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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)):
I call this meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We're continuing today with our study of Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry).

We have representatives from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. We have an individual from Saskatoon, Mr. Murray Grismer, a sergeant in the police force. From Canadians Against Violence Everywhere Advocating its Termination, we have Priscilla de Villiers, a victim's advocate. From the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, we have Monsieur Pierre Maurice, chief of the scientific unit; and Étienne Blais, an assistant professor at the school of criminology, University of Montreal. From the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, we have Mr. William Blair, the president.

We would like to welcome all of you to our meeting. We look forward to your testimony. You each have 10 minutes for your presentation, and then we will go to questions and comments from the various political parties.

Monsieur Maurice, go ahead.

[Translation]

Dr. Pierre Maurice (Chief, Scientific Unit, Safety and Injury Prevention, Institut national de santé publique du Québec):
Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished committee members, allow us first to introduce ourselves.

I am Dr. Pierre Maurice, and I am an injury prevention expert at the Scientific Unit, Safety and Injury Prevention, of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec. I'm accompanied by Mr. Étienne Blais, who is a criminologist on my team and assistant professor at the School of Criminology of the University of Montreal. Mr. Blais has, in recent years, developed a research program on firearm-related injuries.

We thank you for this opportunity to present our analysis on Bill C-391. We decided we wanted to be heard by this committee after seeing that the debate on the Canadian Firearms Registry was focused solely on crime-related issues. The issue surrounding Bill C-391 goes way beyond crime, and that is why we think it essential today to view the debate from a public health perspective as

well. This perspective leads us to consider the potential consequences of this bill for all firearm-related deaths and injuries, not just those related to crime.

We should note from the outset that suicides are by far the leading cause of firearm-related deaths in Canada and represent more than 75% of the total number of deaths related to that type of weapon. Most of those deaths involve non-restricted firearms. In overall terms, the data show that the problem of firearm-related deaths mainly concerns people dealing with personal, marital or mental health problems, rather than the criminal milieu. The figures also show that the home is the main place where those deaths occur, which makes it a significant focus for education in a prevention perspective.

Numerous studies have shown that access to firearms is the main risk factor for suicide, homicide and accidental death. That is why Quebec's national public health program includes a specific measure to support the development and implementation of legislative and regulatory measures to make firearms less accessible to individuals who may misuse them.

In the past 30 years, the Parliament of Canada has implemented a number of measures to control the problems associated with firearms. Most of those measures focused on the control of non-restricted firearms such as rifles and shotguns. Since 1998, following the adoption of Bill C-68, all owners of non-restricted firearms have been required to hold a licence to possess firearms and to register each firearm that they own.

From a public health perspective, we must ask ourselves the following question: have the measures introduced following implementation of Bill C-68 helped reduce the number of firearm-related deaths? A study was recently conducted to assess this effect taking into account the downward trend observed since 1974 in homicide and suicide rates and the concomitant impact of other factors associated with firearm-related deaths.

The observed results show that the coming into force of Bill C-68 is associated, on average, with a reduction of 50 firearm-related homicides and 250 firearm-related suicides per year in Canada. The results of this study also show that no substitution effect has been observed since Bill C-68 was implemented. In other words, the decline in the number of firearm-related suicides and homicides has not been offset by an increase in the number of suicides and homicides committed by other means.

Based on available data on the direct and indirect costs associated with firearm-related deaths, we estimate the costs saved in respect of the reduction of 300 deaths associated with the coming into force of Bill C-68 at over \$400 million a year. It should be noted that the two main measures implemented following the adoption of Bill C-68 are the obligation for all owners of non-restricted firearms to hold a licence to possess firearms and the obligation to register each of the firearms that they own. The effectiveness of the act stems from the interaction of these two measures. More specifically, the licence and registration make it possible to link every weapon to its owner, which has the effect of encouraging the owners of non-restricted firearms to comply with the regulations in effect concerning the storing, selling, lending and donation of firearms.

● (1535)

This possibility of linking each weapon to its owner also helps to support the police in the performance of their duties, for example in the execution of a prohibition order concerning the possession of a firearm. These effects on owners and the police result in a smaller number of non-restricted firearms being improperly stored, lost or stolen and thus make this type of weapon less readily accessible to individuals likely to misuse them. This is important, knowing that access to a firearm has long been acknowledged in the scientific literature as a major risk factor for firearm-related suicide and homicide, a weapon being a factor that facilitates acting out by those inclined to commit suicide or homicide.

The effectiveness of these two measures, the licence and registration, also stems from the fact that they concern all owners of non-restricted firearms, which makes it possible to take action on all weapons falling into this category.

In conclusion, bearing in mind that: the vast majority of firearm-related deaths are suicides and do not involve the criminal milieu; that the coming into force of Bill C-68 is associated, on average, with a reduction of 300 firearm-related deaths in Canada each year, including 250 suicides; that the compulsory registration of non-restricted firearms is one of the key measures implemented following the adoption of Bill C-68; that the Canadian non-restricted firearms registration system is solidly established and operational; that most of the non-restricted firearms now in circulation in Canada have already been registered; that the current operating cost of the registration system is relatively low—we're talking about \$9 million in—relation to the 300 lives saved and the avoided costs, approximately \$400 million every year since Bill C-68 came into force; that the registration of a non-restricted firearm does not prevent its owner from using it legitimately for hunting or shooting, but is intended instead to make non-restricted firearms less accessible to individuals likely to misuse them; the Institut national de santé publique du Québec recommends: that the firearms control measures implemented following the adoption of Bill C-68, including the obligation for all non-restricted firearms owners to register each of the weapons that they possess, be integrally maintained.

To sum up, from a public health standpoint, this is as though Canadian society had a drug that could make it possible to prevent 300 deaths a year. Two important ingredients go into the make-up of that drug. In this case, they are the licence and registration. We think it is dangerous to change the composition of that drug by removing

one of its important ingredients, particularly since the secondary effects associated with firearm registration are minimal.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1540)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to Mr. William Blair.

Go ahead, sir.

Chief William Blair (President, Chief of the Toronto Police Service, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): Thank you. Good afternoon.

My name is William Blair, and I'm the chief of the Toronto Police Service.

Like my fellow chiefs across Canada, I have served for decades in front-line policing. I've been a member of the Toronto Police Service since November 1, 1976, and over the past 33 years I have served in nearly every policing function. I have worked in some of the toughest neighbourhoods in Canada's largest city. I spent years working undercover on the drug squad. I worked on our holdup squad, and I set up organized drug crime units and our gun and gang task force.

For three years I served as the commander of all the detective units in Toronto, including the homicide squad, the sex crimes unit, the Toronto drug squad, and our intelligence services. In 2005 I was appointed as the chief of the Toronto Police Service. With that appointment I accepted a statutory responsibility for the safety of Toronto's 2.7 million citizens and the safety of my 5,600 police officers. It is a responsibility I take very seriously.

Part of that responsibility is to provide our officers with all the tools, training, and resources they need to do their jobs effectively and safely. The national firearms registry is one such tool.

Since my appointment, the Toronto Police Service has established one of the first and the largest integrated guns and gangs units in North America. We work in an integrated investigative environment with partners, including the RCMP national weapons enforcement support teams, the Ontario Provincial Police provincial weapons enforcement unit, and all the regional police services in the greater Toronto area. They are one of the most effective investigative units dealing with gun violence in Canada. They have conducted some of the largest and most successful gang investigations in North America. They are recognized internationally for their expertise. They use the firearms registry every day.

They tell me they need that information to do their job. They need it to solve crimes and to prosecute offenders. They use it to control the supply of legal firearms and to trace the origin of all crime guns.

Domestic violence investigators regularly check the registry to determine the number and types of weapons registered to a person involved in a potentially violent dispute so they might obtain a public safety warrant to remove those firearms. They know such efforts have saved lives and prevented tragedies. The evidence of reduced domestic gun violence confirms their knowledge.

Criminal investigators regularly check the registry to determine the origin and ownership of seized firearms. They use it to obtain evidence for criminal prosecutions. They use it to identify a firearm that is stolen and to return such firearms to the rightful owners. They use it to solve serious crimes. They use it every day.

The rank-and-file officers in my service tell me they need the information from the registry to do their jobs. Communications dispatchers regularly check addresses to provide first responders with information that keeps them safe. Front-line cops ask for registry checks when approaching a potentially dangerous situation. Tactical officers check the registry to determine the number and type of weapons likely to be encountered when entering a residence of a barricaded person or when executing a search warrant.

These checks are not done, as has been suggested, as part of some automatic computer program. They are requested by police officers who value accurate and reliable information when they are doing their job. They know the firearms registry is a tool that helps them to do their jobs effectively and safely.

They have asked me to advocate to you on their behalf to retain access to the information contained in the registry. The Toronto police union, representing their interests, has also expressed strong support for the retention of the registry. They know the information obtained from that registry helps keep their members safe. We all know its value, and we want you to know that as well.

We also know the limitations of every information system that supports police work. Information must be verified. Criminal intelligence is only as good as its source, and it must always be considered in its context. The firearms registry database is one such tool. It does not prevent every crime or solve every crime. It cannot guarantee the safety of every police officer. None of us expects it to. What we do expect is access to the best and most accurate information available. We require access to the information contained in the firearms registry.

Like all the tools we use, the firearms registry is not a perfect, universally effective tool. Not every criminal will register their weapons. Not everyone will obey the law. It will not deter every criminal, nor will it solve every crime. The police have never claimed that it would. What we do claim, with the authority that comes from actually using the information contained in the firearms registry every day, is that it is a tool that helps us to do our job. Criminals may not register their weapons, but because the gun registry exists, we can determine the origin of a criminal's weapons. We can hold them accountable and the persons responsible for providing them with these guns.

The registry provides us with intelligence. It provides us with evidence. It creates an accountability for gun owners and it encourages responsible gun ownership. It is valuable, but it is not perfect. It is certainly not the only tool we need, and no one claims it

is the answer to every challenge. But it is an important tool, nonetheless.

Similarly, no legislation, no matter how comprehensive or well written, will prevent every crime. No minimum sentence, no matter how certain and severe, will deter every criminal bent on violence. No investment in gathering criminal intelligence will guarantee our safety. Not even the absolute certainty of getting caught and going to jail would deter every criminal. Again, no sensible person would suggest that it could.

In 2009 I was elected as the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Our membership includes chiefs of police and senior members of police services of every size and from every region in Canada. It includes the commissioner in command of the RCMP, the OPP, and the Sûreté du Québec. It includes chiefs of the major cities, as well as small towns.

● (1545)

Since 1905, police leaders from across Canada have joined together in the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to advocate for public safety. Our input and support have been sought and valued by successive governments for over a century.

The legitimacy of the CACP as a national and trusted voice in police leadership in Canada has not previously been questioned. The integrity of our members and our commitment to the safety of their communities and their officers are accepted and trusted in towns and cities across Canada.

As the president of the CACP, it is my responsibility to advance positions that have been determined collectively by our membership. Since 1974, the CACP has advocated for the tools that will enable us to deal effectively with gun violence.

In 1994 the CACP adopted a resolution calling upon the Government of Canada to enact legislation requiring registration of all firearms, including long guns. This is a position from which the CACP has never wavered. This is not to suggest that we support wasteful spending. We do not. The CACP acknowledges that the implementation of the Firearms Act was not done efficiently.

Prior to 2005 our members also expressed frustration with the cost and apparent inefficiencies in the firearms program. As an example, Commissioner Fantino expressed his frustration with the system in January of 2003. That was more than seven years ago. Today, the OPP, which he leads, uses the registry over 1,500 times a day. They use it very effectively. They use it to make Ontario safer for all Ontarians.

The operation of the long-gun registry has improved significantly since responsibility was given to the RCMP in 2006. The first thing they did was to create a more efficient and cost-effective system. The long-gun registry now costs \$4.1 million a year. They streamlined the process for Canadians to register their weapons. They improved the accessibility and reliability of information available from the registry. They improved the training available to investigators and front-line officers on using the registry's information. They developed reporting tools that police services use to encourage responsible gun ownership. They have made it possible to enforce prohibition orders and licence revocations by providing accurate and reliable information about the number, type, calibre, and serial numbers of weapons in the possession of persons who have been determined to be dangerous. Without that information from the registry, police would have no means to determine what guns a person prohibited from possessing firearms actually has registered to them. The law allows us to seize such firearms, but we would have no way to determine their existence without the registry.

It is no coincidence that a handful of police critics relied upon by the gun lobby come from people who have retired at least five years ago or from those with no current experience in using the firearms registry database. They do not know how it works. They have never used it, but they know they hate it. No one should delude themselves that they speak for the silent majority of serving police officers in Canada.

Police officers are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves. We do so individually, and many of us do, notwithstanding blatantly dishonest assertions that chiefs have muzzled all dissenting opinions. Anyone suggesting that police unions would be complicit in the suppression of legitimate concerns of police officers doesn't know—or hopes that you don't know—very much about police officers.

More often, we elect representatives who speak on our behalf. Police chiefs have formed associations to represent their national or regional interests. Police officers join associations or unions to speak on their behalf. This is most effective when the overwhelming majority holds a common view on an issue of significant importance to public and police officer safety.

Retention of the firearms registry for long guns is one such issue. It is an issue that has brought together, perhaps like no other issue, a coalition of the full spectrum of police leadership in Canada. It is an issue that has united the leaders of police services, police associations, and police boards across Canada. We all believe that the registration of all firearms, including long guns, is important to the safety of Canadians and police officers.

We believe that Bill C-391 is ill conceived and based on a dated misunderstanding of the current system. We believe that the destruction of the firearms registry will make our communities less safe. It will make our officers less effective in dealing with violent crime. It will make the already difficult and dangerous job of a police officer more difficult and less safe.

I have brought with me today resolutions and letters concerning the firearms registry from provincial chiefs associations of every province in Canada. I implore you to read those resolutions. They are remarkably consistent. From British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador, the chiefs and leaders of police services across the country

are telling this Parliament that they support the retention of the registry.

Some have gone even further, acknowledging the value of the current registry, but calling on the government to do more. They want the registry improved and enhanced. They want it made even more efficient and effective. They want to address the legitimate concerns of law-abiding firearm owners by removing the threat of criminal sanction and providing for a ticketing mechanism to encourage compliance; the CACP supports this measure. They want new tools of search and seizure, stricter sentencing of violent firearms offenders, and better control of the guns coming across their borders. They do not support taking valuable information away from police officers.

In addition to the resolutions of every provincial association of chiefs of police, I have provided a number of letters written by chiefs of police in smaller, rural, and northern communities. They have expressed their support for the retention of the long-gun registry. They have communicated their support to their local member of Parliament. Like chiefs across Canada, they will, in the coming weeks, explain to the citizens they are sworn to protect their support for the retention of the long-gun registry and their opposition to Bill C-391.

● (1550)

I believe that when Canadians hear from their police leaders the importance of the registry to public safety, they will support the retention of that registry.

I am also aware that the RCMP has completed an internal audit of the firearms program and an evaluation of the firearms program's effectiveness. I understand that both reports strongly indicate that the firearms program is providing good value and is being managed efficiently. When Canadians have access to that report, I believe it will resolve many of their outstanding questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Priscilla de Villiers for her presentation.

Ms. Priscilla de Villiers (Victim Advocate and Founder, Canadians Against Violence Everywhere Advocating its Termination): Thank you. Good afternoon.

Could I ask the clerk to hand out this last page of my submission in English and French? It is missing from my submission.

The Chair: Certainly. We'll distribute it.

Go ahead.

Ms. Priscilla de Villiers: Thank you.

Thank you very much for inviting me to be here today. My name is Priscilla de Villiers and for the last almost 19 years I have been working with victims of crime. The title of my discussion today is "The Costs of Gun Violence and The Impact on Victims".

In recent years, in the many debates linked to the gun registry, we've heard little acknowledgement that incalculable human suffering has resulted from the use of firearms, whether criminal, accidental, or self-inflicted. Fatalities and traumatic injuries are listed as statistics with little attempt to assess the enormous loss to our society, our communities, and to our families. It is time that we shift the focus of the debate from the rights of gun owners to the rights of the public to safety. In particular, the role of legally owned firearms in domestic violence against women and children must be acknowledged.

Victims have been at the forefront of the battle to strengthen Canada's gun control legislation since the beginning, and we applauded the passage of the Firearms Act in 1995. The measures passed were aimed at preventing tragedies and considering the rights of Canadians to safety. In 1993 we presented the de Villiers petition to the government, signed by 2.5 million Canadians. It noted that the crimes of violence against the person were abhorrent and that there were especially vulnerable people: children, women, the disabled.

While many changes have been made and deficiencies are still being addressed, there is still more to be done to protect Canadians. We've appeared at a number of committees. We have spoken in the media. We have written to elected officials. We fought all the way to the Supreme Court to defend our gun laws and we will not stop now.

While we agree with the proposal to improve certain aspects of the system, let me remind you that it should not be done at the expense of lives. Gun violence is a complex social problem that needs a comprehensive set of solutions. Strong controls on firearms are one part of that solution. Regardless of victim support, victims' services, or kind words, it's our conviction that no life should be forfeit, no injury tolerated, and no vulnerable people held hostage in Canada when it's largely preventable.

Those of us who have suffered want to prevent others from experiencing what we have experienced. Canada's gun control legislation in its current form is the result of at least six public inquiries that have emphasized the importance of licensing and registration as a means of preventing future tragedies. The measures included in the Firearms Act are important to prevent violence.

I'll address some of the myths and facts about gun control in Canada. Number one, duck guns are not dangerous. The fact is my daughter was killed with a duck gun. So were too many other victims. A sample is here for you to read.

In 1991 my daughter, Nina de Villiers, and Karen Marquis were shot and killed by a sexual predator with his own rifle, which he had recently used to terrorize and threaten his victim in a violent sexual assault. He then turned that same gun on himself. The inquest into his death and five others called for a gun registry. The one clear message that continues to emerge from the terrible tragedies—whether criminal, accidental, or self-inflicted—is that of the coroner: “What we learn from one may save the lives of many.”

Rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in domestic violence, suicide, accident, and in the murder of police officers. There are three mechanisms by which the availability of firearms increases violence: guns instigate violence; they facilitate violence; they intensify violence.

The fact that firearms may be used for sporting, collecting, or other pursuits cannot deny their inherent dangerousness. Firearms in the household continue to be the leading cause of suicide in young men, a lethal weapon in family violence, a cause of intimidation and terror in children, accidental injury, and death. Most of this is never publicly reported.

While there are more guns in rural areas in the west and more opposition to gun control, there is also a higher rate of injury and death by gun, often involving rifles and shotguns, which are powerful weapons that can cause serious injury or in fact death.

• (1555)

We see, as an example, the killing of 14 young women and the injuring of 27 others in 22 minutes at the Montreal Polytechnique. The Ruger Mini-14 was used. This gun is still sold as an unrestricted hunting rifle.

Myth two is that registration does not work; licensing the gun owner is sufficient. The fact is that public inquiries have repeatedly recommended licensing and registration. Six separate inquiries called for this and made many recommendations for strengthening screening processes and reducing the renewal period. They're listed here.

Victims fought all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to defend the law that was forged in death and misery. In June 2000, in its unanimous 9-0 decision, the Supreme Court of Canada stated:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. ... 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.

The UN special rapporteur on violence against women and the special rapporteur on human rights and small arms emphasized that states that do not adequately regulate firearms are failing to meet their obligations under international law.

In Canada the court has repeatedly ruled that it is a privilege and not a right to own a firearm. Our loved ones have the right to safety and security of person, which is guaranteed under the charter in section 7. Gun owners have a privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility and accountability.

There cannot be effective gun control without information about who owns what guns. The registering of firearms brings about accountability and reduces the chances that legally owned guns will be diverted to unlicensed owners. It also reduces the risk that dangerous people will have access to weapons.

We've heard about all the advantages to police. Without registration it's not possible for police, as we know, to ensure that all firearms have been removed from a gun owner.

Myth three is that the registry is an expensive bureaucratic nightmare that has never saved a single life. What are the costs of human life? Gun violence costs Canadians \$6.6 billion. It's the victim, according to the justice department, who bears 47% of the costs. Victims of violence are not covered by any insurance policy. They bear not only the financial costs but the ongoing effects on their mental health, disabilities, relationships, and employment. The Canadian Institute for Health Information in 2004 estimated that the average cost for a patient to spend one night in hospital for treatment is \$7,000. That did not include emergency care, day surgery, long-term care, hospital clinics, or fee-for-service payments to physicians.

The indirect costs of gun violence and gun intimidation and harassment should also be taken into account. The effect on the victim can be profoundly debilitating.

It's all very well to look at what is in the past. I also believe that we should always look forward to what is in the future. We are recommending, on the strength of our full submission, that the committee vote to terminate Bill C-391. Long-gun registration is an essential part of Canada's gun control law. We are willing to support some compromises, provided they do not affect public safety. The proposal to waive fees associated with gun registration permanently while removing financial resources from the program is a reasonable compromise; so is the introduction of a non-criminal supplementary offence for the failure to register one firearm once.

Finally, we are also calling for a national information campaign to educate Canadians on all the salient issues mentioned above, as part of a national public health strategy and a violence prevention strategy. No registration program can function successfully without current, informed, and accurate information consistently delivered.

• (1600)

Our lives and our safety deserve that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ma'am. I let you go a little longer, and I realize you probably had some things you didn't include, but maybe during some of the questions and comments you can finish your report.

Ms. Priscilla de Villiers: Certainly. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Mr. Greg Farrant. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Greg Farrant (Manager, Government Relations and Communications, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, fellow panellists.

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, with 100,000 members and 670 member clubs across Ontario, I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you today to comment on Ms. Hoepfner's bill, Bill C-391.

Going back a few years, Bill C-68 was born out of tragedy and was directly attributable to public concerns in the aftermath of the horrific shooting of 14 women at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. No right-thinking person should ever underestimate the impact an event of that magnitude must have had on the families of the victims, nor can anyone state with confidence, unless they have walked in their shoes, the emotional costs to family members of other shooting victims, including our fellow panellists today, and what impact that has made on their lives.

OFAH supports effective firearms control, much like the former FAC system, that does not unfairly or unnecessarily target legal, law-abiding firearms owners. I must say that the establishment of public policy based strictly upon emotion, not fact, is flawed. In the aftermath of the Lépine shooting, the Coalition for Gun Control convinced the government that more gun control would make us safer. Unfortunately, over the years other instances, like the shootings at Dawson College, Mayerthorpe, and others, have demonstrated the folly of the original belief that the registry of long guns would prevent crime and enhance public safety.

Bill C-68 included a licensing component and a provision for mandatory sentences for the criminal use of a firearm, something that has been ignored, bargained away, traded, and generally abused during sentencing deals for offenders, including consideration of time served and two-for-one deals. It also established a new process for the licensing of firearms owners that uses a series of checks and balances, like a mandatory waiting period, criminal and mental health background checks, and spousal consultation, which, if done correctly, affords the public with a fair degree of certainty that the applicant is safe to own and use firearms. Unfortunately, these checks and balances are not always done.

From the start, many experts both inside and outside of government advised that the long-gun registry would be prohibitively expensive and turn out to be nothing more than hollow political symbolism. In fact, according to Dr. John Dixon, who at the time was senior advisor to the deputy minister of justice, the short answer arrived at by every study of the idea to create a universal registration of firearms by the Department of Justice was that it would be ruinously expensive and could actually yield a negative public security result. At that time, the president of the Coalition for Gun Control told the CBC that the argument for gun control had never been based on individual cases; it was always based on the general principle that if you have adequate control of all guns, you reduce the chances that dangerous people would gain access to them. You don't eliminate them. At best, that statement is disingenuous.

The entire debate over gun control in this country and the creation of a long-gun registry under Bill C-68 was a direct result of the misguided actions of one lone individual. Prior to that, gun control was not a major public policy issue, and the creation of a regime to regulate legal firearms—in this particular case, long guns—as a means of protecting the public from individuals with a grudge was flawed. Equally wrong are current suggestions that by simply tweaking the registry to make it work better, it will make us safer and justify its creation. Even a well-run registry won't prevent random violent crime. Believing this ignores the glaring fact that criminals don't register firearms and, worse still, that Bill C-68 did not include a provision under the Firearms Act for the tracking of prohibited offenders, those most likely to commit gun crime.

Over the years much has been made of the cost of the long-gun registry and the suggestion that the system has cost taxpayers over \$1 billion. In fact, the Auditor General has commented extensively on this aspect of the system, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that today. However, alarming as these cost overruns have been, perhaps most damning in the Auditor General's reports of both 2002 and 2006 were her comments that the Canada Firearms Centre was unable or unwilling to provide her department with information to substantiate the need for the long-gun registry as a public safety tool. I quote:

The Centre does not show how these activities help minimize risks to public safety with evidence-based outcomes such as reduced deaths, injuries, and threats from firearms.

• (1605)

During recent debates and public statements on Bill C-391, defenders of the long-gun registry have suggested that while the costs over the years have been exorbitant, they are now in the area of \$4 million to \$8 million per year and this is “a tolerable amount”. As a taxpayer as well as a long-gun owner, I find that assumption is breathtaking in its arrogance. We can think of past examples where government misspending of lesser amounts has resulted in the calling of public inquiries. Yet in the case of the long-gun registry, which has experienced a budgetary excess on a monumental scale, some proponents of the system have ignored the financial mismanagement from the start by suggesting that the spending is now under control.

This myopic view also ignores the fundamental precept that if a system does not work, no amount of money spent on it is acceptable. It also ignores the fact that on two occasions a cost-benefit analysis

of the registry was completed by the former government, one by former MP Shaughnessy Cohen and the other by current MP and then-minister Albina Guarnieri. Neither review has seen the light of day. Because of this, we are left to conclude that if those reviews had demonstrated the system was providing good return on investment, they would have been trotted out to great acclaim instead of being hidden behind a veil of cabinet confidentiality. In the case of Ms. Guarnieri's report, which was commissioned by former Prime Minister Martin after he admitted the system was flawed and placed the entire program under review, the recommendations in her report were rejected outright by her cabinet colleagues.

A fundamental flaw with the registry is that the number of firearms and firearms owners in Canada is in dispute, and no accurate assessment of how many guns are actually out there exists. Without knowing that a significant majority of firearms are registered, when so many may remain unaccounted for, how can anyone claim that it works? Since program spending estimates are determined based upon the potential number of firearms in the country, if the numbers are off, costs will fluctuate accordingly.

I think the most interesting comment comes from the former commissioner, Bill Baker, who told the House of Commons justice committee on October 23, 2003, “I don't think anybody in the country knows exactly how many guns are out there.”

For years, the long-gun registry has been a source of concern in terms of the protection of privacy. The former privacy commissioner expressed concerns over the lack of information security and protections in the system. Both the Auditor General and the RCMP have admitted that the speed of compilation and accuracy of the registry are questionable. The Coalition for Gun Control scoffed at the suggestion that the system is unsafe and suggested it's as safe as CPIC, the main law enforcement database used by police across this country. However, according to information provided by the RCMP in response to an access to information request in 2003, there had been at that time 1,495 breaches of the CPIC system, of which 427 were confirmed. Given this, assurances about the efficacy of the system run cold.

Over the last few years, public support for the registry has slipped. Canadians have grown increasingly agitated by the excessive cost of the system and skeptical about the ability of the system to prevent crime and protect the public safety.

In the interest of time and brevity today, I'll try to shorten my remarks, Mr. Chair. I'll speak to a couple of the recommendations we make in our report. We make eight in total, but I'm going to speak to only two of them today. I hope you'll take the opportunity to read the full submission.

The first recommendation is that we need to eliminate the registry for all non-restricted firearms, first and foremost. The passage of an unamended Bill C-391 and the subsequent repeal of the long-gun registry would reduce the burdens on the system. Passage of Bill C-391 will not affect the registration of restricted and prohibited firearms, which will continue. Licensing will continue, as will mandatory background checks. Safe storage, safe transportation, and mandatory firearms training will all continue. The passage of Bill C-391 will impact only on the long-gun registry, nothing more, nothing less.

The second recommendation is the creation of a prohibited offenders registry to track prohibited offenders previously convicted of gun crimes. We should not have a registry in this country of individuals who are allowed to own firearms. We should have a registry of those too dangerous to own firearms. This would be similar to the systems used by police in New York, Baltimore, and Virginia, which have proven to be extremely effective and have resulted in a reduction in the number of firearms-related crimes. Previous offenders are required to register with the government, much like a sex offender registry. As David Kennedy, director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York put it, it's common sense to focus on a smaller number of dangerous people instead of chasing around after people for "low level nonsense".

With that, I'll conclude my remarks and thank you again on behalf of the OFAH for the opportunity to appear before you today.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Sergeant Murray Grismer.

Detective Sergeant Murray Grismer (Detective Sergeant, Saskatoon Police Service, As an Individual): Mr. Chairman, honourable committee members, and fellow witnesses, it is an honour and a privilege for me to appear before you today to assist you in your deliberations on Bill C-391.

As you already know, my name is Murray Grismer. What some of you may or may not know is that I am a serving member of the Saskatoon Police Service with over 23 years of service protecting the citizens of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan. At present, I hold the rank of detective sergeant, assigned to the major crime-serious crimes unit.

The courts in Saskatchewan have qualified me as an expert witness, able to give opinion and evidence on firearms. I have provided assistance to both federal and provincial prosecutions in the area of firearms-related crime. I'm a master instructor for the Canadian firearms safety courses and an approved verifier certified by the registrar of the Canadian firearms registry.

I want to make it clear from the outset that my comments here today before this committee are mine and mine alone. They do not reflect the opinion of my employer, chief, or the police service.

That said, I am the elected spokesperson of the Saskatoon Police Association on firearms issues, specifically the Firearms Act and the firearms registry. I was also the spokesperson for the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers on the issues of the Firearms Act and the firearms registry until the fall of 2002. During that time, I sat on the advisory panel to the Honourable John Nilson, justice minister and Attorney General for the Province of Saskatchewan, which brought forward Saskatchewan's position to opt out of the administration and enforcement of the Firearms Act.

I understand this august committee has had the opportunity to hear from a number of retired police officers who share my belief that the registry for non-restricted rifles and shotguns, commonly referred to as long guns, should be brought to an end. It's also my understanding I will be the only serving police officer called to appear as a witness who holds this position.

Therefore, ipso facto, I also represent the opinion of thousands of police officers across Canada who are, in my opinion, the silent majority and, for some, the silenced majority: not only police officers who have been ordered not to speak out against the long-gun registry but also officers who fear for their careers should they voice an opinion publicly in opposition to continuation of the registry or against the position adopted by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, their chief of police, or commanding officer.

To say the police community is divided on support for the long-gun registry is an understatement. The committee has heard from Mr. Charles Momy, president of the Canadian Police Association, who claimed that he represents the opinion of 41,000 police officers in Canada. The CPA endorses the continuation of the registry, yet in truth, they adopt this position without ever having formally polled their membership.

The CPA's position is not that of the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers, nor that of the Saskatoon Police Association. The Saskatchewan Federation is the only provincial federation or association that has polled its entire membership on the issue of the registration of firearms. When polled, the Saskatoon Police Association was 99.46% against a long-gun registry, while many of our compatriots in Saskatchewan were 100% in opposition to the registry.

There are some who may choose arrogantly or foolishly to consider the opinions of those who oppose the registry as uninformed or uneducated. Nothing could be further from the truth; we are neither. Instead, we recognize the cornerstone of public safety is the training, screening, and licensing of owners, not the registration of non-restricted rifles and shotguns.

The mantra of the former government of the day and the CACP was that “gun control is crime control”. The registry misses the target of the criminal use of firearms. Instead, it targets millions of legitimate firearms owners in the name of crime control. The fact is, the registry can do nothing to prevent the criminal use or criminals from obtaining firearms any more than the registration of vehicles can prevent them from being stolen or used by impaired drivers.

Ms. de Villiers of CAVEAT advocates on behalf of Canadians Against Violence. This is a laudable cause and one that I believe every Canadian supports, for violence makes victims of us all. To Ms. de Villiers, I offer my profoundest sympathy on the loss of your daughter, Nina de Villiers. However, a registry for long guns would not have stopped such a tragic event or addressed the failings of the justice system, and the retention of the registry will do nothing to prevent any such further event. Training, enhanced screening, and licensing of firearm owners, as we see today, might have prevented Jonathan Yeo, in the first instance, from being able to obtain a firearm. However, not even Canada's strict licensing regime or firearms registry can prevent random acts of violence. The best example of this failure is the shooting rampage at Dawson College by Kimveer Gill.

• (1615)

Chief Blair and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police contend that Canadians continue to support the registry that costs taxpayers over \$2 billion and that in over a decade cannot be shown to have prevented even one death. Furthermore, what he is not telling you is that the CACP is not unanimous in their support and never has been. The fact is, the CACP publicly supported Allan Rock in the establishment of the registry in the beginning and continued to support it for the next 15 years, denying the mountainous cost overruns despite the ever-mounting evidence of the true cost to Canadians. This was projected in the beginning by firearms groups across Canada.

The complicity between the CACP and successive Liberal governments to establish and maintain the registry is nothing short of duplicitous. Now the CACP suggests to you that Canadians everywhere should turn a blind eye to the \$2 billion oversight, claiming the money is spent. They say get over it, the registry now only costs \$4 million a year to run. Moreover, this figure tends to change depending on which chief or senior member of the RCMP happens to be speaking.

At first blush, it may appear to be a miracle in business management rather than an exercise in creative accounting due to the amalgamation with the RCMP. Past yearly budgets of the Canadian Firearms Centre were in excess of \$92.8 million.

Chief Blair will attempt to convince you that the retention of the registry is an officer safety issue. To the layperson, having no personal knowledge of firearms or the registry, this may appear reasonable. However, once one knows and understands the failings of the registry, the issue of officer safety takes on a far more sinister meaning. For officers using the registry, trusting in the inaccurate and unverified information contained therein, tragedy looms around the next door.

Knowing what I do about the registry, I cannot use the information contained in the registry to swear out a search warrant. To do so

would be a criminal act. Thus I cannot in good conscience tell any officer, junior or senior, to place his faith in the results of a query of the Canadian firearms registry online.

To illustrate, it's acknowledged by persons within policing, the firearms centre, and the recreational firearms community that there are, at minimum, in excess of one million firearms in Canada that have not been registered. The registry does not indicate where firearms are stored or who may have control of the firearm, nor does it denote ownership. Tens of thousands of firearms are registered inaccurately using patent numbers and catalogue numbers in place of serial numbers or model numbers. Many firearms in the registry have multiple registrations for the same firearm.

This is but the tip of the iceberg for problems with the registry. Projections from within the Canadian Firearms Centre privately state it will take 70-plus years of attrition to come close to eliminating all the errors and to have all firearms currently in Canada registered.

This level of inaccuracy is unacceptable for any industry, let alone law enforcement. Police officers deserve better; the public and courts demand better. If there were to be the same potential for error within the national DNA data bank or the automated fingerprint identification system, the public and the courts would be outraged, and with just cause. Every entry in these databases is empirical—a level of accuracy the registry has not and cannot attain.

As a team leader for the Olympic security force, I had the opportunity to speak with police officers from across Canada. The vast majority of officers I spoke with did not support the continuation of the registry. They do not trust the information it contains and see it as a waste of time and money. Some I spoke with who did support the registry were shocked to learn of the vast inaccuracies and the potential officer safety risks associated with the registry.

Again I take you back to the issue of police safety. Police across Canada cannot and must not place their trust and risk their lives on the inaccurate, unverified information contained in the registry. From my perspective, if doing away with the long-gun registry saves even one life of one of Canada's front-line police officers, it is worth it. Retaining the registry at the risk of one police officer is too great a price to pay.

Mr. Ignatieff has proposed first-time failures to register long guns be treated as simple, non-criminal ticketing offences, instead of criminal offences, as they are currently. This epiphany has received the endorsement of many members of the CACP. However, it is disingenuous at best, nothing more than mere smoke and mirrors in an attempt to appease the concerns of the public and firearms owners across Canada.

The truth of the matter is that the CPA demanded such a condition of Allan Rock and the Liberal government of the day in order to receive their support for Bill C-68, the Firearms Act. Thus section 112 was placed into the Firearms Act, which makes it a summary offence for the firearms owner to possess an unregistered firearm in the first instance. The only difference is that Mr. Ignatieff's proposal makes it a ticketable offence like a traffic ticket. His problem is there is no federal mechanism, such as the Summary Offences Procedure Act, which allows for this. Firearms owners would still be forced, by appearance notice or summons, to attend court and be liable on conviction to a fine of not more than \$2,000 or imprisonment for six months, or both.

In closing, I wish to thank you for your attention and leave you with these thoughts.

• (1620)

Polls indicate that the majority of Canadians want to see the registry for non-restricted rifles and shotguns ended. I contend this position is supported by the majority of police officers in Canada.

Bill C-391 is worthy of your consideration and support, for it brings an end to a registry that represents the largest and most contentious single waste of taxpayers' dollars, a registry consumed with errors and inaccurate data, and, more importantly, a registry that risks the safety of front-line police officers across Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The practice at this committee is to allow each party seven minutes in the first round to make comments and question witnesses. We'll begin that.

I have to tell the committee that I have to leave in about 20 minutes. Mr. Phil McColeman has agreed to replace me. Some other members have also told me they will have to leave and maybe return as well. There's been agreement for this to take place—to let those who are watching on television know what's happening.

Mr. Holland, please, for seven minutes.

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

And thank you very much to the witnesses for appearing today.

Chief Blair, maybe I could start with you. With regard to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, how many chiefs does that association represent?

• (1625)

Chief William Blair: We have well in excess of 1,100 members. It is the chiefs of all the police services right across the country. But it's not just limited to police chiefs; it also includes all the senior officers and deputy chiefs from those organizations.

Mr. Mark Holland: So it covers the entire country and every region.

Chief William Blair: It is a national organization. It represents municipal, provincial, and national police services, the RCMP, coast to coast.

Mr. Mark Holland: It's my understanding that there are three out of 428 chiefs who currently support C-391, who support dismantling the....

As somebody who used to sit on a police services board, I'm looking for your help. We've heard from a sergeant, who I'm sure does an excellent job in Saskatoon, about a divide in the policing community. The problem I'm having is that almost all the chiefs of police in the entire country, and then almost every police association in the country, which is elected by front-line members, support the registry.

So I'm having a problem. As a former board member of police services, I know that members don't keep quiet when they have concerns or when they disagree with their chief or their elected associations. Is it reasonable to believe this divide exists, or is it your belief that there's near unanimity on this point?

Chief William Blair: It is my very strongly held belief that it is a great fiction that any police officer has been or could be suppressed from expressing their opinion. I think it's certainly beyond belief that the police unions would be complicit in such things. It's nonsense, if I may say.

In speaking to police leaders across the country, I've also spoken to every provincial police chiefs association. Many police chiefs don't get involved in the national organization, but the police leaders participate in a regional organization and provincial associations. Every single one of them has come out strongly in support of retention of the gun registry.

We've talked to the Canadian Police Association, but also the police union leaders right across Canada. Certainly in my service I can tell you I've spoken to Mike McCormack, the president of our police association. He's a very strong advocate on behalf of his members, and for the safety of his members, for the retention of that registry. We've received letters from individual chiefs and from police officers across the country. There has been no order given, as has been suggested, that would direct any police officer to withhold his opinion.

What we have discovered in virtually every case is that when we provide police officers, and even police associations, with accurate information, they quickly see the value of the registry. When we provide them with training, the usage of that registry increases exponentially.

Even today, a member of my service, the head of my guns and gangs unit, travelled to Estevan, Saskatchewan, and met with the Saskatchewan police association. They wrote and asked us to come to explain how the gun registry works so they might make an informed decision about it. That meeting took place in Estevan this morning.

I believe there is a great appetite, even for those who have heard the misinformation about the registry, to get the facts. Once getting the facts, they support its retention.

Mr. Mark Holland: So the police association, which is elected by its members...the group in Saskatchewan, which is six of more than 150, is actually reconsidering their position now that they're looking at facts.

I'm just wondering, though.... And let me say before I move to my next point that I'm very sorry that the debate has degenerated to the point where certain people are attacking chiefs of police or inferring motives on them. I want to thank you for the work you're doing. I think it's a shame that this is taking place.

One of the things I don't get is that the Conservatives and others who are trying to get rid of the registry are saying we should get rid of registering long guns because registering makes no sense, and yet in the same breath they're saying that registering should remain in place for handguns. Would not the same arguments be made against handguns as long guns? Are we not dealing with the same thing?

Chief William Blair: The registration of the weapons has value to policing. It has value to my investigators. Having information that someone is licensed to own a firearm is useful information. We support the licensing regime in this country.

But it's also of extremely important value to know how many guns a person possesses. For example, if you go to a domestic situation where the life of a woman has been threatened, you're trying to determine how many weapons are in the house. The registry will give you information on the make, model, calibre, and serial numbers of the weapons. No police officers are going to go in, find the nine guns that are registered, and quit. They're going to continue. If they haven't found all nine that are registered, they're going to continue the search to make sure they've done everything possible to remove the firearms from the situation and render the situation safe.

The information contained in the registry helps us identify weapons that have been stolen and weapons that have been used in crime. It helps us return those guns.

If I might cite an example, in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, one of the chiefs who expressed his public opposition was very well quoted in a newspaper article at the conclusion of an investigation in which they seized 77 firearms. When asked what they were going to do, he said the first thing they were going to do was check the firearms against the registry to find out where they belonged and return them to their rightful owners.

I checked back with him. All of the weapons were identified. The registered owners were identified and the weapons were returned to them. The person in possession of them was criminally prosecuted for stealing them.

Mr. Mark Holland: We're very limited on time. I have one quick question and then one longer question.

Of course, we currently have to register our cars, we have to register our dogs, and we have to register our boats. We don't enjoy those processes, but I don't think they come under nearly the same type of scrutiny as registering a gun. Would it be fair to say that registering a gun is as easy as registering a car or registering anything else?

Chief William Blair: Registering a firearm, particularly if it's done at point of sale, is in fact far easier than registering a motor vehicle. I've seen it done. I've seen people who are pretty good at it and they've registered in as short a period of time as 37 seconds. It normally takes a few minutes online.

Mr. Mark Holland: This is my last question. You mentioned that an internal audit was conducted by the RCMP. It has not been

released; it's been embargoed. Do you have a copy of the internal audit?

• (1630)

Chief William Blair: I've had the privilege of seeing it.

There are actually two documents. One is an internal audit and one is an internal evaluation on the firearms program. As I understand it, both of the documents are quite supportive of the efficiency and the value of the firearms program, but they have not yet been made public.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Chair, this is the third time that witnesses have made reference to that document. It was done in February 2010. I'd like to make a request that the committee ask the Commissioner of the RCMP for a copy of the document. If it's not possible to provide it bilingually, then I'm sure the committee would be happy to accept it unilingually, given the fact that this matter is urgent and we've now had three witnesses raise the issue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): No, Mr. Chairman, I don't accept any unilingual English versions.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I guess we have an issue there. We can discuss this at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Mark Holland: Is it possible to save five minutes at the end for that?

The Chair: I won't be here. If you wish, and if the committee decides that's what they'd like to do, then they can do it.

Ms. Mourani, please.

[Translation]

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

Good afternoon to everyone and thank you for being here. I would like to start with Dr. Maurice, with your permission.

Dr. Maurice, you said in your address that 300 deaths a year are avoided as a result of the registry. Yesterday we heard from Mr. Boisvenu in the committee and he told us that he doubted the registry's effectiveness as a preventive tool.

What do you think about that?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: First, we didn't say that 300 deaths had been avoided as a result of the registry. We said that there was a decrease of 300 deaths associated with Bill C-68.

Ms. Maria Mourani: Pardon me, I misunderstood.

Dr. Pierre Maurice: That bill contains two essential and very important ingredients, which are the possession permit and registration. We think it's very risky at this time, in view of the effectiveness of the act, which includes these two important ingredients, to remove from the act one of the main ingredients, in view of the fact that we save 300 lives a year in Canada with the act as it stands.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Unless I'm mistaken, you think that, if we remove one of those two ingredients, the system wouldn't be as effective?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: The system is quite effective because there's a reduction of 300 deaths a year. Considering that the measure is that effective, and considering all the costs it represents, it seems reasonable to me that solid, well supported evidence should be provided to demonstrate that the registry is ineffective before making any changes to the system. We know that the act, as it currently stands, makes it possible to effectively reduce the number of firearm-related deaths.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: So you're saying the registry makes it possible to effectively reduce the number of deaths by firearms?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: We're saying that the act makes it possible to effectively reduce the number of deaths, and the act consists of ingredients, including the registry.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Do you have any examples to give us concerning the registry as a prevention tool?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: Do you mean apart from firearms?

• (1635)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No. I'm talking about the firearms registry as a prevention tool. Do you have an example?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: On the one hand, as a result of the firearms registry and the accompanying act as a whole, firearms owners will be much more inclined to comply with the regulations regarding storage, the transfer of possession of a firearm, donation, sale, and so on. On the other hand, this is one very important means of protection for police forces who have to intervene, particularly when they have to remove weapons from someone who is known to be dangerous.

I want to add another point. To date, we've heard a lot of arguments from people who consider the glass half empty, that is to say who give greater consideration to what the registry does not do. However, you also have to consider that the majority of firearm-related deaths in Canada are not caused by criminals who do not comply with acts and regulations. The majority of people who die from firearms in Canada are people like you and me, well intended people who obey Canada's law and regulations and who, in practice, most of the time, register their weapons. Consequently, this knowledge, the registration of weapons and also the process imposed for the issuing of gun licences helps reduce the risk that a person who owns a firearm may misuse it as a result of a crisis, personal problems, a mental illness, problems with depression and so on.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Yesterday, we heard from Mr. Mauser, who is often quoted by members of the Conservative government and by various MPs. We were also told that he had been cited by Mr. Day, former minister of public safety. It's often mentioned, even in the government's arguments, that knives, and not shoulder guns, are most often used to kill women in spousal abuse cases. Ms. Hoepfner, who is the spokesperson for this bill, said that an oven was as dangerous as a firearm.

[English]

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: In your practice, have you observed that knives, ovens, household objects are used much more than firearms?

Dr. Pierre Maurice: I'm going to let my colleague Mr. Blais answer your question.

Mr. Etienne Blais (Assistant Professor, School of Criminology, University of Montreal, Institut national de santé publique du Québec): I have two points I want to clarify. First, it must be understood that a firearm is the ideal instrument with which to commit suicide or homicide, because it gives the attacker an incredible advantage over his victim. It enables him to kill the person more quickly and impersonally. A lot of people wouldn't commit a homicide or commit suicide with a knife if they didn't have a firearm within reach because they would be unable to do so. Consider the example of a 100-pound woman who attacks a 200-pound man; the firearm gives her an incredible power over her victim. The difference in strength between the individuals involved is no longer so important when a firearm is involved, but it remains if a knife is used.

The second thing you have to know is that, while knives are used as much in homicides, while they are used in the same proportion, that is particularly as a result of effective firearms control. The percentage of homicides committed by knife may increase at the same time as the homicide rate in general declines. It's because the rate of homicide by firearms is falling that the rate of homicide by knife is increasing. However, that doesn't mean that knives are more dangerous.

That's why these statistics must be compared with the trend in rates of homicide by firearms or by other methods.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I have training as a criminologist and I remember that we were told, in the lectures that were given, that it was much easier to kill with a firearm than with a knife. Holding a knife in your hand and stabbing someone takes on a personal dimension, involves contact with an individual, as a result of which it is much easier to kill someone with a firearm than with a knife.

Mr. Etienne Blais: Absolutely.

[English]

The Chair: We'll have to wrap it up there. I'm sorry, Ms. Mourani, you're out of time.

Mr. Comartin is next for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Dr. Maurice and Dr. Blais, in your paper today and in your comments you referred to a number of studies that showed diametrically opposed conclusions from Professor Mauser's yesterday.

Are you aware of Professor Mauser's work? Would you care to comment, not so much on the quality of the work but where it sits in relation to other work done by criminologists or other specialists in the conclusions he drew? In particular, I would ask you to address his conclusion that if you lived in a house where you had a long gun or any weapon, you were safer; that is, people who owned guns were less likely to commit crimes than people who didn't own guns; and the gun registry for both handguns and long guns has had no impact at all and may have created more crime. There was one more outrageous comment, but I can't remember what it was.

So basically there are two questions. Where do his conclusions fit in the mainstream of other criminologists, and are you aware of his studies about methodology?

●(1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Etienne Blais: I'm going to answer, since I am conducting a research program on the prevention of trauma caused by firearms.

First, I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Mauser. He has done excellent work on firearms and there are two studies that are repeatedly cited in which he assesses the effect of Bill C-51 on robberies and homicides. That said, you have to be careful when you make associations. If we're talking, for example, about a trend in homicide rates or robbery rates, we can't associate that trend with the measures put in place by the government to combat firearm-related homicides and suicides.

In my opinion, and from experience, you have to know that Professor Mauser has done no studies on the impact of Bill C-68. We have conducted studies in accordance with the same statistical methods, which were very rigorous, and we came to the conclusion that, since Bill C-68, there has been an average of 50 fewer homicides a year and 250 fewer homicides a year committed by firearms, without any tactical displacement effect.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Professor Blais, are these conclusions the same as those of other criminologists in Canada?

Mr. Etienne Blais: Absolutely. I would say that one thing emerges. I've read a lot of reports by Gary Mauser—he quotes himself—and Gary Kleck, but he does not refer to other criminologists such as Philip Cook or people who work at Harvard, such as David Hemenway, Anthony Braga or David Kennedy, who was cited earlier. These are all major researchers who show that some firearms legislation and anti-firearms police programs are effective, but they aren't cited by Gary Mauser.

The same is true in self-defence cases involving firearms. He will cite the study that is the exception to the rule. However, all other researchers are unanimous: the biggest studies show that owning a firearm increases the risk of being killed, by suicide or by homicide. I would say this is a somewhat arbitrary selection from the scientific literature.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin: *Merci.*

Sergeant Grismer, from reading your paper and hearing your comments today, you have obviously been opposed to the registry for a good length of time. Does that include being opposed to the handgun registry?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: Absolutely not.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Then I don't understand your position. The Auditor General made it very clear in the two reports she did that as far as costs and efficiency, 60% or 65% of the dollars were spent on licensing and the handgun registry and less than a third on the long-gun registry. Secondly, the accuracy of the figures on the handgun registry were no better than they were on the long-gun registry. Those were her determinations, particularly in the 2006 report.

Are you aware that those were the conclusions she drew on both the costs and the quality of the information in the handgun and long-gun registries?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I'm not aware of that aspect of the Auditor General's report. However, in comment on the accuracy of the restricted firearms registry and the prohibited firearms registry versus the long-gun registry, the information data contained in the long-gun registry was not obtained in the same fashion as that for restricted firearms and prohibited firearms, which for years, since 1934, have been registered by the RCMP and held within a national database.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Okay.

I suggest you read the report, because in fact what happened in that process was that the efficiency of the handgun registry was significantly impaired.

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: Well, can you let me finish answering the question?

Mr. Joe Comartin: No, I haven't got time.

Chief Blair, with regard to the comment of Sergeant Grismer that he can't use the registry for a sworn statement to take out a search warrant—if I understood what he said—how many times do you use the registry for sworn statements?

Chief William Blair: My police services use the registry for sworn statements, to put affidavits before the courts and to obtain search warrants, on a daily basis. Police officers right across this country use the information from the registry and from the Canada Firearms Centre for judicial processes.

I believe you heard yesterday from my Attorney General when he commented on the value of that evidence that the Firearms Centre puts forward.

●(1645)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Let me interrupt again. Do you—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): Thirty seconds, Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Do you feel you're breaking the law, that you would commit a criminal act every time one of those affidavits was sworn?

Chief William Blair: No, sir, absolutely not.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Thank you.

We'll go to the next round, to the Conservative side and Mr. Rathgeber for seven minutes.

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

Chief Blair, on May 9 of this year you did an interview on CTV and you said,

...I consider lobbying a political activity, and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the police community are quite content to leave the politics to the politicians...

Do you recall saying that?

Chief William Blair: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I know you believe in the registry, so if I were to search the lobbyist registry, would I find any active lobbyists who are retained on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police?

Chief William Blair: Active lobbyists? We have not hired any lobbyists that I am aware of.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Well, sir—

Chief William Blair: We have a government liaison company with which we've entered into a short-term contract. It had to do with a different matter.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: And would that be Ensign Canada?

Chief William Blair: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So you should know, sir, that you do in fact have three lobbyists on retainer: Mr. John Weir, Mr. Will Stewart, and Ms. Lisa Pearson. Are those names familiar to you?

Chief William Blair: Yes, sir.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So if you're against lobbying, why do you have three lobbyists on retainer?

Chief William Blair: We contracted them not to lobby on our behalf, but to engage in government liaison. We've dealt with them, and because of their relationship with your government, they declined to be involved in any aspect of the CACP's advocacy—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I think most people would consider government liaison to be lobbying, but we'll leave that for now.

The executive director of your association...you're no doubt familiar with Mr. Peter Cuthbert.

Chief William Blair: Yes.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: He issued an e-mail to all of the chiefs of police and all of your members about a week after you made that statement on May 17, announcing your attendance here today and asking all the members, the board, directors, the presidents of the provincial associations, to seek media interviews, opportunities to inform front-line officers, community members, and members of Parliament who reside in their jurisdictions on the value of the registry as a policing tool.

Now, if you don't subscribe to lobbying, why did your executive director issue that e-mail?

Chief William Blair: Because, sir, as I explained on the TV show, and as you have quoted me rather accurately, we do believe very strongly in advocating for public safety. We believe that a well-informed public, well-informed front-line police officers, and well-informed members of Parliament will be better equipped to make decisions about public safety issues. So we wanted to make sure, because there has been a great deal of misinformation, inaccurate and false information, that has been stated about the police position, that we clarify that for all Canadians.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay. I need to manage my time.

Why would front-line police officers require instructions on the benefit of the long-gun registry as a police tool?

Chief William Blair: That's an excellent question. Thank you for asking it.

What we have found in every jurisdiction where we've gone in and explained to police officers what information is available in the registry, how they might access it and how they might use it to do their jobs, is that the use of that registry has increased exponentially. And the success of their investigations, prosecutions, and the safety of our officers has been enhanced by that training. So by providing that information, to ensure that they know what the registry can do for their safety and for their work in keeping our communities safe, we have made them more effective.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Sure.

Do you know Marty Cheliak of the RCMP?

Chief William Blair: Very well, sir.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: And do you know that he's travelling the country doing exactly the same thing, educating front-line officers on the value of the long-gun registry?

Chief William Blair: Yes. I've accompanied him on a number of occasions where we've met with chiefs' associations across the country—a couple of them—where Marty has made a presentation on the work the Firearms Centre does, has shared the data that is now available to police chiefs across this country, and has helped explain the value that data can provide them in keeping their communities safe.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So if front-line police officers require instruction on the value of the long-gun registry, how can they possibly be in a position to give an informed opinion regarding its value?

Chief William Blair: I think once we provide them with that information, they will be able to give—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Maybe we should survey them now, now that you're educating them. Maybe we should do the surveys now.

Chief William Blair: Well, in fact, we are informing them. Their police associations are informing them. Their police chiefs are informing them. We believe that police officers need to know about what value this registry brings to them.

We have found where there is training—let me give you an example. There are two cities in Alberta—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: No, that'll have to wait.

Charles Momy sat in that very chair a couple of weeks ago and told me that in fact front-line police officers cannot possibly rely on the long-gun registry in their tactical decisions. Have you reviewed his testimony?

Chief William Blair: No, I haven't, but I—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Does that come as a surprise to you, that he said that?

Chief William Blair: I won't speak for Mr. Momy, but a police officer will use that information to inform themselves about the situation they're entering into. Is it absolutely the last word on the subject? Is there no other circumstance where they should consider other alternatives? Of course there are, and I'm sure that's what Mr. Momy was referring to. But the information available is useful.

• (1650)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I'll ask you the same question. Your officers respond to a domestic incident. They do a search of the residence by address and by owner, if they know the owner of the residence. It shows there are no registered firearms at that residence. He told me, and I'm sure you'll agree with me, that his officers cannot possibly rely on that search, that they have to go into that residence fully expecting there to be firearms.

Chief William Blair: I believe in my earlier testimony that I also said that if the information is available on the registry, it's extremely useful, but a police officer will continue the search regardless, because our ultimate responsibility is public safety, the safety of the people in that home.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: But you're agreeing with me: that search is unreliable. A search that shows no firearms at a domestic situation is unreliable.

Chief William Blair: No. What I'm telling you is, if the search does reveal that there are registered weapons, that information is incredibly reliable and very important to us, and it will help us in our investigation.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: How so? The search shows that there's one registered weapon at that residence. Your officers go in and they neutralize that weapon. That's it, the crisis is averted, or do they assume there might be more?

Chief William Blair: Of course they're going to assume. But if they go into that house—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: So in both scenarios—

Chief William Blair: If I may finish—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: —the search is unreliable, sir.

Chief William Blair: If they go into that house and they find 20 weapons but they've not yet found the one that's registered, they're going to keep searching for it.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you. You've agreed with me that both of those searches are not reliable.

Chief William Blair: Actually, I wouldn't characterize my response as agreeing with you, sir.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: In your magazine, the *CACP Bulletin*, spring 2010, you're quoted at the bottom of page 5 as saying, "We lose the gun registry at our peril." That's a quote attributed to you. Do you acknowledge making that?

Chief William Blair: Yes, I made that comment.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I agree with that. But are you talking about the gun registry or are you talking about the long-gun registry? Those are very different things.

Chief William Blair: I'm talking about both, sir, the registration of all firearms, including the long-gun registry.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Do you agree with Mr. Grismer that in some incidents reliance on the long-gun registry has actually imperiled the safety of officers?

Chief William Blair: No.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: What about Mayerthorpe?

Chief William Blair: Actually, in the incident they did not rely on that information, but the information was valuable in solving that crime and determining some of the individuals who were responsible for the death of those officers.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: We'll talk about that later.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Thank you.

Now we move to the second round of questions.

Mr. Kania, five minutes.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): May I ask you to give me a 30-second notice as well? Ms. Jennings is going to start, and we'll share some of my time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Very well.

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

[Translation]

My question is for Dr. Maurice and Mr. Blais. It concerns a topic you discussed with Ms. Mourani, the decline in the number of suicides, the non-displacement of firearm-related suicides and the non-displacement of suicides by other means.

You said there was a study on the subject. Today we heard statements to the effect that there is no evidence that the firearms registry has saved even one life. If we had evidence that it had saved even one life, the person who made that statement would not be opposing the firearms registry and would be in favour of keeping it.

Consequently, I would like you to explain the study that was done and how you were able to show that lives have been saved as a result of the act and the registry.

Dr. Pierre Maurice: As Mr. Blais is the co-author of that study, I'm going to let him explain that to you.

Mr. Etienne Blais: I'm going to try to answer in clear language, avoiding the jargon of the statistician and, in some cases, the criminologist.

Briefly, we conduct trend analyses on the rates of homicides and suicides committed using firearms and other means. We conduct analyses in which we take existing trends into account. We know very well that the trend is downward. We also consider socio-economic circumstances. We know that firearms control is not the only factor that may influence the rates. Lastly, based on all these factors, we determine whether there was a drop in the rates of suicides and homicides committed using firearms before and after the implementation of Bill C-68. We repeat the same procedure for the rates of suicides and homicides committed by other means and, with the aid of statistical criteria, we create estimates.

Those estimates tell us whether there has been a significant decline in the rates of homicides and suicides committed by firearms following implementation of Bill C-68 and that, at the same time, the rates of homicides and suicides committed by other means did not increase following implementation of Bill C-68. This means that there is no so-called displacement effect. I would add that these methods are recognized as being the most rigorous in the scientific field.

• (1655)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: So there is scientific evidence that the act and the Canadian Firearms Registry have saved lives, period.

Mr. Etienne Blais: We are in a position to say that it's the act. However, other research may prove necessary as Dr. Maurice was saying, to determine clearly all the mechanisms. The fact remains that, at this stage, we consider it risky to withdraw an essential component of the act and subsequently to risk compromising public health and safety.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: But the answer is that the scientific evidence exists.

Mr. Etienne Blais: It exists.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I have to share my time with my colleague Mr. Kania.

Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Kania: Chief Blair, you've mentioned documents and letters that you brought with you. Could you make sure you table those for the committee, please, so we have them?

Chief William Blair: Yes. I believe they were provided to the clerk and I have them at the back here. And my most sincere apologies, as some of the resolutions that I have received from the provincial associations have not yet been translated into French. We will undertake to do that for the committee members as quickly as possible.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Chief Blair, you indicated that on this issue the police are united like no other issue. Some people have commented that there's a silent, and silenced, majority of police officers who don't speak out. I'd like you to please comment on that.

Chief William Blair: I can't recall any other issue of public safety or public policy in which the police chiefs right across Canada, not just the national association but the provincial associations in urban and rural communities in virtually every region of the country, as well as the police associations, both national and local, along with our police services boards, have come together. The documents that I have provided here today demonstrate a remarkably consistent support for the gun registry from police leaders right across the country.

We have met with the police association leaders. We are not always on the same page. On this issue we are united. I'm not suggesting for a moment that support is unanimous, but I have never experienced, in my 33 years of policing, such a common cause among police officers, advocating for information that helps keep us safe and helps us do our job.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Does the fact that some guns are not registered mean the system should not exist?

Chief William Blair: No, and I think we should do everything we can to encourage Canadians in their compliance. Rather than just simply abandon the efforts to maintain a registry because some are not complying, we should do everything we can to ensure their compliance, and I believe that's through public education: educating Canadians on the value of the registry, the fact that it does not cost them to do it, the fact that it can be done efficiently, and the fact that the registration system is now an efficient operation and it has real value to law enforcement.

My experience is that police chiefs—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Thank you, Chief Blair.

Ms. Hoepfner, five minutes.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here. I sincerely appreciate all of you being here and all of the input that you have provided.

Chief Blair, I think we know you and I are on very different sides of this issue. I think it's clear you support keeping the registry. I've introduced the bill. I support seeing it ended.

One of the factors is the cost, from the \$4 million the RCMP has given us, all the way to what the Canadian Taxpayers Federation told us yesterday, I think \$106 million. When I look at the main estimates for the Treasury Board and the government website that I just got yesterday, I know that just the firearms registration—not the licensing, just the firearms registration—was \$23 million. Now, of that, we know approximately seven million long guns and about 700,000 prohibited and restricted are in that. So we're somewhere between \$4 million and all the way up to \$106 million.

I have a very simple question to ask you. If you had an extra \$4 million all the way up to \$106 million to spend, would you spend it on hiring more police officers or keeping the long-gun registry?

Chief William Blair: Let me tell you—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: It's quite a simple question: keep the long-gun registry or hire more officers?

If you can't answer, it's okay.

Chief William Blair: I can answer it.

We invest quite significantly in the gathering of information and making that information available to our officers. Accurate, reliable information makes them more effective and helps keep them safe. So for us, it's not an either/or. A police officer who does not have accurate, reliable information upon which to make decisions is not going to be effective.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'm sorry, sir. Can I ask you to please answer? It's a tough decision. Would you rather spend the money on more officers or keeping the long-gun registry?

I will ask the other officer here the same question.

•(1700)

Chief William Blair: And I'll tell you, I make that decision on a daily basis when I run my police services.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Long-gun registry or police officers? If you don't want to answer, sir, I understand.

Chief William Blair: Let me answer. I believe there is sufficient value in the long-gun registry that I advocate for its retention.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: So you would rather keep the long-gun registry.

Chief William Blair: Yes.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Thank you very much.

Sergeant Grismer, I want to thank you as well for being here. I'd like to ask you the same question.

As a front-line officer who's on the streets day after day dealing with criminals—and I would be interested to know what the Toronto police officers who are right now on the streets of Toronto had to say about this—in Saskatchewan, where you stand, what would you rather spend that money on, hiring more officers or keeping the long-gun registry?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: That's a very simple question to ask and answer.

I would put the money towards the scarce resources, towards more police officers on the street. We know, because of specific targeting we've done in the last number of months in Saskatoon in relation to a crime wave that has come through the city, that by putting more officers on the street we're able to see a reduction in that crime. We're talking violent crime. We're talking murders; we're talking aggravated assaults. By having more members on the street, having a more visible presence, we make our society safer than we do by having a registry that contains flawed, inaccurate data that has been collected, Mr. Comartin, in a manner that just breeds error and inaccuracy.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Thank you very much for that.

One of the issues that has come up today is the whole issue of police being silenced. When I introduced this bill, I really didn't know a lot of police officers except the ones in my caucus. But I've received countless numbers of e-mails, phone calls, and letters from police officers who have said to me, "Please do not give my name, but I support what you're doing."

I tell you, this is what I'm hearing.

I hear what you're saying as well, Chief Blair. You're asserting that's incorrect, that these officers are not being told to be quiet. So I would like to ask you, just for the record, to be very clear: have you directly or indirectly suggested to any law enforcement officer or police chief who supports my bill that they not vocalize that opinion publicly?

Chief William Blair: No, I have not.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Okay. Thank you very much.

I have another question regarding some proposals that Mr. Ignatieff has made on changes to the registry, but also to licensing.

Do you support his proposal to eliminate licensing fees for first-time licence applicants?

Chief William Blair: The actual fee structure has very little to do with the efficacy of the licensing system. It's an administrative matter. I frankly don't have a strong opinion one way or the other.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: So do you believe the licensing process is where individuals are actually screened to own firearms?

Chief William Blair: I think licensing is extremely important, and the screening of those individuals is extremely important. As to what is the appropriate fee to charge them, I'll leave that to the administrators.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Would you support weakening that licensing process or strengthening it?

Chief William Blair: I believe the licensing process must remain strong. It has value.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Thank you.

We'll go now to the Bloc and Mr. Desnoyers.

[Translation]

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

My question is for Mr. Farrant.

Your sixth recommendation reads as follows:

6. Domestic violence is a serious but preventable societal problem. Public education and debt counselling can help reduce stress in the home and the workplace and accordingly, may help to reduce overall instances of domestic violence. Use the money being wasted on the long gun registry to attack the root causes of poverty, another cause of domestic upheaval.

Reading that recommendation, I wondered if you were serious.

[English]

Mr. Greg Farrant: Certainly when we made—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Are you familiar with domestic violence?

[English]

Mr. Greg Farrant: Without needing to insult me, sir, yes, I am aware of what spousal abuse is. It takes many forms, not only of physical violence but verbal abuse. Certainly there are many forms of that. This is just one of the recommendations we've made in here. One of the suggestions we've made—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: This recommendation is important because you're talking about domestic violence, and all the witnesses heard came and told us that firearms could play an important role in domestic violence, which you don't say in that. Did you forget it?

[English]

Mr. Greg Farrant: What, to say that it is a part of spousal violence? We're making a recommendation....

Sir, you've asked me the question. I'd like to try to answer your question.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: A number of witnesses came and told us that firearms are used in domestic violence. Are you aware of that? I understand that you're not an expert.

I'm going to ask another question, but this time I'm going to put it to Dr. Maurice.

You talked about an important component: health. You talked about saving \$400 million. I find that figure significant. If the registry or Bill C-68 or the certificate makes it possible to save such large amounts of money, I believe both sides of this House should significantly take that component into account.

Dr. Pierre Maurice: In fact, the calculation is simple. It's based on a study conducted by an expert in cost-benefit studies, Mr. Ted Miller. He conducted a study on the cost of firearm-related deaths in Canada—those costs have been adjusted to current dollars. He estimates the value of one saved life at roughly \$1.5 million, just considering the direct and indirect costs. Those costs mainly consist of the lost productivity of the people who die. These are often young people who will not produce during their working lives, and so on.

If you do the calculation, it's quite easy to come to the conclusion that we're saving quite a bit of money for Canadian society as a whole.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: This is a component that's too often overlooked on this committee, especially on the Conservative side, because they want to abolish it rather than see what this investment can do for society.

Mr. Blair, you talked about an additional tool. You didn't talk about a tool that solves all police officers' problems, but you said that it's an important tool in the police arsenal. I'd like to hear you say a little more on that point.

[English]

Chief William Blair: Thank you.

The registry is an important information tool. We have many tools available to us. We have legislation, we have other information databases that we rely on, information that comes from our criminal intelligence gathering, information from our records management systems, information that we share among police services and among our police partners. These are tools that help us be effective in our work.

The gun registry is one of those tools. It is not a perfect tool, as I've said. It does not solve all our problems and prevent every crime, but we have no expectation that information can do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Ms. de Villiers, yesterday, a Conservative senator, who is also a representative of a victims association, appeared before us. He did not know which way to turn, but you know. I'd like to hear you say a little more about domestic violence.

[English]

Ms. Priscilla de Villiers: Thank you for the question.

I will be sending these around to show that I'm representing a number of organizations and victims, not just my opinion.

Yes, over the last 19-odd years, I have had a lot of dealings with many types of homicide and serious violence, and obviously with very serious domestic violence—spousal abuse, young people who have been killed or very badly injured—and in most of the cases, and some of them are listed here, there was a mental illness or depression, or suicidal ideation, that predicted this.

One of the things that has concerned me over the last 20 years is the misinformation, lies, and, frankly, distortions that have prevented families, people within the home, from using the opportunity to call to attention that the gun is taken out of the house. So that is where the gun registry has made a huge—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): We'll have to end it there. Thank you.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

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

Thank you, Chief Blair, for appearing before our committee. Before I start, I'd like to also thank you for those 33 years of serving and protecting the citizenry of Toronto.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I have a point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): I apologize. It's my error, being a rookie in the chair. Forgive me.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: You're doing a fine job.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): I was so proud that I pronounced his name right that I forgot about my side having the next round. I apologize for that to the committee.

Mrs. Glover, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you very much.

I also want to thank the committee members for being here today.

I have a couple of questions.

I have to say that I'm somewhat disappointed you weren't able to finish, Mr. Grismer. It was an important question about handguns and the registration of handguns versus the registration of long guns. I would like you to finish. There is a significant difference.

I spent a lot of time policing, as did many of our members on the Conservative side. There are no police officers in any other party here in the House of Commons. There are a number of a police officers who are elected officials and who very strongly agree with the bill put forward by Candice Hoepfner.

I want to give you a chance to answer that question, because it's important.

• (1710)

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: The registration of handguns and prohibited firearms, when it was under the regime of national weapons—I can't remember what it was called—was conducted by the national restricted weapons registry system. Everything was verified there.

A person would go out and buy a firearm and would then return to the police station with a permit that allowed the transport of the firearm to the police station. Every single aspect of the firearm would be verified by the officer behind the counter.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: It was before you received the handgun.

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: It was before you were allowed to take the handgun home.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: It's a significant difference that I think is very important to highlight when we talk about the registry itself and why the handgun registry is more reliable than the long-gun registry. It was a voluntary system to collect information from a wide array of Canadians across the country.

You referred to a poll. I'm very glad to hear that you polled your members.

When I was policing, we were polled when the long-gun registry was brought forward by the previous government. Front-line officers overwhelmingly said they did not want the long-gun registry and they did not think it would be effective.

There were officers who suffered consequences at the hands of chiefs, like Mr. Blair, who transferred them when they spoke out against it. It is why they are silenced today and afraid to come forward. I've received thousands of phone calls from people in Toronto, in Montreal, and across this country. Police officers are afraid to stand up because they fear the consequences in their jobs.

I'm ashamed of that. I'm ashamed as a police officer. I'm ashamed as an elected official.

You polled your members. I congratulate you. What in fact were the numbers? How many did you poll? What were the response numbers?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I'm sorry, I don't have that.

I know that our local association was polled. Everybody was polled. In the Saskatoon Police Service, the number fluctuates, but there are usually around 440 officers. Of course, it's certainly not the size of Chief Blair's association.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Do you have any idea of how many approximately? Did 75% answer? How many answered the poll or the survey?

Could you get that for us?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I'm sorry. I can try.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay. If you could give that to us later, it would be much appreciated.

I want to point out that the CPA president referred to a poll that had been done by the RCMP. There were 75,000 police officers across this county who were polled. The CPA kept referring to it.

I'm sorry. It was Mr. Wrzesnewskyj who asked a question of the CPA president, indicating that 92% of those who answered the poll were strongly using the registry. There were 408 people out of 75,000 who answered that poll. It's a ridiculous number to base any percentage on. It's ridiculous.

We have to get to the truth and the facts here. This is a divisive issue.

Sir, I commend you for standing up. I know it's a very difficult thing to do, given the pressure that has been put on this by many other police officers and other agencies.

The chief of police, Mr. Blair, also commented that it takes 37 seconds to register a firearm. Doesn't that give you confidence? It takes 37 seconds. Could you rely on that 37-second input of information to protect your life?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I don't rely on the Canadian firearms registry to protect my life at all, let alone 37 seconds. I don't rely on the information contained there.

As I said earlier, I will not swear out a search warrant based on any of the information contained in the registry, because in order to swear out a search warrant I have to swear on a Bible that I verily believe the information contained in my information to obtain a warrant is accurate and true to the best of my knowledge. I cannot and will not make that statement about the Canadian firearms registry.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much. I do applaud all police officers for their service, but we have to be truthful about this long-gun registry. It is not a clear-cut answer, and to have a majority of police officers not even know how to use it after 10 years of being in effect tells us it is wasteful, ineffective, unreliable.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Thank you.

We now move on to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Let me thank you for your 33 years of serving and protecting Toronto citizenry, in some of the toughest neighbourhoods, I might note, and on some of the meanest streets.

I'd also like to note that over the last number of years, while you have been the chief, Toronto has had a tough gang problem. You've been effectively addressing that particular issue, and we've seen violent crime decrease in the city of Toronto. So I think I speak for all Torontonians when I express my thanks for the tremendous work you've done for over three decades.

Sir—and this is a tough one—have you ever in the past been referred to as a member of a cult?

• (1715)

Chief William Blair: It kind of caught me by surprise, but, yes, that's happened.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Collectively, all the chiefs of police that are members of your association have over 5,000 years of serving and protecting Canadians coast to coast. Have you received a letter of apology as the president of the association from the chair of this committee for having sent a communication out?

Chief William Blair: We've received no communication from him whatsoever.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: That's astounding, though I think most Canadians would find that particular cult theory laughable.

But let's move on to the next theory that's been brought forward, a conspiracy theory. We heard from a retired Winnipeg officer, Jack Tinsley, that officers have been intimidated not to attend. That officers have been prevented from attending a standing committee of the Parliament of Canada is a serious allegation. He stated that they've been silenced, and we've heard similar allegations today. In fact, Sergeant Grismer has said police officers have been ordered.

Mr. Grismer, do you subscribe to this conspiracy theory that we're hearing that a majority—in fact, you say a silent majority—of police officers across this country have been silenced?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I stand by what I have in my presentation.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: So you subscribe to this conspiracy theory that thousands of officers.... In fact, actually, you go further. You say that in your appearance today you represent thousands of police officers across Canada who, in your opinion, are the silent majority, or for some the “silenced” majority. So, ipso facto, you believe you represent thousands of officers across this country?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I've had the ability to stand up and voice an opinion without being hampered or ordered not to, so in that respect I take the liberty of saying that I do represent these people ipso facto.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: We had the Canadian Police Association here. They were actually elected democratically. Would you not agree that they were elected democratically to represent thousands and thousands of officers coast to coast?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I would not agree that they're elected democratically, because the average front-line police officer has no input whatsoever into who is the president or who is on the board of directors of the Canadian Police Association.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: But there is an election and an electoral process in selecting the representatives?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: There's an electoral process in—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: There is. Perhaps you can check what that process is.

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I'm quite familiar with that process.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: But it doesn't matter, because you've decided that ipso facto you represent thousands of officers. Sir, you were quoted in an American NRA infomercial stating, “Once the populace doesn't have the ability to defend itself, it's no longer a governed nation. It's a ruled nation.” Do you stand by that statement?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I do.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Did you receive any form of compensation from the NRA?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: I received none whatsoever.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: But they're using you as a spokesperson. So in fact you're a spokesperson for the NRA in their infomercials, although you represented yourself here as, ipso facto, representing thousands of officers across the country as part of this conspiracy theory.

Do you believe that Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be amended to add the right to bear arms, based on your quotation here?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): You have 30 seconds.

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: No.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): We'll move over to the government side.

Mr. Norlock for five minutes.

● (1720)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for appearing today.

I'd like to ask Mr. Farrant of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters a question. In his submission Mr. Farrant didn't have enough time to talk about some of the long-gun registry myths and some of the polling that has been done with regard to that.

I wonder, Mr. Farrant, if you could go to your section near the end where you talk about the myth that the majority of Canadians support the federal long-gun registry and believe it should be maintained. Would you reference just the first four or five?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Norlock.

Recently we had—if you're talking about the polls themselves. Is that what you're asking me to reference?

Mr. Rick Norlock: Yes, just the results.

Mr. Greg Farrant: Sure. In the CTV poll of Thursday, April 29, 2010—so roughly a month ago—CTV News asked a very simple question: do you support the long-gun registry? Five percent, or 1,413 people, said yes they do. Ninety-five percent, 26,172 people, said no they do not.

Previous to that, on November 12, 2009, in Kamloops, British Columbia, the question was, do you agree with ending mandatory registration of rifles and shotguns? Eighty-eight percent said yes; 12 percent said no.

The *Toronto Sun*, just the week before that, asked if the federal government should scrap the national registry for rifles and shotguns. Eighty-one percent said yes; nineteen percent said no. And on and on we go.

Over the last four years, 16 polls have conclusively demonstrated that Canadians are fed up with this registry and want to see it gone.

Mr. Rick Norlock: When you say you represent 100,000 Ontarians, usually anglers, and hunters.... In some of your publications that I've been able to read, you talk about the safe use of firearms and the safe handling of firearms and the responsibility that firearms owners have.

Could you tell me, with regard to your publication, how often in that publication you would repeat those issues about firearms safety?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Mr. Norlock, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters is also the publisher of *Ontario Out of Doors* magazine as well as Angler & Hunter Television, and I think it's safe to say, and fair to say, that we repeat that mantra at every opportunity.

Last year we produced over 100,000 pamphlets on responsible hunting, and in there we talked about safe storage, safe transportation, safe use, licensing of firearms, etc. Copies of that went to every municipality in the province of Ontario.

I appear annually in 50 to 100 municipalities talking about discharge of firearms bylaws, both in my capacity as a member of the federation and their representative, but also because I'm a vice-chair of a police services board. So I talk to OPP officers about this all the time and take their recommendations about what to send to our members in terms of safe use of firearms.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

Sergeant Grismer, if I were to tell you that in 1998 the percentage of homicides that involved firearms was 27%, and it stayed roughly within 2% or 3% of that number.... In 2001, of course, the long-gun registry started and the percentage of homicides involving firearms was 31%. Then if I were to tell you that in 2003—long guns then required to be registered—homicides with firearms were 29% and that has remained steady, what would you logically conclude from that?

Det Sgt Murray Grismer: Well, figures on firearms used in crime fluctuate across this nation. If you track them over the years, they've fluctuated up...we've been higher, we've been lower, and now they seem to be reaching a stabilized point. When we look at firearms crime in other nations, we see that there has been a downturn in violent crime within the U.S. So I guess the answer is it shows that at the number it's at, it's staying relatively at a plateau.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

Having—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Twenty seconds, Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: That's it? Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): That will end the questioning period.

It's a great privilege, on behalf of the chair, to thank you all for being here today and bringing us your expertise on this vital issue. Again, thanks, and thanks for coming to Ottawa.

We were told that the Liberal Party needed five minutes at the end of the meeting to deal with a motion that was going to be presented by Mr. Holland. That's the way the chair left it with me.

• (1725)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: That's correct, and since Mr. Holland isn't here, I am more than happy to make the motion that the reports by the RCMP be brought forward to our committee.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Okay. Can you specify what reports we're looking at requesting from the RCMP?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I unfortunately don't have the exact names of those reports, but I think they are referred to in the transcript.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): I've checked with the clerk on the applicability of this motion, just so the government side understands.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: They are internal audits by the RCMP of the gun registry.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): In consultation with the clerk, because it's germane to what the committee is currently dealing with, it is appropriate to put the motion on the floor. I just want to make that very clear to everyone.

Are there any comments, questions, discussion, or debate on the motion?

Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I have some comments, because we are dealing with something when we don't exactly know what it is. If I remember some of the questioning of Mr. Sweeney from the RCMP, there was some suggestion that it was a position paper being taken by the RCMP in consultation with others—it may have been Chief Blair—on Bill C-391.

Mr. Holland is very familiar with the contents of that position paper, yet not every member present here has been afforded an opportunity to look at it. One would think that Canada's official opposition—and I'm not sure about this, I'm just trying to logically piece things together—the RCMP, and allegedly Chief Blair.... I'm not sure whether that's factual or not, but based on statements I recall having been made, and not having access to exact quotations—although I could probably bring one up here very shortly—this piece of paper has been referred to as an RCMP position, in consultation with others. It's an internal report, and I think I have an excerpt for the committee, just so we know where we're going.

Deputy Commissioner Sweeney said:

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify what I said. I said cabinet committee, but I misspoke; I meant parliamentary committee. I do apologize for that. We have been working with Chief Bill Blair and others. Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak has been assisting in developing positions with respect to Bill C-391....

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): I don't want to interrupt, but you have about 30 seconds before I drop the gavel and the bells start ringing.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I don't believe at this time, quite frankly, that this committee should be hearing about an internal RCMP position, in consultation with others, that the official opposition has, that has not been made public. It's not a public document, and I would have to say—

An hon. member: Mr. Chairman—

• (1730)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): Mr. Norlock is speaking. The bells are ringing. I'm watching the time. There are about 10 seconds. Continue for 10 seconds.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I'm simply trying to say that if this is in the public realm, we need to know about it.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman): The meeting is adjourned.

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