well based in any foundation?

• (1725)

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: I think that's a question that would be best asked to and answered by Chief Bill Blair, who is the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I will ask him that.

Now, with 11,000 hits per day to the Canadian firearms registry online, I understand if Bill C-391 were to become law, it is only serial numbers and certificate numbers that would no longer be accessible. You'd still be able to search by name, address, licence number, or telephone number. Is that correct?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: No, the information would not be available, or it would be dated relative to the number of firearms or the types of firearms.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: The vast majority of queries are by name—7,600 out of 11,000 per day.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: That's correct.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You'd still be able to search by name, because the person would have to have a licence.

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: You could determine if they had a licence, but you would not be able to determine what firearms were associated with that person.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: But would you be able to search my name?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: Yes, I would.

The Chair: You'll have to put your final question.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We have three or four minutes left.

Mr. Kania, you indicated you wanted to...?

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Yes, thank you, Chair.

Following on the comments from Mr. MacKenzie that it would be great to have extra time to put queries to these witnesses, and in consideration that we started approximately 10 minutes late, and since we also gave Ms. Hoepfner a little extra time, I would like to move that we be provided the time to do one additional full round of questions from each of the parties.

The Chair: We could do it this round. Go ahead.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay, thank you, Chair.

The Chair: That's because there's just you and the government side. Is that okay?

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): On a point of order, no, that isn't. This committee was constrained by the opposition as to the number of days and times we were going to sit. We should abide by that, because what we're going to have here, time and time again, is an interjection by the opposition who are—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: A point of order. You already ruled on my motion.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I have a point of order right now, Mr. Chair, but if you want the opposition to run the meeting, you can shut me down and let them go. I'm tired of this.

The Chair: No. We're going to end this meeting at 5:30, as was agreed by the committee, so you have about two minutes left.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

Senior Deputy Commissioner Sweeney, this may be the last time you appear before a committee before your summer retirement, so let me begin by expressing the gratitude of all members of the committee and our tremendous respect for you and for your 36 years of service to the RCMP in serving and protecting all Canadians. I express that on behalf of everyone and our constituents.

Now, many years ago you were a front-line officer. Did you ever respond to a domestic incident?

D/Commr William Sweeney: Yes, I did.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Because these can involve highly irrational, emotional states, and potentially be very dangerous, would it have helped to know whether or not there was a long gun in the residence?

D/Commr William Sweeney: Yes, it would have, but, as has been testified to or alluded to by my colleague, Chief Hanson, we always assume that there are firearms or weapons until such time as we have concluded that this is not the case. However, in domestic cases, when we have reason to remove one of the offending parties—and more often than not that's a male—and we know there are firearms, in the absence of a registry, we're operating in a void.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

In Ms. Hoepfner's opening statement, she drew a parallel between sharp knives and long guns. What is more dangerously lethal, a sharp knife or a long gun, for instance, in a case of responding to a domestic?

D/Commr William Sweeney: I wouldn't be able to give you an answer to that, sir. Both weapons are just terribly lethal. I wouldn't be able to answer that intelligently.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay.

I'd like to move on to the number of queries. There are 11,000 queries per day. That comes out to a current cost of \$1.16 per query made to the firearms registry. Since 2004 we've seen an increase in usage from just over 2,000 to over 11,000 usages per day. That's a 531% increase; in the last two years it's a 59% increase. Every year there are double-digit percentage increases in the usage.

Doesn't this continuous increase in usage of this policing tool indicate its utility?

• (1730)

D/Commr William Sweeney: I would be speculating, but if I was to speculate I would suggest that it's because the front-line officers are understanding better today what is accessible and that they have greater confidence in the quality and the reliability of the information. And that's not just the front-line officers, that's our dispatchers, who quite often will make a query into the system on behalf of the responding member.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: That seems to indicate that the system is working more efficiently as we go forward.

In fact, Chief Superintendent Cheliak, you had referenced the fact that there are new programs that tell us, for instance, if there's been stockpiling of long guns taking place, and it red flags potential situations.

It's just been a few years since the Roszko situation in Mayerthorpe, Alberta. Are those the types of stockpiling incidences that would be red flagged by this registry and the new systems you have in place?

C/Supt Marty Cheliak: The stockpiling aspect is red flagged for anyone who acquires in excess of 10 firearms over a 30-day period. That's where the flags go up.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, our time is up.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before us today. I wish we had more time, but unfortunately we don't.

The meeting is adjourned.

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