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Tuesday, May 25, 2010

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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 19, and we are today looking at Bill C-391, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry).

We have quite a long list of witnesses.

Have you made any decisions on who goes first, or have you discussed this amongst yourselves? Shall we just start on the right side and move across, if that's okay?

On the right side, then, to start, we have the Canadian Labour Congress. Please introduce yourselves.

Ms. Byers, are you going to present, or Ms. Ducharme?

Ms. Barbara Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): We're each going to be taking about five minutes.

And I've never been called being on the "right side" before.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Barbara Byers: The correct side, maybe, but not the right.

The Chair: Well, maybe that's perspective. Looking at the back, you are then on the left.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Okay, that's great.

The Chair: And for all the witnesses, just so know, you have approximately 10 minutes. I can give you an extra minute if I can see that you're wrapping it up, but please because we have so many today we're going to have to stick pretty close to the 10 minutes. Thank you.

Yes, Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): I have a point of order, if I could, before the meeting begins.

I have four letters from attorneys general across the country, who have asked that we submit these to the committee: the Attorney General of Manitoba, the Attorney General of Saskatchewan, the Attorney General of Alberta, and the Attorney General from the Yukon.

I would just submit these to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The clerk will accept those. They're already in both official languages. Thank you very much.

Yes, Madame Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to know whether the letters are available in both official languages.

[English]

The Chair: Is that taken care of? Okay.

Ms. Byers, please.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the 3.2 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress, I want to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on Bill C-391, an act that would repeal the long-gun registry.

The CLC opposes Bill C-391. Our members have debated the issue of gun control at our conventions, and delegates have supported various forms of gun control in Canada, which led us to support the creation of the gun registry in 1995.

We know the debate about gun control and the gun registry can be difficult, but we must keep it in perspective.

The vast majority of Canadians do not own guns. There are as compelling reasons today as there were in 1995 for a national gun registry: to enforce safe storage requirements; to ensure gun owners are held accountable for all the guns they own, including non-restricted firearms like rifles and shotguns; to compel gun owners to report missing or stolen firearms; to reduce the illegal trade in rifles and shotguns; to give the police and first responders modern tools to protect their health and safety and take preventive action; and to trace back stolen guns to their rightful owners.

After a decade of use, first responders and police testify to its effectiveness, and a database that is consulted thousands of times a day by police across the country can no longer be dismissed by opponents as useless.

In domestic violence situations and child endangerment situations, both police and social workers can access the registry to assess the situation they are heading into and are able to take precautions and enter dangerous situations knowing what they may expect on the other side of the door. I can say, as a past social worker, that the registry would have been very helpful for me when I was doing emergency duty.

We know that rifles and shotguns are the guns most available in people's homes. A gun in the home increases risk factors on many levels, risks that the registry helps mitigate by providing those first responders with vital information: the number of guns in the home and, more importantly, what kind of guns. It allows them to assess risk to themselves and to others, particularly in domestic violence situations.

Rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in domestic violence situations. They are the guns most often used in suicides, particularly those involving youth, and they are the guns most often used to kill police officers.

We are aware that in one high-profile case, a registered gun left at the scene of the murders of four RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, was traced back to its owner through the registry. The owner was eventually convicted as an accessory in the killing of those officers.

The registry clearly plays an important role for our nation's police forces and first responders. We do not ignore the fact that mistakes were made when the gun registry was established. Cost overruns were documented by the Auditor General in 2002, although most of the costs were spent on the licensing aspect of the 1995 law, not on the registry itself.

Any new program has unanticipated costs, as this government has learned recently. *The Globe and Mail* reported last week the estimated cost to provinces for the federal government's new Truth in Sentencing Act has gone from an estimated \$90 million over the next two years to \$2 billion over five years, according to justice minister Vic Toews, and Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page estimates the projected costs at \$7 billion to \$10 billion over five years.

Clearly only time will tell, but regardless of whether you feel the money setting up the licensing and gun registry was money well spent or not, it is money spent. Its current annual operating costs do provide value, particularly in terms of the access to the database by police across the country thousands of times a day.

The vast majority of gun owners in this country are clearly law-abiding citizens. They continue to register their guns despite this government's attempt in recent years to undermine the registry. As one member of a CLC affiliate said recently at his union's convention debating a resolution to support the gun registry—and I quote—"I am a proud hunter, and I am proud to register my rifle."

● (1535)

As many have pointed out, registering guns is not an onerous task. When compared to the rules and regulations governing car ownership, the restrictions are put into perspective. You need a licence to operate a car. You have to renew your licence every year. In many provinces, you have to bring your car for emissions testing before you can renew your licence. You're required by law to wear a seat belt in your car. You need to purchase insurance, otherwise you cannot operate your car. In some provinces, you can't talk on a cellphone while driving your car, and in some provinces you have to buy and put snow tires on your car in the winter.

In contrast, gun owners need a licence to own a gun. The licence can be revoked if you use your gun recklessly. You need to register guns when you buy them. You must store your guns safely.

In 1995, a majority of Canadians favoured even stricter gun control legislation than the Firearms Act mandated. The same can be said today. Our own polling by Vector Research in January of this year continues to show majority support by Canadians to abolish gun ownership outright. The Firearms Act of 1995 is a uniquely Canadian example of compromise, a balance between the interests of those who favour stricter controls on firearms and those who prefer less restrictions.

Bill C-391 eliminates that balance, eliminates the tool used by police to work safely, eliminates the tool that keeps our communities safe and that has helped to reduce deaths by shotguns and rifles.

Patty Ducharme will complete our time on the agenda.

● (1540)

Ms. Patty Ducharme (National Executive Vice-President, Executive Office, Public Service Alliance of Canada, Canadian Labour Congress): Thanks, Barb.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada represents 172,000 workers across the country, including the 238 workers who work in the federal firearms registry in New Brunswick, and we are proud to be members of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Our union supports gun control. Our union also supports a firearms registry, which we believe has proven its importance and its success. Abolishing the long-gun registry serves no useful purpose, and we urge the committee to stand against Bill C-391 and reject its proposed amendments for the following reasons.

We've provided a written brief, so I am just going to address some of our concerns in bullet form.

We believe the long-gun registration is a necessary tool in the fight against violence against women. The long-gun registration helps ensure public health and safety, and gun control helps police do their work.

I'm going to talk briefly about the experience of our members—Public Service Alliance of Canada members—who work in the gun registry. Our members working at the registry provide information on the legislation and facilitate the registration, licensing, and transfer of ownership for gun owners. They answer anywhere between 75 and 120 calls per day working in a call centre environment, and they tell us that the people they interact with in general also support the program. These workers have first-hand experience of the importance of this registry.

As Charline Vautour, who works at the exception handling unit of the program, says,

We see results every day. We know the registry is useful when we see who uses it—in police investigations, when police visit people's homes, in situations of domestic violence, in legal matters. It is also used by health care workers who are first responders who need to know if there are weapons in a house and by fire departments which need to know if there are any explosives in a house. In a house fire, a long gun might just melt, but the ammunition can be very dangerous.

Eliminating the registry would be a huge step backwards. All those records would be deleted. The outcome would be negative and it would be dangerous.

We agree that most gun owners have been registered and have registered their firearms. Of course, most Canadians support gun control, with a recent Léger poll indicating that 59% of Canadians consider the gun registry a good investment.

Are you asking me to stop, sir?

The Chair: No, I'm telling you that you have one minute left.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Okay.

Two-thirds of women polled support the registry. It's worth it. The firearms registry is an effective tool for law enforcement and has effectively reduced the overall rate of homicide. The costs of implementing the gun registry have already been paid, and 90% of the guns have already been registered. At an annual cost of less than \$4 million, the costs of the day-to-day operation of the registry are relatively low.

In addition, this workplace makes a significant contribution to the social and economic well-being of the workers and the community of Miramichi, New Brunswick.

This committee has a responsibility to promote public security. The work of this committee must be guided by Canada's constitutional human rights framework, and this includes the obligation to ensure that federal legislation does not infringe anyone's right to life, liberty, and security of the person as guaranteed in section 7 of the charter.

This committee should not support legislation that would weaken the existing mechanisms created to protect public safety. Instead of spending significant resources on ineffective law and order proposals, this government should maintain a long-gun registry that is an effective tool against domestic and community violence.

We urge this committee to stand against this bill and reject its proposed amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go over now to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Mr. Kevin Gaudet, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Kevin Gaudet (Federal Director, Canadian Taxpayers Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, and my fellow witnesses.

My name is Kevin Gaudet. I'm the federal director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. We're a national, non-profit, non-partisan organization with more than 74,000 supporters nationwide. We have offices in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Toronto, and Ottawa, and soon to be Atlantic Canada. The mandate of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is to advocate

for lower taxes, less waste, and more accountable government. We've been doing this for a long time, celebrating our 20th anniversary this year. We don't take government money or issue tax receipts.

I'd like to take this opportunity now to thank the supporters of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, whose contributions allowed me to be here today to testify. We refused the offer of the committee to cover our expenses. Instead, we relied on the support of our supporters. I'm pleased to be here today on their behalf, to speak against the wasteful long-gun registry and for its appropriate elimination, thanks to Ms. Hoepfner's Bill C-391.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the chair of the committee on behalf of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for his many years of work on this issue and to thank all the MPs on the committee who supported our attendance today.

Mr. Chairman, all the members of the committee and their parties are to be commended for the open free vote that allowed this bill to come before the committee. Free votes are a key element to a fully functioning democracy. If it wasn't for the support of MPs from the NDP and the Liberal Party, joining the Conservatives in support of this bill at second reading, we wouldn't even be here today having this reasoned discussion. All of these MPs should be applauded for their courage and conviction on this issue.

That same open and free approach, we submit, should be continued in the House when this bill comes up again for vote after third reading. This has been a long-standing privilege that MPs have enjoyed for decades. It is a practice that ought to be followed without exception, after third reading on this bill.

Given the sensitivity of this debate, many have been calling for a compromise on this issue, and I agree. I suggest that Ms. Hoepfner's bill does just that. It provides a reasonable compromise for responsible and trustworthy gun owners, and we support it. This bill is a compromise because many responsible and trustworthy gun owners would have preferred to see more changes regarding hand guns, licensing, and other restrictions. It became clear that a bill with such changes was not going to get majority support from the House, so Bill S-5 was introduced in the Senate. It was deeply flawed, with the possibility of creating a new gun registry in every province. Thankfully, it too would not gain majority support.

As a result, this bill was created. Ms. Hoepfner's bill provides a compromise, having stripped away all other changes save for this one: the elimination of the wasteful long-gun registry. The long-gun registry has been an extremely wasteful and burdensome placebo that provides false impressions of improving public safety. Most importantly, the long-gun registry has been a substantial financial boondoggle since its creation in 1995 by then Minister of Justice Allan Rock. It has cost well beyond \$2 billion, and the final figure is still yet unclear.

Some would like to argue that annual operating costs associated with the registry run at only \$3 million. This is false. This figure does not reflect true fully-loaded direct costing, nor does it factor in indirect costing. In fact, the registry costs taxpayers more than \$106 million per year, and a final figure cannot be known. As the Auditor General has pointed out, not once but twice, for a program that does little to nothing to keep Canadians safe, this is and has been a huge waste of taxpayer money. And all of this wasted spending originates due to misleading information having been given to Parliament when Bill C-68 was passed.

Related, of course, is that Canadians don't even know if the \$2 billion is a complete figure. In 2002 we in the Canadian Taxpayers Federation presented Auditor General Sheila Fraser with a petition of over 14,000 signatures, requesting that her office audit the program. She did so and found astonishing waste.

In the second audit of the program, in 2006, Ms. Fraser found that whenever costs ballooned beyond what Parliament had authorized, or above what the government had publicly promised, the true amounts were hidden from legislators and the public. The Auditor General concludes that hiding these costs broke the law and violated the government's own accounting practices. It also meant that Parliament's constitutional power to decide how taxpayers' dollars are spent was usurped by bureaucrats. This is where the committee ought to be focusing its time more appropriately.

In 2006 my predecessor delivered to then public safety minister Day another petition, this time with over 28,000 petitions, calling for the elimination of the wasteful long-gun registry.

● (1545)

To quote from the Auditor General's report from December 2002, "From the start insufficient financial information was provided to Parliament". The Auditor General says that Parliament was misled in 1995 to believe that the program would cost a net of only \$2 million. Canadians may never know the full and true cost of this program.

We know, thanks to the Auditor General and the CBC, that it has cost over \$2 billion. The program has been disastrously managed. According to the Auditor General, 70% of all money approved by Parliament for the creation and management of this program came from supplementary estimates. As you parliamentarians are aware, this is a clear indication of just how out of control the program has been, as this spending had not been budgeted.

The Auditor General's report is scathing. It outlines waste and mismanagement of immense scale. An important excerpt from the audit reads:

In our view, the financial information provided for audit by the Department does not fairly present the cost of the Program to the government. Our initial review found significant shortcomings in the information the Department provided. Consequently we stopped our audit of this information....

The Auditor General notes that costs exceeded \$1 billion, according to the department. And she noted that the cost was importantly incomplete.

The auditor also highlights that the program's focus had changed from high-risk firearms owners to excessive regulation and enforcement of controls over all owners and their firearms. The department concluded that, as a result, the program had become

overly complex and very costly to deliver, and that it had become difficult for owners to comply with the program. Importantly, the Auditor General notes, "The Department also did not report to Parliament the wider costs of the Program as required by the government's regulatory policy."

As a result, the CBC submitted a freedom of information request to attempt to gain better information on full costing. They ran a story in February 2004 reporting the full wasteful program costs at more than \$2 billion. Canadians likely will never know how much the wasteful program costs to date. Equally, we don't know fully how much it costs annually in direct and associated costs.

The RCMP reports it spends \$8.4 million a year on registration. Leave aside for a moment the credibility of this number. Simply add it to the \$98 million annual operating costs for other related programs, as outlined in the detailed research report from the Library of Parliament in 2003, and the total operating costs for the impact of this wasteful registry exceed \$106 million a year. Of course, we don't even know the real cost to the RCMP, as the ongoing registry's operating costs have been routinely, purposely misrepresented.

In her 2006 audit, the Auditor General points out repeated examples of improper accounting where spending was hidden from Parliament. One example is for \$17 million and another example is for \$22 million. She notes in 2006 that the managers intended to continue with this accounting practice of hiding costs.

Nor do we know the true feeling of the rank and file members of the force. On May 5 of this year, Deputy Commissioner Killam issued an outrageous memo to all commanding officers regarding Ms. Hoepfner's bill, ordering the commanders and all their employees to keep their opinions to themselves and their mouths shut. With this kind of culture of chill in the RCMP, the true costs of managing the wasteful registry may never truly be known, nor may the true attitudes of the front line officers.

The only way to save taxpayers from this ongoing debacle is for this committee and Parliament to put an end to the wasteful long-gun registry.

Thank you for your time.

● (1550)

The Chair: We will now proceed to the Coalition for Gun Control, Ms. Wendy Cukier, please.

Ms. Wendy Cukier (President, Coalition for Gun Control): Thanks very much for allowing me to appear. I'll try to address points that have not already been raised and keep to my time allotted.

The Coalition for Gun Control is a non-profit organization that was founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre. Its position on firearms regulation, including support for the licensing of all firearms owners and the registration of all firearms, has been supported by over 300 organizations across the country, including all major public safety organizations, as well as the Canadian Public Health Association, major injury prevention groups, victims' organizations, labour, and the like. So I appreciate having the opportunity to speak on behalf of the members who represent the coalition.

I want to make a few key points. I hope we'll have time to address in the Q and A some of the problematic claims that have already been made.

Fundamentally, all firearms are potentially lethal. There has been an effort to differentiate rifles and shotguns from handguns. While this is appropriate to a certain extent, because restricted weapons—particularly handguns—are more concealable than rifles and shotguns, there have been many claims suggesting that rifles and shotguns don't kill. That is simply not the case.

In fact, if we look at the data, rifles and shotguns are the firearms most often used in suicides, in domestic violence, and to kill police officers in this country. While references to “duck guns” seem to suggest that these firearms are somehow toys, let us not forget that if this bill passes, the Ruger Mini-14—the powerful semi-automatic used in the Montreal massacre—will no longer be registered; nor will a number of sniper rifles that have the power to shoot with accuracy at two kilometres and pierce Kevlar vests.

The other thing that is important to understand is that the firearms legislation was established not just as a crime-fighting tool, not just for police, although that was clearly one of its functions. The firearms legislation was also passed because of advocacy by public health organizations and injury prevention organizations across the country who were, like the Prime Minister of Canada, concerned with suicide prevention. You have in the brief a complete list of some of those organizations who have insisted that stronger controls on rifles and shotguns—the firearms most often used in suicides—because they are the firearms most readily accessible need to be registered in order to reinforce the licensing provisions.

The risk factors for suicide and for homicide are very similar. That's part of the reason why 50% of domestic violence incidents involving firearms end in suicide. That's part of the reason why many of the public shootings that have attracted considerable attention also end in suicide.

The screening provisions in the licensing portion of the legislation are critical for addressing this. As the Supreme Court clearly stated, the registration of all firearms is essential to reinforce the licensing provisions:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.

●(1555)

Part of the reason the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association, representing rank and file police officers, advocated for both licensing and registration back in 1991, culminating in the legislation that was passed in 1995, was because of the gaps in the existing legislation.

Many people around this table have argued that the firearms acquisition certificate was sufficient, that licensing was not required. Only one-third of firearm owners had valid firearms acquisition certificates. One of the big problems with the old firearms acquisition certificate system was that while records were supposed to be kept of firearm sales and transactions, there was in fact no record of how many guns an individual purchased unless police went store to store and examined their records. That meant legal gun owners could acquire as many rifles and shotguns as they wanted. If those rifles and shotguns were given, sold, or stolen, and ended up in the wrong hands, there were no mechanisms for tracing them back to their original owners. Hence, registration is absolutely essential for reinforcing the licensing provisions of the legislation. So people around this table who claim they support licensing must also logically support registration, which is key to reinforcing the licensing provisions.

It's also important to underscore the fact that the registry has been used by police to remove firearms from individuals who are potentially at risk to themselves or others. I know you have heard from the Canadian Police Association and you will be hearing from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, so I won't detail that any further, other than to say that we know for a fact that almost immediately after the shooting at Dawson College, a copycat made threats on the Internet, and the registry was part of what allowed the police to identify that individual and remove the firearms. Other cases have already been identified where the firearms registry has been instrumental in leading to convictions of individuals who have committed serious offences.

One of the other points that has been made in this debate is the notion that the support for firearms regulation, and particularly the registry, is purely an urban phenomenon. In fact, that is not the case. The groups that support the licensing and registration provisions of the legislation range from large national organizations to women's organizations in small rural communities, suicide prevention organizations, the Alberta council of injury prevention, and others. So the notion that this is just a big-city issue flies in the face of the evidence those groups have brought forward, and in fact, the data.

In my brief I've shown quite clearly that the rates of gun death and injury in Canada tend to be higher in the regions where there are more firearms available, even though in those very regions we see more opposition to the legislation.

I also want to draw your attention to the evidence we see when we look at rates of gun death and injury, when we look at rates of homicide with rifles and shotguns, when we look at rates of intimate partner violence. Rates are important. Some members around the table talk about numbers. It's important to look at the rate per hundred thousand.

What we see is that over the last 35 years, as we have strengthened controls over firearms, rates of firearm death and injury have declined. It's always very difficult to prove causal connections when we're dealing with complex phenomena such as crime or suicide, but the evidence appears to show that today we are far safer as a result of stronger firearms control than we were in the early 1970s.

● (1600)

I wish to draw the committee's attention to the fact that the provisions in this legislation do not simply eliminate the registration provisions that were introduced in 1995—

The Chair: I'm sorry—

Ms. Wendy Cukier: —but in fact eliminate the requirement that we record firearms sales, in effect taking us back not just 15 years but more than 30 years.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Boisvenu, please. Go ahead when you're ready, sir.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu (Senator, CPC, Senate): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, parliamentary colleagues.

As an introduction, I would like to begin by telling you a bit about my origins. I come from Abitibi-Témiscamingue. For those from the Canadian west or from territories located even further away, Abitibi-Témiscamingue is located in northwestern Quebec, and it is known primarily for hunting and fishing.

You can understand that, very early in my youth, firearms and hunting were part of my family's daily activities—I come from a family of trappers. I am not prejudiced against hunters, far be it from that. That is why I want to clearly indicate to you, at the outset, my position with respect to hunting, among other things. I have never experienced, in my personal or family life, any traumatic events, with the exception of my daughter's murder, committed by a sexual predator, who strangled her to death.

Moreover, my position or the comments that I will be making this afternoon may appear somewhat contradictory, given that I am the founder of an association for persons who have been assassinated or disappeared, namely the Association of Families of Persons Assassinated or Disappeared. Today the association has more than 600 member families who have lost one of their own as a result of a death or murder caused, in particular, by a firearm.

What bothers me a bit in this firearm debate is that, right now, this is more a debate about opinions rather than one based on science. I noted this when, just two weeks ago, I received a group from the Coalition for Gun Control in my Senate office. I realized how

difficult it was to discuss or even evaluate the program as such. Anyone who challenged certain aspects of the gun registry was automatically perceived as someone who was insensitive to violence against women, or someone who was almost in the enemy camp. It is unfortunate that, with this issue, you are either for or against, and no one has looked at the middle ground.

This is a very delicate topic of debate, particularly when we question certain aspects of it. As I said at the outset, I am not at all against the free circulation of firearms, far from that; I am in favour of some type of gun control, but not at any cost.

I am giving you opinions this afternoon. Since we are engaged in a debate about opinions, I will present mine. I am no expert, but I am someone who has already lived with firearms and has been with families who have had one of their members murdered. So I am speaking to you based on my experience in this matter.

I view the gun registry first and foremost as a work tool for police officers. This is a tool that is designed to protect them at work, and all of the police forces that have appeared before you have admitted this. This is primarily a tool that protects police officers. I believe that there is even a guideline obliging police officers to check the gun registry to determine whether or not there may be any firearms located on the premises they are to visit. When we hear that 10,000 checks are made daily, it is because the police officers have to do so to protect themselves.

I have some serious questions as to whether or not the gun registry can be viewed as an effective tool to prevent crime or murder. There is no clear scientific evidence demonstrating that the gun registry has had an impact on crime prevention.

The drop in the number of homicides and suicides in Canada started occurring in 1979. If we look at the homicide and suicide curve, we can see that it has declined since 1979. The registry came into effect in 1992 and it has not in any way triggered a sharper decline. The decline has been maintained at a constant level regardless of whether there was a registry or not. Hence, before we can claim that this tool has resulted in a drop in the crime rate, we need to be very cautious.

● (1605)

One has only to think about the events that took place at Dawson College—reference was made to this a short while ago—or at the École Polytechnique de Montréal, or of the police officers who recently were shot and killed. All of the weapons used had been registered. With respect to the event that took place at Dawson College, the weapon used was almost viewed as a hunting gun. Would we not be better off expanding the list of banned weapons? That is the question I am asking myself. According to data from British Columbia, 80% of the firearms seized in that province are illegal. Regardless of whether or not there is a registry, the problem of illegal weapons will always be with us.

What I'm trying to do is trigger a debate or some thought on crime prevention. In Canada, the murder rate is dropping off sharply, as are gun-related homicides. However, the number of homicides committed using either a handgun or a knife increased by 35% since 2000. Missing persons cases rose by 40% over the past six years. I am wondering about the expenses incurred to maintain the Canadian Gun Registry. We are talking about millions of dollars here. Is this the most effective place to invest in order to prevent crime? Firearms represent only 2.4% of the weapons used in homicides.

Canada adopted the Firearms Act, requiring the hunter or gun owner to register the weapon. Comparing the Canadian Gun Registry to a driver's licence is perilous, dangerous and at times dishonest. In Quebec, we pay \$500 per year to register a driver's licence. The government is responsible for administering the registry. The people who work at the Canadian Gun Registry are to a large extent volunteers. The hunter pays only once. In order for the Canadian Gun Registry to be effective and up to date, each gun owner would have to pay \$100 per year. That is the reality. The driver's licence registry is effective because this system is financed properly.

In my opinion, this registry will always have shortcomings, if only because there will always be problems with the updating of the firearms owners' list. As is the case for most of Canada's systems and registries, there will always be cost overruns. Just think about the Quebec health insurance card. In order to computerize this system, the initial costs nearly doubled. And then there is SYGBEC, the Quebec government's system to manage government information. It too had a cost overrun. As soon as a system is computerized, we have to expect there to be a cost overrun. It is unavoidable.

Mr. Chair, I will conclude by saying that we must stop exaggerating the importance of the Canadian Gun Registry when it comes to crime prevention. When we examine the declining curve of homicides and suicides, which has remained constant since 1979, we realize that the registry has not triggered an even quicker decline in these rates.

As a senator, I am asking myself the following question: if we need to invest tens of millions of dollars in crime prevention, would we not be better off investing this money somewhere else rather than in the registry, given that we have not been able to demonstrate that it has had an impact on crime prevention?

Thank you.

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the Honourable Chris Bentley, please.

Go ahead, sir.

Hon. Chris Bentley (Attorney General of Ontario, Government of Ontario): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to join the debate, and quite a debate it's been already this afternoon.

I'm not delivering a letter, I'm here in person. I know you've heard a lot of testimony, not only during these hearings but during the long debate about the gun registry.

I suspect that what joins the overwhelming majority of people in this debate is that we all wish for pretty much the same things. We all want a safe society. We all want a crime-free society. We want to apprehend those who commit crimes, and make sure the system of justice meets its appropriate result.

The real question is what will be achieved if this bill is passed? What will be achieved in furthering the ends of crime prevention, the administration of justice, the apprehension of criminals, and the prosecution of offences?

It's my respectful submission to you that nothing will be achieved, and that in fact—in fact—we will undermine the efforts of those who are charged with preventing, with enforcing the law, with prosecuting.

I see at the outset that there has been discussion at various times about what a single tool in law enforcement can and cannot do. The standard is not one of perfection for any tool, whether it's a registry, whether it's a law, whether it's an approach. There's nothing. There is no one tool that is perfect. The issue really is this: does it contribute in a significant way? The evidence is pretty clear that the gun registry does contribute in a significant way. Almost 11,000 times a day, it's accessed. Almost 11,000 times a day, it's accessed by those on the front lines of law enforcement in Canada.

Now, you could say that many of those are automatic accesses. They happen when other checks occur. But it wouldn't be accessed if it wasn't useful, if it didn't have important information, information that can protect not only the officer answering the call, the officer in assessing the risk, but information that could assist in law enforcement or the investigation.

The information in the gun registry contributes to the reasonable and probable grounds officers require in search and seizure warrants, in arrest warrants. It contributes significantly to the information that investigative officers require in order to determine who committed certain offences.

But the information doesn't stop with the officer. In the province of Ontario, as the Attorney General, I'm responsible for the crowns who prosecute crime, crowns who have to make determinations and make presentations to the judiciary, justices of the peace and judges, about whether an individual is capable of being released once they're arrested, or should be held for a bail hearing, or whether their detention should continue, or they should be released on certain conditions. The information in the registry assists in that determination.

No, it's not perfect. Gosh, if you ever find the perfect tool, let me know what it is. In a system that consists primarily of men and women working their best every day and doing their best, you're not likely to find perfection in any one tool. But it does assist that determination, knowing who's registered as owning guns, what types, whether a person can be released into the custody of another who presents themselves as a surety or guarantor, and thereby might have access to guns.

These are all important pieces of information. Perfect? No, it's not perfect, but it's of significant assistance, as is the information in the hands of those who have to consider parole questions or sentencing questions, sentencing that might result in probation, or community supervision. The question of whether somebody is being released into a household where there are firearms present or not can be important information—not perfect but important information.

• (1615)

I suppose one of the questions is that if you get rid of it, what replaces it? Would it be the position of the proponents of the bill that the information is simply irrelevant in all cases? Or is it the position of the proponents of the bill that somehow the information could be replaced in a different way, and if so, how? Licensing is only the first step.

So the question is what replaces it, and why would you want to deny those who stake their lives on the fact that the information is important? Why would you want to deny them that information? Why would you want to deny those, who are charged with the responsibility of prosecuting, the access to that information that they maintain is important?

There is no one tool that would be perfect. In fact, the police and the crowns, every single day, access information of various degrees of completeness and credibility. They make those assessments every minute of every day in every case. Whether it's the undercover officer accessing information from an informant, whether it's the crown assessing professional or other witnesses, many of whom have contradictory stories, they're assessing information all the time. But the magic is the information, not the denial of the information, not the refusal to look at the information.

I've never met a front line professional who, when given the opportunity to look at something that they were able to look at, said "No, I don't want to look at that; I don't want to know that; I'm not interested." I've never met that person, ever. I practised for 25 years on the other side from where I am now, but I never met that. People want to know and then they'll make their assessment using their own personal and professional judgment, which is extremely important.

In this particular case, in the case of the gun registry, it's not a question of vilifying the owners of guns in any way, shape, or form. It is minimally intrusive on the owners to register, minimally intrusive. When you have a tool that is minimally intrusive but can provide very important information, in my respectful submission we should not deny its continuance, deny its updating, deny its strengthening.

Let me conclude with this. Bad things happen to good people. Guns are stolen. Guns go into circulation. The criminal may be found with the gun, but the investigation may extend not only to that one offence but to others, and knowing where the gun started and knowing what the trail is, is enormously important in the resolution not only of the one crime but others, in assessing the degree of seriousness with which that individual at the end of the trail should be assessed because of the apprehension.

So I say simply that the Province of Ontario's perspective, the perspective of the Attorney General, is that this registry should be maintained and Bill C-391 should not be supported.

Strengthened? Absolutely. Enhanced? Absolutely. But the registry should be maintained. It contributes significantly to the protection of the people, not only in the province of Ontario but, I believe, throughout the country.

Thank you very much.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We will now proceed to Sergeant Duane Rutledge.

Anytime you're ready, sir, go ahead.

Sgt Duane Rutledge (Sergeant, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, and fellow witnesses.

My name is Duane Rutledge. I'm a member of the Glasgow Police Service in Nova Scotia. I'm in my thirtieth year of service. I've been a police officer for two-thirds of my life. I have worked general duty, drugs, GIS, major crime, and undercover, and I'm a member of the emergency response team. Presently, I'm a dog handler. Since I was eight years of age, I've handled firearms in either a hunting or a work capacity.

I would like to thank the committee for giving me this opportunity to speak on this controversial matter regardless of which side I might stand on. As an average citizen, it confirms my faith in our system to be involved in the making and changing of laws in our country without fear of reprisals or punishment. It's something that's unheard of in most places. For that, I thank the Government of Canada and Canada's people for an open and inclusive justice system.

We are here today to discuss the long-gun registry and why I feel that it has not achieved what it proposed to do. In my view, it is a failure both in protecting citizens and in assisting the police in their efforts to keep communities safe and criminals off the street.

I feel that to understand this we must go back to the start, to how it was presented to Canadians by the government of the day. How it was delivered to the public was one of the biggest issues: that it would make society safer by registering. It was rural against urban and non-owners against owners. Its astronomical cost turned even those who were not gun owners against it.

Initially, it was looked at as a tax on gun owners. Mostly, it targeted rural Canadians.

It's an unreliable system. Some people registered their weapons in this country, some people registered a few weapons in this country, and a lot of people didn't register any. Now we have an underground economy as a result of that.

Also, people who have licences to "possess only" have the ability to possess guns that are not registered to them, the guns of other people. There is no way of tracking that regardless of what system there is, because no one keeps track of those movements.

For the most part, the people this law was targeted at were hunters, sportsmen, collectors, and rural people—basically, honest Canadians, which is most of this country. In my experience, a large number of Canadians did not buy into it on the front end, which has caused the underground economy of weapons. Most importantly, in my experience, criminals will not even participate in the registry.

People who register a gun realize that this does not make it safe for them or for anyone else. Speaking in particular, it is an administrative function. It will not render a gun safe. As for recording the serial number, putting a serial number on it is not adequate to stop a knife or a bat from harming someone.

It's the person with the intent to cause harm who the police are most concerned about. And at the end of the day, in every homicide in this country, the common factor is another human being.

Safe handling and storage, along with education of the public, is the best way to attack this. The most powerful piece of legislation passed in this country in my lifetime was the one that locked up guns and separated ammunition from guns. Also, it was for safe training and for handling the storage of firearms. In my belief, that's what has caused a drop in a lot of things.

On elimination of private ownership, which is on the minds of most gun owners, I don't believe that's the answer, because only the police, the military, and the criminals then would have guns. I recall my initial reaction back in 1996-97 when this proposed gun legislation became public. I admit that I was a little upset at the onset. I was not positive towards it, and I thought that maybe I should speak to people before I came up here because my views have been fairly steady all along.

So I took the time before I came up here to speak to colleagues in my policing community, both those on the federal side—for some of them it has been tried to muzzle them—and local police officers. I've talked to the prosecution service. I've talked to a judge. I've talked to the lady who runs our local transition house. I've talked to people who have criminal records to get a view of how they looked at the system.

I knew how I looked at it and I thought that maybe I was missing something. After my conversation with them, it's very clear. Very few of them believe that it has protected the public. There are a few in those numbers who did believe it was helping. The majority of people I spoke to did not believe that.

In my over 30 years of experience, I've encountered numerous situations involving violence. There are far more involving knives and edged weapons than guns. Shotguns and hunting rifles are not a weapon of choice for most criminals because of their actual size; when they are used, they are cut down to become prohibited weapons.

•(1625)

In the 1930s, handguns were registered, and violence in handguns is still growing today. It seems to be one of the biggest rises in this country, the use of handguns in cities, gangs, and organized crime, and automatic weapons.

In other words, I have no hesitation in saying that in my opinion, the long-gun registry does not help police stop violence or make

these communities safer from violence. And there's no evidence that it has ever saved a single life on its own merits.

I am disappointed that this issue has become so political in this country. I've heard the chiefs of police quoted here and also the Canadian association of professional police. To my knowledge, my members, where I'm at, were not polled by the Canadian Police Association for their viewpoint on this. Many people have been, in an attempt to muzzle them from giving their full views on this issue. It's something that's uncalled for in this country. As I said, everyone should have the ability to speak their opinion, regardless of which side you stand on, and when someone says they represent someone, they should represent those people by actually polling them and getting their full views. I know that on the police level that has not been done, regardless of what people have been told, and there has been a fair amount of political pressure put on people to be quiet about this.

My own chief was outspoken about this. He was scheduled to testify here, and now he's not testifying. I spoke to him personally, but as to why he's not here, you would have to speak to him. I know why he's not here. I came, myself, as an individual to represent the people who I've spoken to.

As I said, in my opinion it has not done what it was set out to do. Inflammatory remarks by members of those organizations referring to policemen who disagree with this as anonymous, donut-eating, sitting-in-the-coffeeshop police officers is uncalled for, and there's no need for it, either at this level or at the level of representing the chiefs of police or the Canadian Police Association.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Last, but not least, we have Professor Emeritus Mr. Gary Mauser.

Go ahead, sir.

Dr. Gary Mauser (Professor Emeritus, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to address the committee.

I'm a professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University. I am here as an individual criminologist to present facts, not myths; facts, not emotion.

In this presentation I will briefly show how claims made by the opponents of Bill C-391 are blatantly false or misleading. For more details, see my submission, which has already been distributed to members of this committee. It is also on the web at the Social Science Research Network, SSRN.

Suggestions that the long-gun registry is vital to police because authorities consult it 10,000 times a day or more are false. This claim confuses the long-gun registry with the Canadian Firearms Registry On-Line, the CFRO. The Honourable Peter Van Loan, then public safety minister, in November 2009 analyzed the police data and reported that 97% of the time when authorities check the CFRO, they want information about the owner, not the firearm. This concerns licensing, not registration.

Bill C-391 proposes no changes in licensing. The long-gun registry only includes information about the firearm. Contrary to some people who have testified here, it contains nothing about the location of that firearm, nor the owner.

The key question we have to look at is the effectiveness of the registry, not whether guns are dangerous. Focusing on guns is myopic. It ignores the problem of substitution. Murderers are opportunistic. This is particularly true for spousal murderers.

It is disingenuous to claim that the best approach to saving lives was to invent a new bureaucracy for \$2 billion merely to track long guns, and then waste more millions every year to maintain the illusion that we are doing something when demonstrably we are not. There is no convincing evidence supporting the claim that the long-gun registry has had any effect on homicide, suicide, or domestic violence rates. On the other hand, screening and training firearms owners, which we have done since the 1970s, has been shown to be effective.

The long-gun registry was not introduced until 2001—not in 1995, as some have led you to believe. Since 2001, homicide rates have been essentially flat, even though homicide rates had been plummeting since the early 1990s. The long-gun registry has not saved any lives.

Few guns involved in violent crime have been stolen. Studies differ, but the numbers are as low as 1% and as high as 17%. This is not the bulk of guns used in crime. Almost all of the guns involved in criminal violence have been smuggled. Smuggling is a problem in Canada, Australia, and the U.K. That is the source of crime guns, not your citizens.

Suicide rates have slowly declined over two decades. Firearm suicides have declined as well, but suicides by hanging have soared. Some call this a success. In 1991, 3,500 people took their own life; in 2005, 3,700. The long-gun registry has not saved any lives.

Sixteen percent of suicides involve firearms. Almost half of suicides involve hanging. You wouldn't know this from some of the opponents' testimony. Hanging, carbon monoxide poisoning, drowning, and shooting all have nearly identical fatality rates. Eliminate one and the rest remain. But oh, we could have a \$2 billion bureaucracy for each of those.

Some suggest that the costs of the long-gun registry are minimal, but \$4 million a year is a gross underestimate. That would make a massive contribution to programs that are more effective: suicide prevention efforts, community clinics for abused spouses, treatment programs for those with addiction problems. It is disappointing that women's groups, even medical groups, ignore real problems to flog firearm fears.

• (1630)

No jurisdiction anywhere in the world can show that the introduction of new gun laws has been linked to a reduction in murder, suicide, or aggravated assault. See my Harvard paper, which I did with criminologist Don Kates, also available on the web at SSRN. Research by both the National Academy of Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta back up my claim.

It is difficult to understand why the chiefs of police support the long-gun registry. The CFRO has so many errors that relying upon it puts the lives of rank-and-file police members at risk. This is a classic database problem: garbage in, gospel out. The police should know better.

Millions of entries are incorrect or missing. Most striking, less than half of all long guns in Canada are in the registry. The long-gun registry does worse; it misdirects the police. People who have registered their firearms are less likely to be violent than Canadians who don't even own firearms. They should be. Gun owners have been screened by the police since 1979. We are told that 15% of the guns used in homicides are long guns. What is not said is that virtually none were registered. How does the gun registry help?

When I spoke at the Ontario Police College, one of the instructors told me privately that trusting the registry was a way to get good police officers killed. Consider the four RCMP rookies who were gunned down by James Roszko in Mayerthorpe, Alberta. His firearms were not in the registry. Trusting the registry lulled these young people into a sense of safety. The registry showed no guns present: so there must not be any. When they went to his home they were killed. Poor training contributed to the deaths of these rookies. Experienced front line police officers know that when attending to potentially violent situations, they must always assume a weapon could be present. The registry is no help.

Similarly, when enforcing court orders to confiscate firearms, the registry cannot be relied upon to identify firearms at a residence. The RCMP have testified in court they cannot trust the registry. The registry is no help.

Opponents to Bill C-391 argue that the long-gun registry is important because rifles and shotguns can be used in domestic homicide. This is a red herring. The problem is the murder of family members, not the means of killing. Almost all firearms used by abusive spouses to kill their wives are possessed illegally. They are not in the registry.

It has been illegal since 1992 for a person with a violent record to own a firearm. They are not even in the CFRO. There is no empirical support for the claim that the long-gun registry has reduced spousal murders. Knives are used in almost one-third of domestic homicide. Rifles and shotguns, much less often—18% or so. Why aren't opponents of Bill C-391 concerned about women being killed with other weapons?

Opponents of Bill C-391 claim that spousal murder with guns have fallen threefold since the law was passed, while spousal murders without guns have remained the same. This is false. Spousal murders with and without guns have been slowly declining since the mid-seventies. The long-gun registry, I repeat, was not started until 2001. See charts one and eight in my submission.

Bill C-391 does not change licensing or screening requirements. It only concerns the long-gun registry. Neither the long-gun registry nor licensing is typically useful to police in solving spousal homicides. In almost all cases the accused is immediately identified.

The focus on the long-gun registry is a red herring. It distracts attention from serious problems such as gang crimes. Gang-related homicides have been increasing since the early nineties. In 2008 about one in four homicides was gang-related. Almost all of these were committed with illegally possessed handguns. See my charts two and three in the submission.

•(1635)

In closing, I urge committee members to read my submission in full. They will find my claims to be fully substantiated. My citations are not newspaper clippings.

I support gun laws that are based on what has been shown to work, not those based on perceptions or fears. When a government program isn't working, it should be shut down rather than being permitted to drain funds for no good reason except employment.

Finally, I wish to thank the chair of the committee, as well as the committee members, for allowing me an opportunity to show how the claims of the opponents of Bill C-391 are blatantly false or misleading.

Thank you.

•(1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

As is the usual practice of the committee, we will now have seven minutes of questions and comments, beginning with the Liberal Party. I would like to remind everybody that it includes the answers as well, so hopefully you will take that into account when you're doing this.

Mr. Holland, please.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for appearing today.

I would like to start, Minister Bentley, with yourself as Attorney General for Canada's most populous province. We know that not only are the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Chiefs of Police saying this is a vital public safety tool to save lives, but that in fact of the more than 430 chiefs in the country, only three support dismantling the registry, and that of the more than 150 police associations across the country, only six support dismantling the registry; all the rest say it's vital. In fact, of those six, they're represented by one broader association that is now reconsidering their position in light of all the facts that have come in front of them. Of course, we have paramedics, doctors, labour, all of these organizations....

Is it pretty extraordinary for one tool that police have to have this kind of support out there?

Hon. Chris Bentley: It is extraordinary. The chiefs have spoken seemingly with a near-unanimous voice. I know you'll be hearing from Chief Blair, representing the chiefs of police, in the future. But in my experience, it is an extraordinary expression of support.

I simply say that I have enormous respect for all of our police officers, whether they're chiefs or front line. Whatever their experience, I want to make sure they have the tools they need to stay safe themselves and to properly investigate and keep the rest of us safe.

Mr. Mark Holland: Minister, I, too, have deep respect and recognize that in the policing community, as in any community, there's going to be divergent opinion. You're not going to get 100% on anything. So I respect of course that we have a very excellent officer here, I'm sure, from New Glasgow. We had three retired officers from Winnipeg. So of course we would expect there's going to be outlying opinion.

I'm wondering what your opinion is on this. Even if we were to assume that somehow the police associations, which are elected by rank-and-file police officers, are somehow not representing police, and even if we were to assume that the divide that is attempted to be painted here indeed existed, and let's say only 50% instead of 98% of those on the front lines of keeping our communities safe said that this is an important tool and it saves lives and they need it to do their jobs, would that not unto itself be sufficient, if you say that 50% of officers said this was a tool that they used and needed for their job?

Hon. Chris Bentley: Well, the tool exists, and as long as a significant number of front line officers or chiefs say it's important in protecting the public, I think we should think once, twice, and three times before dismantling it.

Mr. Mark Holland: To Ms. Cukier, first of all, I'm sorry you're here, to be honest. You've been fighting this battle for a very long time, representing more than 300 victims' groups, and worked very hard for us to get an effective gun registry that does save lives. I'm sorry that you're yet again having to fight this battle.

One of the things I want to tackle is the issue of cost. I don't think anybody can deny costs were high. The Auditor General spoke clearly about that. But one of the things that wasn't mentioned about the Auditor General's 2006 report was that she said the system is now efficient and working effectively.

In fact, the Auditor General has now stated that the cost is \$4.1 million. Given the fact that hopefully...and, I would say, presumably, because things are cyclical, we're going to eventually have another government, if Bill C-391 was successful and dismantled the registry, would it not be enormously costly to then have to restart the registry all over again, when we've already incurred those costs of starting up the registry and we're now down, according to the RCMP and the Auditor General, to \$4.1 million a year in costs?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Thanks very much for raising that question. I'll try to be brief.

One of the things that is clearly not well understood, and some would argue has been deliberately confused and misrepresented, is the fact that firearms are registered once—one time only—unless they're sold or traded. Hence, 7 million firearms are registered. Most of those never, ever have to be registered again; hence, it is a sunk cost. The \$4.1 million, which I think is the estimate from the RCMP of what would be saved if we ended the registration of rifles and shotguns tomorrow, represents the costs of registering guns that are traded or sold.

The big-ticket item, both now and in the past, the item that has cost the most—I know you have the Auditor General coming, and I'm sure she can address this—was licensing, which everyone here says they support. What I find interesting is that there's this hue and cry over the \$4 million that maintaining the long-gun registry will cost given that we've sunk all those other costs, and nobody has raised a peep at the \$22 million in waived and refunded fees that this government basically wasted in terms of taxpayers' money. I think that's critically important.

The other thing is that one complex murder investigation can easily cost \$2 million. The value of the registry as an investigative tool and the costs that will be incurred as a result of not being able to trace guns back to their source is immense and inestimable.

• (1645)

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you.

Another issue that has been raised is that this is an issue for the urban community, not the rural community. I asked the Canadian Police Association, and they gave me a listing by census region of the most firearms-related incidents per 100,000 people. Of the top 50 census regions, 50 of 50 were in rural communities. That means rural communities lead the list of firearms-related incidents.

I'm wondering if you could talk to us on behalf of victims—as pediatricians have, as many police associations and national associations have—about the importance of this registry for rural communities.

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Again, I think you raise a really important point. It's part of the reason it's important to look at rates per 100,000. That's basically what public health and epidemiologists consider, as well as criminologists. They look at the rates per 100,000 of crimes and death because that gives you an indication of the severity.

And you're absolutely right; in fact, I have the Criminal Code incidents right in front of me. Toronto has one of the lowest rates of firearms homicide in the country and certainly one of the lowest rates of firearms deaths.

If you talk to the Canadian Paediatric Society or the Association for Adolescent Health or the Canadian Public Health Association or the suicide prevention groups, they will tell you that young people are more at risk of being killed with firearms in rural communities, and in the west and in the north, than they are in downtown Toronto because availability is such a critical issue. In fact, as you note, children are often caught in the crossfire of domestic violence when firearms are involved—very often in rural communities.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there for this round.

Ms. Mourani, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I have a question for Mr. Boisvenu. I paid close attention to your presentation and perhaps you can tell me if I'm wrong. In a way, you have not taken a position on the registry, you have not said whether you are for or against it. You said that the registry is a work tool for police officers, specifically in regards to health and safety.

Do you believe this single aspect of the registry is significant enough for it to be maintained?

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: I worked for 15 years as a public safety senior official. The first thing police officers are taught in training is that they are responsible for their own safety. I fully agree with Professor Mauser: the murder of the four young police officers in western Canada was attributable to a professional mistake on their part. In Ms. Gignac's case, where she was killed with a registered firearm, one should not forget that a judge had granted an individual with psychiatric issues the right to carry the weapon for a month, during the hunting season.

If the registry only serves to protect police officers' lives, that is a fundamental flaw. I am not saying that querying the registry to see whether an individual possesses a firearm does not have an effect. In fact, close to 40% of address-related data in the registry is false. We have to pay \$2 billion to protect the health and safety of police officers. In my opinion, that is the only causal relationship we have any evidence for. It is too expensive.

• (1650)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'd like to get back to your point, when you were referring to the registry as an effective tool for prevention.

We heard from Mr. Cheliak of the RCMP who told us that in 2009, 7,000 firearms registration certificates had been revoked in Canada, either by a judge or by a firearms officer. The reasons for doing so included mental health problems, domestic violence, risk of suicide and the uttering of death threats by young people who threatened to commit mass shootings in their high school or colleges. The weapons were removed for prevention purposes.

In my opinion, to prevent incidents, we need to act before an offence is committed. I think you would agree with that. The fact that 7,000 certificates were revoked from potentially dangerous individuals because they had a host of problems is a sign of great effectiveness, is it not, if you consider the 4 million we are referring to?

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Yes. That said, there is no way of proving whether murders would have been committed if they had not been revoked.

Take for instance the situation which occurred in the Lac-Saint-Jean area last year. A request was issued to revoke the licence of someone who had psychiatric problems. It was never done, and two weeks later, he killed someone.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Well in fact, that is a good example, because we were saying that 7,000 individuals had their certificates revoked, including some people with major mental health problems. This was done before they committed any offence. It's a great preventive measure for society.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: There are other means to arrive at the same results.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Not necessarily.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: An individual with psychiatric problems can possess an unregistered firearm.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: That is another matter.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: It is not another matter. You are saying that an issue I am raising is another matter. In fact, it is the very same thing. The management of firearms—

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Wait a moment. I am talking to you about the registry. You are questioning the usefulness of the registry—we are indeed talking about the registry—with respect to prevention.

Mr. Cheliak informed us that the registry had enabled us to revoke 7,000 certificates, each certificate possibly being valid for several firearms. We can never prove whether or not crimes would or would not have been committed, since the instrument which would have been used had been taken away.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Mrs. Mourani, what I'm telling you is that it is not the registry that enables us to take away the firearm. Information may have been disclosed by a neighbour, by a spouse or by some other individuals. The withdrawal of a firearm is not necessarily triggered by the registry—the spouse may have denounced her husband, who has a firearm, and requested that it be seized—even though, according to the registry, we can see that a firearm has been withdrawn.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand what you are getting at. However, that is not what I'm trying to get across, and I know that I do not have very much time.

Perhaps we should improve the registry. Nevertheless, in your opinion, do you feel that at present we can determine whether or not the registry is a tool enabling the police to take dangerous firearms out of circulation and prevent crimes from occurring?

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: It's a matter of costs.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: We're talking about \$4 million.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: I think it is naive to think that it costs us \$4 million to administer the registry.

We are forgetting about two things. First of all, we are forgetting that it has not been updated for years. Secondly, we are forgetting about the cost of lawsuits. Let us not forget that the Firearms Act does not provide for the registration of firearms alone, but also for the legal prosecution of offenders. There is a cost associated with that.

For instance, if one million firearms are not registered, will the government invest the requisite money in order to prosecute these

individuals who, according to the law—I would remind you of this—may be given a 7-year prison term?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Unfortunately, there is currently an amnesty in effect which lets them run around.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: I do understand, but if we were to take the law—

Mrs. Maria Mourani: It is true that, at present, it is difficult to administer the registry because of this amnesty.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Mrs. Mourani, I am asking you whether or not we could prosecute these people if we were to restore the gun registry. If so, how much would it cost?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: According to the current legislation, yes.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: But what will it cost? Have you calculated the cost?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: One moment.

I have some questions for Mr. Mauser, and given the amount of time I have left, I will not be able to ask them all.

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: You have half a minute.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Mauser, we have been told that you are the person who advised the government about the firearms. Is that correct? As far as the gun registry is concerned, you would be a person of prominence. You have even been quoted by Mr. Day several times in letters.

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: I'm glad that people quote me, but I can't say I'm an official specialist or an official adviser. You'd have to ask the Conservative Party or the government themselves. If they've hired me, I've received no cheque and received no title, so I think the answer is no.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Very well.

As an expert in criminal law, do you own any firearms?

[English]

The Chair: One more response.

Dr. Gary Mauser: Several years after coming to Canada, I started researching the sociology of gun owners as part of my academic program. Before I started this research, I was as naive about guns as any professor. I knew nothing about guns. After I finished the research and I discovered that the myths about gun ownership were laughably false, that gun owners were in fact honest, contributing members of society, that their violence rates were lower than non-gun owners, then I purchased my first gun. It was an old-style black-powder firearm.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: How many firearms do you have?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Comartin, please.

Sorry, we went way over time here.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

Ms. Ducharme, perhaps I could start with you. The Prime Minister in the run-up to the election in 2008—it was in August or September—was in the Miramichi area, and promised that there would be no job losses at the centre if the long-gun registry was gotten rid of.

I'd like to know if you heard about those comments he made and if there would be no job losses if the long-gun registry was in fact gotten rid of.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Yes, I did hear that those comments and promises had been made. I think it's of note that when the registry was actually situated in Miramichi, it was as a result of the economic devastation that followed the closing of the base in New Brunswick. Although there are only 238 jobs at the gun registry, as opposed to many hundreds and hundreds of jobs....

But the Prime Minister did make those comments. I've been on the phone talking to our members. They know that I'm here this afternoon. No one knows what the government has as an alternative should the gun registry close.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Okay.

Ms. Cukier, you didn't give us any particular information on the impact on accidental deaths. You mentioned it a couple of times.

Are there any statistics anywhere that we could look to, pre-long-gun registry and post-long-gun-registry, on the rate of accidental death? I'm looking here with regard to children and adults.

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Unintentional injuries or accidental deaths are actually a very small percentage of the overall firearm deaths. In 1991 there were about 1,400 firearm deaths in Canada. That was primarily suicide and homicide. Accidents were about 25.

The number of accidental deaths has in fact declined steadily over time. The registry no doubt contributes, because it helps enforce the safe storage provisions. It's one of the arguments that the police have made over and over.

But overall, the accidental deaths are a relatively small percentage of firearm deaths. I do have Canada's mortality statistics, and I can look it up for you, but not quite so quickly. It's under 20 a year, essentially.

Mr. Joe Comartin: When Senator Boisvenu was making a comment, you shook your head and said it wasn't true. Could you comment as to what you felt was inaccurate in his statement?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: It was the comment with respect to the firearm use at Dawson College. If the translation was correct, I believe the senator stated that it was an unrestricted hunting rifle. In fact it was a restricted firearm that probably should have been a prohibited firearm.

Many of you have probably already heard about the push from the police to update the list of prohibited weapons, because there are many firearms currently being sold as unrestricted and restricted

weapons that frankly should never have been imported to Canada, and that would be one of them.

• (1700)

Mr. Joe Comartin: As an example, we had the exchange this last couple of weeks over this gun from China that could be easily converted. Is that one of the examples of a weapon that should have been on a different list?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: We have argued for a number of years that the Ruger Mini-14 should have been moved to restricted category—that was the gun used at Polytechnique—because of certain characteristics. There are also firearms that are sold as restricted weapons, like the AR-15, that should be prohibited. Recently we've seen a lot of press around sniper rifles, for example, and the fact that they're being sold as non-restricted firearms. Many would argue that the 50-calibres in particular should be prohibited.

So there are some issues around the classifications, and hence the concern about when these non-restricted weapons are no longer tracked. And remember, this bill not only eliminates the need to register the firearms, it also has no provision for recording the sale of firearms in the stores, a provision that has been in place since 1977, which at least allowed police a starting point. That is absent from this. There will be no information about who has these guns, and as a result, if they end up involved in crime or in the wrong hands, there's no way to hold people accountable.

Mr. Joe Comartin: We'll be in the position fairly soon to sign on to protocols, both with the UN and with the Organization of American States, which will require us to publish each year all of the handguns and individual weapons. I'm talking about non-military weapons, although some of these, I suppose, could fall into those categories too. If this bill goes through and the long-gun registry is done away with, will we have any way of complying with those two protocols?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: The importance of registration in fulfilling our international obligations is the subject of some discussion. I know that many people around here received a joint letter that was signed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, police associations, and police boards, arguing against the government's decisions around marking and tracing. A number of experts have put forward the position that, if this law passes, Canada would no longer be able to meet its international obligations under the marking and tracing regime and under the 2001 Programme of Action. In fact, special rapporteurs on violence against women, as well as human rights and small arms, have suggested that countries that fail to adequately regulate firearms to protect civilians and particularly women from firearm violence are failing their obligations under international human rights law.

It's not my area of expertise, but certainly there are indications that there are problems if this law passes.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I have one more question, Ms. Cukier, with regard to the arguments we've heard from Mr. Gaudet, Professor Mauser, and I guess Detective Rutledge.

The Chair: You'll have to really make this brief. You're out of time.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I listened to those arguments. The same evidence that they proclaim makes the long-gun registry useless and wasteful, and those kind of terminologies, applies, as I see it, to the handgun registry, the restricted registry. Is there any evidence that supports why we should get rid of the long-gun registry and keep the registry of handguns?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: The principles are basically the same. That's why I started by saying that all guns are potentially lethal. All gun owners need to be licensed. All guns need to be registered.

The Chair: Mr. Rathgeber, please.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I'll be sharing my time with Mrs. Glover.

Ms. Cukier, you referred to the Ruger Mini-14 as a weapon that will no longer need to be registered if Bill C-391 was passed. Did I hear that correctly?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You'll agree with me that it is a semi-automatic rifle?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You'll agree with me that its barrel is less than 47 centimetres?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: I don't know the length of its barrel, but I know that it's currently sold as a non-restricted firearm and therefore will no longer be registered.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Well, you know that if its barrel is less than 47 centimetres, it's a restricted firearm?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: The Ruger Mini-14 is most certainly not a restricted firearm. It has a long barrel.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: That wasn't my question. Do you agree with me that if its barrel is less than 47 centimetres, it's restricted?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Some variants may be restricted, but the Ruger Mini-14 has a long barrel—

• (1705)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: And if it's altered, cut off, it becomes prohibited. You understand that?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

You referenced \$4.1 million savings in your paper. Did you cost that, or did you just rely on the *National Post* and Canwest Media for that number?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: I relied on the RCMP. We have two pieces of testimony—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

Mr. Gaudet, did you—

Ms. Wendy Cukier: —from the RCMP.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: —do some costing with respect to your \$106 million, or did you just rely on the media?

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: Thank you for your question.

The cost analysis we undertook involved the \$8.4 million published by the RCMP. It's important to reiterate that the Auditor General reportedly notes that the cost is importantly underreported—inaccurately reported, in fact. It flouts the important parliamentary obligations of elected officials, like yourselves, who normally have great due diligence and responsibility and care to oversee the spending of government, and, I would have thought, normally would be upset to find out that members of the bureaucracy would purposely, in violation of the dictates of the Auditor General, flout—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...Mrs. Glover has some questions.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): I'm going to ask some quick questions. Thank you to all our witnesses for being here.

I too want to focus on a couple of things that Ms. Cukier has said.

I'm going to ask you some questions. Perhaps you could just give me a yes or no answer to the first question, because I have a number of questions.

Have you or the Coalition for Gun Control ever received any grants or contributions, any money at all, from the previous Liberal government to promote your views on this issue?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: No.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Well, in fact did you not receive in 2002 a three-year contract for \$380,000 to develop strategies for the implementation of the firearms law?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Absolutely. It was from the Quebec government via the National Crime Prevention Council. It was a competitive bid, and the program was very specifically focused on implementation of the law—nothing to do with advocacy, which I think you implied in your question.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I'm not implying anything specific other than we are aware that you do have some motivation for being involved in this issue, including: have you donated to the Liberal Party?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: Yes. And I've donated to the NDP Party—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good.

Ms. Wendy Cukier: —and I've donated to the Bloc Québécois Party.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

Ms. Wendy Cukier: One party's missing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Senator, as you indicated, the registry has not had an impact on crime prevention. I am a police officer and I agree, but I would like to know whether, as the founder of the Association of Families of Persons Assassinated or Disappeared, you feel that the registry is an effective means of saving lives.

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Currently, the number of homicides committed using a gun is decreasing, but it is as though over the last decade we had seen an increase in this type of crime and found it necessary to act. That is the impression we are under, but it is quite the opposite. Since 1979, the crime and homicide rate involving the use of guns has been in free fall. The registry came into effect in 1992. With or without the registry, crime and homicide rates will continue to decline. This is obvious, and it is for all kinds of reasons.

Yes, urbanization is of critical importance in terms of the use of firearms. When I was at the Ministère du Loisir, de la Chasse et de la Pêche du Québec [Quebec Ministry of Leisure, Hunting and Fishing], the number of hunting permits was constantly decreasing. That has been the case for 20 years, to the point that we are wondering whether there will be a new generation of hunters. There are all kinds of factors to be considered. The fact that couples are separating is one. Hunting is no longer passed along as a cultural value from father to son. In many cases, when a couple separates, it is the mother who raises the children. Hunting, however, is not really a part of women's values. There is therefore a natural phenomenon of decline as far as crimes are concerned. Whether or not there is a registry, it cannot be scientifically proven that this will have an impact on crime.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: My time has expired?

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Oh, do I? Very good.

I want to correct a couple of things that were discussed so far. We discovered very clearly recently when the CPA president was here that in fact, as Sergeant Rutledge said, he had not canvassed his members. He commented that nine regional members made the decision to support the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP in their position.

I can tell you that when I was policing and when this first came about, we canvassed every member, and back then there were 60,000 members; now there are only 41,000 members of the CPA. And at that time, overwhelmingly, police officers said they believed it was ineffective and it was not going to help them fight gun crime.

Why did the CPA not include that question when they did the 2010 survey asking many important questions about policing issues? It's interesting they would not ask that question, and yet the CPA president came here and referred to a survey done with all 75,000 police officers across this country about whether to use the firearms registry, and only 408 replied that they did; 408, which is less than 1% of the 41,000 CPA members, and far less when you look at the 75,000 who were serving.

It's interesting to me as a police officer, and to many police officers sitting here who have appeared, that we were never asked the question when years ago we stood up and said we disagreed overwhelmingly that it would stop gun violence.

Mr. Rutledge, why do you think no survey was done?

•(1710)

Sgt Duane Rutledge: I think quite possibly most on-the-street members realize that people are the problem. We will not control what people do. Our initial reaction would be that registering guns will not stop crime, will not make people safe, and will not assist us. We still go to as many houses now not knowing if there are guns in the house or if there aren't. You have to go for the worst and hope for the best, still this day, and that's still our approach.

So it hasn't helped us. It still doesn't make us safe.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: As we've said, it's far more than the \$4 million that we keep referring to. It's probably far more than \$8 million.

Mr. Mauser, you'll probably get a chance to answer that.

If there were more money for policing, don't you think that would be a better investment?

The Chair: We'll have to get back to that on the next round.

Ms. Jennings, please.

Sgt Duane Rutledge: I would say much more effective would be enhancing our DNA ability in this country. If you want to put bad guys in jail, do that. Spend the money on DNA.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jennings, please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses. I appreciate your presence here today, as I know my colleagues in the Liberal Party of Canada do as well.

Ms. Cukier, you were asked about the cost savings of abolishing the firearms registry. It's my understanding that the Auditor General actually addressed the cost of the registry and the cost of registration versus the cost of licensing, and therefore the cost of registration....

And this is according to the Auditor General, not some speculation. I believe Canadians trust her implicitly, which is why members of Parliament are coming under a great deal of pressure with regard to her auditing our expenses. I invite people to go on my website to see my expenses.

A voice: I've already done it.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: So the cost is \$4.1 million. Am I correct?

Ms. Wendy Cukier: The Auditor General looked at how the billion dollars was spent over 10 years. That information is broken down and shows that more than two-thirds of the money that was spent went to licensing gun owners. The \$4.1 million, as far as I'm aware, is a figure that was given by the RCMP when they were asked how much would be saved if the registration of rifles and shotguns were eliminated. Remember, 7 million have already been registered; it's only a few hundred thousand every year that are re-registered, so it makes sense to me.

There was previous testimony by one of the deputy commissioners that put the estimate around \$3.3 million, I think. But those figures come from the RCMP, not from the Auditor General, as far as I know.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you for that correction. I do appreciate it, so it's very clear, and I apologize that I inadvertently made an incorrect statement. I'm glad you've corrected that.

Professor Mauser, I'll use Ms. Glover as my role model: have you received funding from the NRA for any of your studies or research work?

Dr. Gary Mauser: Yes, I have. When I first began researching—

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

Dr. Gary Mauser: —I got \$400.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Have you contributed to the Conservative Party of Canada, or its predecessor the Canadian Alliance, or its predecessor the Reform Party of Canada?

Dr. Gary Mauser: I have contributed to the Conservative Party, the Reform Party, the NDP, and the Liberals.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you. That's excellent.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I'm pleased; I'm pleased. Thank you so much. That's wonderful.

It just goes to show that whether it's Madam Cukier or Mr. Mauser, they're following in the wonderful Canadian tradition of supporting our political parties as truly a fundamental pillar of our democracy.

Bravo to you both.

Mr. Mauser, have you ever stated that you thought it would be a good idea to have a small number of employees working in schools, colleges, or educational institutions, to be trained in firearms in order to be able to protect the students who are there? Would that be a correct statement?

•(1715)

Dr. Gary Mauser: I don't remember saying such a statement, although I quite possibly did.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Well, let me quote.... Apparently it's an article that you wrote to the Montreal *Gazette* regarding the Dawson College shooting, which was, in fact, not published in the *Gazette* but was published in volume 10, number 278, of the *Canadian Firearms Digest*. I have the entire quote here, but I'm not going to read it all.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: A little more than half a minute.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

My last question to you, Professor Mauser, is that, to my understanding, it's not only an issue of registration of long guns that you don't agree with, you also believe that licensing is even worse than registration. Is that correct?

Dr. Gary Mauser: That's correct.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: So in fact, when you come here to speak in favour of Bill C-391, you believe it doesn't go far enough, because it would only abolish the registry of long guns. You believe that no one should have to be licensed to own a firearm. Is that correct?

Dr. Gary Mauser: I am a strong proponent of police screening.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacKenzie, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Minister, just so you understand, we were limited in how many witnesses we could have. Those other four attorneys general would have liked to be here.

But I do have a question for you, Minister. I have a quote here that "a law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them". As well, "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." That is a quote attributed to Julian Fantino, who was at the time Police Chief in Toronto, and who is now the Commissioner of the OPP.

Do you think he's changed his view?

Hon. Chris Bentley: Well, I'll let the commissioner speak for himself.

As always, there was a lot of cost in setting up the registry. We now have it. The question is what to do with it. My advocacy is that we continue it. Thousands of police officers represented by their chiefs say that it's an important public safety tool.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Sergeant Rutledge, I think you indicated that you're an active police officer, you're assigned as a dog handler, and you frequently attend with SWAT teams. Has there ever been a case, or could you tell us of a case, in which you've checked the registry and believed the information to be valid?

Sgt Duane Rutledge: I've used it probably only a couple of times, and that was on the back end of an investigation, not on the front end. Being from an urban-rural community, we still rely on knowing the people we police, and using confidential informants and witnesses. We rely more on that at the front end of things, and that's how I go.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Good. Thank you.

Professor Mauser, there is lots of argument out there about the percentage of long guns that are currently registered. I wonder if you have a view—and I appreciate that it may very well be an opinion—as to what percentage of long guns are currently registered.

Dr. Gary Mauser: In a few of my academic papers I have tried to assess that. That is a very difficult question to answer. Import and export records suggest there are somewhere between 20 million and 30 million firearms in Canada. If we've registered seven million, that leaves quite a few unregistered.

The import and export numbers undoubtedly overestimate the number of legal guns that came into Canada. If we do surveys we come up with something in the order of 15 million firearms. And survey estimates, by the way, are probably underestimates.

So my best estimate would be something between 15 million and 20 million, which would probably be a rough estimate. It may be smaller than that, say 15 million to be conservative.

• (1720)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay.

Mr. Gaudet, if we spent \$2 billion—we don't know exactly how much we spent to register, say, the first half—what would you think about spending another \$2 billion to try to find the other half of the weapons?

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: I believe Professor Mauser's arguments regarding the efficacy of this program. I recognize that you, as elected officials, have a substantial budget deficit to struggle with—some \$48 billion this year alone, give or take. We'd like to see you working more actively on getting that number down. And any dollars that go toward a program for which the efficacy doesn't exist seems to be money that's ill spent.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Is there anybody who thinks it's a good idea that if only half of the guns are registered, it's got to be safe for police officers? This panel is made up of many former and active police officers. You don't trust something that's, at best, 50% accurate.

Hon. Chris Bentley: If you're asking me whether people want to know the information that's on the registry, I would say absolutely yes, and I would say people absolutely want to know that it's been compiled.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: But if 50% of it is wrong—

Hon. Chris Bentley: Those in law enforcement will tell you, those who have been crowned will tell you, and those who are in justice will tell you that it's rare you ever find that piece of information that can prove with certainty, 100%, of any one particular case. We're always dealing with information that's part of, always dealing with witnesses who are part of, and always dealing with part of the picture.

This is part of the picture. The question is do we turn a blind eye?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: But you wouldn't trust your life on it. That's my point. And I suggest to you, sir, that when you talk about that from that side....

Sergeant Rutledge, would you trust your life on it?

Sgt Duane Rutledge: That has been our problem since the start of this. It was promised; it was set out as something that was going to save lives and protect people. It has not done that. I'm still going there with the same feeling—do I or do I not know?—and that's the issue for me.

The Chair: We'll have to wrap it up there.

Ms. Mourani, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will share my time with my colleague.

Mr. Mauser, I would like short answers please. Is this in fact you in this photograph, with a handgun?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: That's me and that's my handgun.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: What kind of gun is it?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: It is a Smith & Wesson revolver.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Is it registered?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: Well, of course.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: How many weapons do you own?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: I'm not sure. It varies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You do not remember how many guns you own? How many long guns do you own?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: I don't remember. It varies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: All right, you own firearms, but you do not remember how many you have?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: I'm getting old.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You are not, however, too old to carry such a gun.

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: That would be a few more years from now.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Where was this photograph taken?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: About 20 years ago.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: But where?

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: You can see that I'm a lot younger there.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Yes, but where? Was it at home? It looks like it was at home, not at a firing range or at a shooting school. Am I right? It is at your house.

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: That's my house.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Excellent. And what were you shooting at? What were you having fun shooting at? Who were you putting on this show for?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Mourani, you have to relate this to the long-gun registry.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I apologize, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I will explain why.

[English]

Dr. Gary Mauser: You will notice, first of all, that I'm not firing. Secondly, the finger is not in the trigger guard. Thirdly, the photographer asked me to pose like this and I resisted, but obviously I should have resisted harder.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You did put up a struggle, my dear sir. But, you are the expert advisor as far as firearms are concerned. I must admit to you that I am scared.

I will give the floor to my colleague.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will quote a few organizations of professionals, experts and scientists, who are all against the bill to repeal the firearms registry. They represent doctors, nurses, suicide prevention experts, women's groups and organizations—I will come back to the case of women in particular—union organizations and social justice organizations, organizations representing human rights activists and women, police services organizations and associations from across the country, also police chiefs, police unions, including the *Fraternité des policiers et policières de Montréal*, the police fraternity of Montreal, and that of Quebec City, who consulted their members on this issue. Everyone is unanimous in stating that this is an important tool.

Of course, my first question is for Mr. Bentley. You talked about a security tool, but this tool is part of a whole. I would like you to talk about this a little more, and then I would like to come back to the issue of women.

• (1725)

[English]

Hon. Chris Bentley: It is a tool, but it is part of a whole. Obviously we need front line police officers, such as Mr. Rutledge and his colleagues, and we need them to have in their possession information, information to assist when they're trying to prevent crime, information to assist when they're answering a call, information to assist when they're responding to the call of a crime, responding to an urgent situation.

The gun registry is a tool. It's a piece of information. Is it absolute? Can it guarantee anything? Well, nothing in crime prevention and enforcement can absolutely guarantee anything. It's an important tool, containing important information.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You say it is an important tool. Sergeant Duane Rutledge, who is here, said he consulted the registry twice. I do not think he is in any position to assess the value of the firearms registry, as was reflected in his presentation.

I would like to come back to the issue of violence against women and spousal violence, among other things. It has been said that the firearms registry is an important tool to fight violence against women. Ms. Cukier, you mentioned some statistics; Ms. Byers and Ms. Ducharme, you also talked about violence against women. I would like to hear you say a little more about this issue.

[English]

The Chair: In about 20 seconds, from both of you—very quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: And I don't want to hear the word “cost”, because I don't think you can attach a monetary value to this.

[English]

Ms. Barbara Byers: In terms of the question of violence against women, the trade union movement has been actively involved in the struggle against violence against women. You will see that not just on December 6 but in terms of the work that we do, in terms of even our initial presentation—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Hoepfner, please.

Ms. Barbara Byers: Well, wait a minute. So violence against women gets 20 seconds?

The Chair: That's his problem.

You have to make sure that you talk—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Mr. Chairman, a little earlier, you gave Ms. Glover two extra minutes. My witness could talk about violence against women for another minute. It's an important subject.

[English]

An hon. member: They're talking out the clock.

The Chair: You are taking up time. I have recorded the time. I have witnesses up here. What you're saying is not correct.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Hoepfner, please.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

An hon. member: *La violence faite aux femmes, ce n'est pas important.*

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, who has the floor?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Do I have the floor, or...?

The Chair: You have a point of order. Are we going to run over time because you're taking time away from the Conservatives?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: No. You may rule this out of order, but I would suggest that, as chair, when witnesses do not have sufficient time to answer the questions asked of them, you simply indicate that they can do so in writing, through you, at a future date, and that will be distributed to the committee and become part of the official record.

The Chair: Thank you.

I also reminded everybody that you have to allow time for the witnesses to answer while it's your time.

I'll give Ms. Hoepfner three minutes, please.

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

Professor Mauser, you were just basically vilified by the Bloc member Ms. Mourani because you own a firearm. You have a picture of yourself with a firearm.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that is what this whole debate is about. This is about a certain group of people who want to defend a registry because they believe that any person in this country who owns a firearm is bad and should be punished and is a criminal.

So I want to make that comment, and I want to ask you, have you ever been arrested or charged? Are you a criminal? Have you contributed to gun crime or violent crime in any way?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Chairman, it seems that we—

[*English*]

Dr. Gary Mauser: Why, no. No, I haven't. If I had, I would lose my firearms licence and I would have my guns confiscated.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much.

I have another question I wanted to ask....

Excuse me.

A voice: Just keep going.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I have another question I wanted to ask Mr. Gaudet. I have the—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Mr. Chairman—

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order. Order!

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: —current 2009-10 estimates in front of me. Right now under the firearms registry, not licensing—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Mr. Chairman, it is 5:30. You did not want to hear my witness, but you have given Ms. Hoepfner more time. Does she have more rights than I do?

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Do I have the floor, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Desnoyers, that is out of order. You know that's incorrect. You have had as much time, or more; in fact, you had more time.

Please continue, Ms. Hoepfner.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: As I said, it is 5:30.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Are their mikes off?

I will just continue, Mr. Gaudet.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are you wanting to take away all the time from the Conservatives on points of order, Mr. Kania?

Mr. Andrew Kania: My point of order is simply that my understanding of the rules is that you need the unanimous consent of a committee to extend a meeting. The meeting time has passed. Am I correct or incorrect?

The Chair: You are questioning the fairness of the chair. Is that correct?

Mr. Andrew Kania: Yes, I am.

The Chair: You are. And I...

When they had time, all of a sudden you had points of order, you delayed the meeting, you did not want them to answer or have any time. There was fairness here.

Mr. Mark Holland: I got cut off...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. Andrew Kania: I'm asking you whether what I said is accurate. Either it is accurate or it's not accurate.

The Chair: No, it wasn't—

Mr. Andrew Kania: My understanding of the rules—

The Chair: I asked—

Mr. Andrew Kania: Just tell me if I'm right or wrong.

The Chair: You're wrong. You're wrong. I asked Ms.—

Mr. Andrew Kania: You're extending the meeting unilaterally, is that what you're saying?

The Chair: No.

The meeting is adjourned.

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