



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

PACP • NUMBER 016 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

—
Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to call the meeting to order. I want to welcome everyone here. I especially want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses who are here before us today. This is the first public meeting of the public accounts committee in the fall session, although we did have two meetings last week. I want to welcome you back to the session.

We have this afternoon's standing order, a review of chapter 4, the Canadian firearms program, of the May 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada. With us, ladies and gentlemen, we do have the Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. With her is Peter Kasurak, senior principal.

From the Department of Public Works and Government Services we have Ian Bennett, the acting assistant deputy minister, acquisitions branch.

From the National Police Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police we have Mr. Peter Martin, the deputy commissioner.

From the Canada Firearms Centre we have Monsieur François Bidal, the director general, and also with him is Denis Bilodeau, senior counsel and head of legal services.

We are expecting Mr. William Baker appearing as an individual. Of course, Mr. Baker was the former commissioner of the Canada Firearms Centre, and hopefully he will be along momentarily.

Before calling upon the Auditor General to make her initial opening remarks, I believe Mr. Nadeau has a point of information or a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Chairman, last week we worked on a report on the Firearms Act, specifically on our ninth report. We checked the Internet for what we believed to be the most recent report, but some changes had not been made further to our last meeting.

Is this not the most recent report then? Is a report containing the changes going to be published?

Mr. Alex Smith (Committee Researcher): A new report will be available for the next meeting.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: And the changes will have been incorporated so that we can discuss them then?

[English]

The Chair: The final report will be circulated, I believe, later today or tomorrow, and it will be discussed at our meeting on Thursday. You haven't seen the final report. At our last meeting we did make a number of changes.

The problem, Monsieur Nadeau, was that we were in a period of hiatus because the committee dissolved for a few days. As a result, the clerk couldn't send out the documentation. Now that's been lifted. The revised and amended report will go out, and I plan to discuss that at our Thursday meeting, although we haven't allotted a lot of time because we didn't spend a lot of time on it. We did make some changes. We want every member to have an opportunity to review the changes, and it will come back to the committee, hopefully for final approval, on Thursday.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have with us Mr. Baker. Thank you very much, Mr. Baker.

Ms. Fraser, your opening remarks.

Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for inviting us to discuss the audit of the Canada Firearms Centre. As you mentioned, I am accompanied today by Peter Kasurak, senior principal of the public safety team responsible for this audit.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide the committee with an overview of our findings related to the operation of the firearms program. This audit was a follow-up to our 2002 audit of the cost of the Canada firearms program. We were unable to complete our 2002 audit because the financial information that was available was unreliable and did not fairly represent the net cost of the program.

This year we are able to report that the centre has made satisfactory progress in addressing our recommendations, with the exception of accounting errors made in recording the cost of its new information system. This committee and others have already conducted extensive hearings on our reports regarding the accounting errors and the implications of these errors to Parliament's control of the public purse. I will therefore focus on our other findings.

As you know, the government has announced changes to the program subsequent to our audit. The most significant changes involve the transfer of the Canada firearms program to the RCMP and the introduction of legislation to abolish the long gun registry. My comments today take these changes into account, but we of course have done no audit work since we reported in May of this year.

[*Translation*]

We have found that the Firearms Centre has made substantial progress in setting up a separate agency and in addressing operational and contracting problems. However, I also found some problems had yet to be addressed. The most important of these were: reporting program performance to Parliament; the accuracy of information in the Registry; and ongoing difficulties with the new information system.

In general, the reporting of performance to Parliament had improved since our 2002 audit. At the time of our 2006 audit, much more information was being provided. However, we found reporting remained at the most basic level for reporting results. The Centre had not set any performance targets and had provided few examples of program outcomes. In addition, the Centre's performance reports contained errors, which significantly overstated its improvements in the timely processing of licensing and registration applications.

With respect to the accuracy of Registry information, to support police and reduce risks to public safety, the accuracy of information in the Registry is vital. We found the information in the database to have significant quality problems:

- address information for firearms owners was frequently wrong;
- verification frequently determined that information on the weapon's action, make or serial number was wrong;
- only half of the 1.2 million restricted weapons listed in the old Restricted Weapons Registration System had been re-registered. Information on these firearms was not updated, despite the knowledge that many of the old records were incorrect. Accuracy of the data regarding these weapons is a problem which remains to be resolved;
- lastly, the Centre did not know the status of 62 per cent of the firearms that had their registration certificates revoked over a three-month period in 2005.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Let me turn now to the difficulties with the information system.

The centre has had continuing difficulties managing its registry information system. CFIS I, its first attempt, cost almost \$190 million by March 2005, including operations and maintenance costs. While initial estimates of the system's costs were in the order of \$13 million to \$20 million, the extent of the cost overrun is difficult to estimate because development and operational costs were not separated. A key factor causing cost escalation was the attempt to develop a system before legislation and regulations were finalized.

In 2001, the centre determined that a new information system was required, known as CFIS II, but repeated the error of attempting to

build the system before legislative and regulatory changes had been completed. CFIS II also experienced serious overruns, including delay costs of \$30.6 million, when the centre put the project on hold. At the time of our audit, CFIS II was more than two years late in being implemented, was still incomplete, and had cost about \$90 million.

Mr. Chair, the RCMP is now responsible for the management of the program and for keeping Parliament informed of its progress. As the firearms centre had agreed to our recommendation and proposed corrective actions, this committee might wish to obtain renewed commitment to the undertakings made by the centre regarding our report.

Mr. Chair, this concludes our opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions committee members may have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Fraser.

Mr. Baker, do you have any opening comments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. William Baker (Former Commissioner, Canada Firearms Centre, As an Individual): I'm very happy to be here today to answers the committee's questions.

[*English*]

It's probably worth underlining that as of May 17, I ceased to be commissioner of firearms. But I'm certainly here at your disposal to respond to items that occurred during the period during which I was commissioner.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Bennett—who is now the acting assistant deputy minister of the acquisitions branch—I understand you have an opening statement.

Mr. Ian Bennett (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Acquisitions Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me introduce to you, Mr. Chair, and to the committee members Scott Leslie, who is the senior director who has worked very closely with the centre and continues to work very closely on this file with the RCMP.

In my opening remarks, Mr. Chair, I want to thank the committee and you for providing me with this opportunity to discuss federal contracting services in relation to chapter 4 of the Auditor General's May 2006 report.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

To deliver the best value procurement services, Public Works and Government Services Canada works as a strategic partner with our customer departments. We help them throughout the procurement process from defining requirements and procurement approaches; managing the bidding process; and supporting them in ensuring accountability throughout the contract.

[English]

The Department of Public Works and Government Services has supported the Canada Firearms Centre since its inception through the provision of contracting services, including those related to IT.

The department has issued two principal contracts, both competitively tendered and awarded, to support the Canadian firearms information systems, referred to as CFIS I and CFIS II. These contracts are highlighted in chapter 4 of the Auditor General's report.

Managing these two CFIS contracts in an uncertain operating and legislative environment has proven to be a significant challenge. Numerous changes to both contracts have been required over the years to accommodate these evolving realities. We do acknowledge, however, that lessons learned from our experience with CFIS I could have been better applied to the CFIS II procurement, which has proven to be a particular challenge. Many of the assumptions upon which it was based had to be adjusted, as the environment, particularly the Firearms Act legislation, has changed.

With the assistance of third-party analysis, Public Works and Government Services Canada, the RCMP Canada Firearms Centre, and the CFIS II contractor have agreed to halt work to ensure that no further expenses are being incurred while we assess the situation.

The Auditor General cited cases dating from 1997 to 2004 in which the firearms centre retained a number of contractors for several years using PWGSC's informatics professional services database, a tool that allows federal departments to search for consultants based on skills and experience to justify a non-competitive procurement process. The Auditor General reports that in many cases, the searches of the IPS database would yield only the name of an incumbent contractor. PWGSC concurs that these contracts should not be justified as competitive, and we note that the firearms centre ceased this practice in 2004.

The Auditor General recommends that Public Works and Government Services review how client departments use its contracting tools and be better able to provide assurance that the tools are not being used to circumvent contracting policies and procedures. We take the Auditor General's recommendation very seriously and have taken corrective measures to address the issues highlighted in the chapter. Such measures include the training of users on accountabilities, policies, processes, increased monitoring and reporting of usage, and, where appropriate, restricting use of these tools. As of December last year, PWGSC has improved, rebranded, and expanded the professional services online database to allow better monitoring of departmental usage.

In conclusion, we recommend that we must continue to find ways to further improve our services to federal departments while continuing to exercise a vigorous check and balance role in the interest of Canadians. PWGSC is in the midst of transforming the way it does business, and we're seeking innovative ways to deliver services smarter, faster, and at reduced cost to Canadians. We are committed to fair, open, and transparent competitive procurement practices to meet government needs while ensuring equal access to businesses that will withstand the test of public scrutiny.

Thank you. I'd be pleased to answer your questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bennett.

Mr. Peter Martin, the deputy commissioner, do have you any opening comments?

D/Commr Peter Martin (Deputy Commissioner, National Police Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Yes, I do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Accompanying me here today are senior officials of the RCMP Canada Firearms Centre.

It gives me great pleasure to meet with you today to discuss issues related to the RCMP Canada Firearms Centre.

On May 17, the Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety, announced some key government decisions concerning the future of the Canada firearms program. The first order of business was to transfer responsibility for the administration and operations of the Canada Firearms Centre to the RCMP. Since that time, we have employed sound stewardship principles to align management functions that have resulted in some economies of scale while remaining focused on the mandate of the firearms centre.

We continue to work toward further alignments of function and operations that will allow the RCMP to invest strategically in important initiatives related to its mandate. We have also reviewed chapter 4 of the Auditor General of Canada's report, tabled in May 2006, and RCMP management has developed an action plan to address all of the recommendations.

I would like to thank you for inviting the RCMP to appear before the committee, and I am ready to take your questions.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Martin.

Monsieur Bidal and Monsieur Bilodeau, have you any opening comments?

Okay, then. That concludes the opening remarks, colleagues. We're now going to go to the first round of questioning.

Before we do so, before calling upon Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, I want to ask members to keep their questions short and to the point. We don't need long, three-minute preambles.

I would ask the witnesses to be short and crisp with your answers. This committee has zero tolerance for long, rambling answers that have nothing to do with the question being asked.

Finally, I would ask members to be aware that this committee deals with the financial issues, with the propriety, the regularity, the economy of the issues at hand and not with the policy: whether or not this country ought or ought not to have gun control. That is a policy issue to be decided by the government of the day, and this committee has no opinion, of course, on that particular issue. I would ask members to direct their questions accordingly.

Having said that, before we go to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, I want to point out that the auditor general of the province of Quebec is in the room. Perhaps the auditor would stand up and say hello.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: *Bienvenue.*

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

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

I'd like to begin by going back to the May 2006 status report. On page 129, in paragraph 4.114 at the second line, it says:

The status of the CFIS project (late and over budget) is largely due to early decisions made in 2001 and 2002; the lack of compliance with good contracting practices goes back to 1997; and the current management team inherited an organizational structure that had not stabilized.

But then on the next line down the auditor continues by saying:

The current management team has made notable progress on a number of issues, including the establishment of a new department.

I note that today in the update, in point 6, the auditor says:

We found that the firearms centre had made substantial progress in setting up a separate agency and addressing operational and contracting problems.

So what we see is that there were, quite obviously, birthing problems and there were a number of reasons for those. Unfortunately, as was mentioned in Mr. Bennett's opening statement, managing the two CFIS contracts in an uncertain operating legislative environment has proven to be a significant challenge. Notwithstanding that, we seem to have made, in the words of the Auditor General, "substantial progress".

Now, that same report from May, in paragraph 4.8, goes on to say that in the audit "we did not examine the effectiveness of the program or its social implications". We can understand the difficulty of doing that sort of audit, but throughout this whole debate and discussion, where costs did overrun—unfortunately, those costs are now sunk costs—we have what appears to be a centre that has made substantial progress, and the only measure I personally can apply to whether or not this centre is effective is by looking at the effectiveness of what its intent is.

I can't help but go to the days after the Dawson shooting, when the Sûreté launched an investigation into a 14-year-old who also posted threats on the vampire.com website. They checked the registry, found his father had firearms, and they removed them. Also, we have an interesting measure here: police use the system 5,000 times a day; last year the system supported 3,000 affidavits; and thousands have had licences denied and revoked.

It's impossible to speculate how many lives we've saved as a result of this substantial progress and the existence of this centre. But I'd like to address the representative here from the RCMP and to ask him, how do you feel about some of these recent successes and some of these numbers, which speak to the effectiveness of this centre—specifically this number that says it's used 5,000 times a day and that last year 3,000 affidavits were supported by the centre?

• (1600)

D/Commr Peter Martin: The number of inquiries through the centre is escalating on a continual basis. Today the centre is queried approximately 6,500 times a day, and it's going up. The centre provides important information to police officers in the field for investigative purposes, and it also assists them in ensuring they take measures to protect their own safety when they're going into premises where it's known that firearms are located. So it goes on and on.

Through the licensing process the program also carries with it a need for training and preventative measures that people are made aware of as they go through the training process. So it's quite a rigorous undertaking.

The benefits of the centre are enormous. We have examples of where the centre has been beneficial. The less tangible, the preventative maintenance aspect of this, is a little bit more difficult to pin down in very specific terms, but the fact that people can get in there, that members of police agencies right across Canada are querying the centre on an increasing basis day after day is evidence of how important they consider the centre to be.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you. That's actually very helpful. It also helps to explain why police chiefs across the country are virtually unanimous in their support of the firearms centre.

I'd now like to move on to point 8 of the Auditor General's report. In the first bullet point it talks of address information on firearms owners being frequently wrong. I assume from the other references made to substantial progress, etc., that this is being corrected. In terms of this registry and its accuracy, there are suggestions that the long gun should be scrapped. Would it be more helpful to actually tighten some of the legislation around this whole issue? Would tighter storage be helpful, and would it help address this particular bullet point?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Issues of legislation are for the government to address, not for the police agency to deal with.

When you talk about the quality of the data using addresses as an example, the Auditor General did point to a concern about the quality of data. We have put together a team to get into the data quality and we have looked at areas of the database where there are problems. Addresses have already been identified as one.

We have prioritized areas of risk. As you can probably appreciate, an address is an important piece of information, whereas a postal code is not as important. We focused on the high-risk points of data quality. To this point, about 25,000 addresses have been fixed. We have about 3,000 left to go, and we continue to make significant progress on improving quality of the data in the database itself.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

My final question is this. The third bullet in point 8 talks about only half the 1.2 million restricted weapons listed in the old registry being re-registered. I'd like to tie that in to the comment made by Mr. Bennett that managing contracts in an uncertain legislative environment...and then to qualify that by pointing out that the Conservative government has talked of an amnesty. Has that sort of talk led to this situation, this very dangerous situation, where the Auditor General notes that we have a serious problem in that half of the 1.2 million restricted weapons that had been registered—now we have half of those, meaning 600,000 are no longer registered. People did not re-register them knowing there is an amnesty. Was this one of the considerations when you mentioned managing the centre is a little difficult in a changing and uncertain legislative environment?

• (1605)

Mr. Ian Bennett: No, that wasn't the intent at all. It was really the coming into effect of the regulations, etc., and the organizational changes as the centre evolved. Those really were the program issues I was referring to.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Monsieur Laforest, huit minutes, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Good afternoon.

I too would like to refer back to paragraphs 4.38 and 4.39 on page 124 of Chapter 4 of the report tabled last May.

Madam Auditor General, the Centre's strategic outcome is to minimize the risks to public safety from firearms in the community. In paragraph 4.39, you mention some financial problems and difficulties with setting up the information system. In essence, a number of activities related to firearms registration and licensing have been carried out, but little emphasis has been placed on evaluating program performance.

Did you in fact state in your report that there was not enough statistical evidence at this time to determine whether or not the program was truly effective?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The difficulty, as we observed, is that the centre's performance report focussed primarily on registration activities. It contained very little information on outcomes. Furthermore, it does not show a link between these activities and the strategic outcome, namely improving public safety. Rather than simply report on activities, the performance report should have been more coherent and provide more information on outcomes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: So that's one of the shortcomings you observed?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes. We expect performance reports to contain information on outcomes. Especially in the case of a somewhat controversial program, it would be beneficial to all parliamentarians to have more information on outcomes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: You also discuss the effectiveness of the information system. You point to the existence of a network of volunteer verifiers, but conclude the network isn't 100 per cent effective. You mention that verifiers can verify their own firearms.

Should this system be improved or should it be endorsed in its present form?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We did in fact identify many problems with the verifiers network. Volunteers can verify their own firearms and do not always have all the required information. There is no mechanism in place to ensure the decisions made are the right ones. This problem needs to be addressed to ensure the quality of the data in the registry.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Exhibit 4.5 in the same report notes that the number of contracts between \$24,000 and \$25,000 has dropped significantly since 2000-2001, while exhibit 4.6 shows that the number of contracts below \$25,000 that were amended by more than 150 per cent has also dropped significantly. According to the two exhibits, the figures for 2000-2001 are rather high.

Did you make a parallel observation? Can these figures be pooled? What transpired in 2000-2001 to produce...?

• (1610)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The first exhibit shows the number of contracts between \$24,000 and \$25,000 while the second shows the number of contracts amended by more than 150 per cent. To us, these are signs of a potential problem. This type of analysis allows us to verify if there are many contracts valued at just under the \$25,000 threshold and to see if it would have been possible to split up the contracts, rather than assign only one with a higher value which should have been put out to tender.

These indicators are what we call red flags. The numbers have dropped significantly. We observed that a new management team was put in place and procedures have changed significantly.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Therefore, there has been a clear improvement on this front.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You have two minutes left, Monsieur Nadeau—*deux minutes*.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: First of all, while we all remember clearly where we were on September 11, 2001, I also clearly recall where I was on December 6, 1989. As we all know, this event ultimately led to the creation of the firearms registry, which I fully support.

Nevertheless, I felt that someone had pulled the rug out from under me when I found out how much it had cost to set up the registry.

Perhaps I don't quite understand the meaning of the words used here, but the report refers to the performance of the gun registry. To my mind, the goal here is to save lives and avoid tragic incidents. It's difficult to say exactly how many lives have been saved because of the registry and to compare these figures with those compiled prior to the registry's existence.

I'm not trying to cast aspersions on those who are experts in numbers or accounting, but I'd like to know how you can possibly compare the performance of a program like this with another not necessarily set up with the express purpose of saving lives.

Is there some way of doing the calculations, strictly from an accounting standpoint?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Often, performance measurements cannot be expressed in figures. We talk about improving public safety, but it is probably quite difficult to quantify that objective. Moreover, it's difficult to establish a link between a registry and an outcome.

We do point out in the report that currently, the performance report is heavily outcome oriented, that is it looks to the number of entries in the registry and the number of times the registry is accessed by a police officer, but it does not provide any indication of how useful data of this kind actually is.

Perhaps what is needed is something as simple as surveying law enforcement agencies to see if they have used the registry and if so, if they found the information to be accurate and useful. There are methods we could explore. You could also give examples of how the registry was useful and how it helped to improve public safety.

For now, just knowing how many entries the registry contains is not particularly useful to us. We're saying that there could be several indicators specifying the outcomes achieved by the registry.

•(1615)

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup, Mr. Nadeau. Thank you very much, Mrs. Fraser.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, you have eight minutes.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): The mandate of this regime that we have in place, from what I can understand, is to improve public safety. That's its overarching goal. If I accept the premise of this whole system, it's highly reliant on quality data, and it's a typical case of garbage in, garbage out: if the information is not correct and accurate, we're going to have problems.

Now, I'm from Saskatchewan. We actually have had cases in Saskatchewan. I know an individual who registered a hair dryer. I think he probably had the action and the mode and the serial number all down pat. Another individual registered a soldering gun.

I'm curious, Mr. Martin. Maybe I'll direct the question to you. Does registering hair dryers and soldering guns somehow improve public safety, in your mind?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The question that came from Mr. Laforest a few moments ago about verifiers is one of the recommendations that came out of the Auditor General's—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: It's a straightforward question. Does this improve public safety, yes or no?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Registering firearms does. We are not supporting the registration of hair dryers or soldering guns.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Right. Okay. I'm just raising the point.

There is another concern that arises. This is not an isolated case; there have been many examples. I refer to an individual named "Mom" Boucher, who I think is serving a 25-year jail sentence for murder and has a record that is quite scary. My understanding is that it was revealed at his trial that he had lawfully registered a number of pump-action shotguns and a revolver.

I'm asking you again, sir, is it good for the public safety of our country for people like "Mom" Boucher to be able to lawfully obtain possession of revolvers and pump-action shotguns?

D/Commr Peter Martin:

I have no knowledge of that specific case; I'd have to look into it.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: How about yes or no? With your police background, do you think that would be good for public safety?

D/Commr Peter Martin: People with criminal activity, if they apply appropriately, will be denied registration.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Right. Or disturbed people getting access to restricted firearms: would you agree with me that's not good for public safety either?

D/Commr Peter Martin: People who have mental stability issues.... We're getting into a very sensitive health area, but people who are not qualified to have weapons should not have them.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Right, but my point is that some of these things are happening, sir.

I'm trying to emphasize the importance of the accuracy of the data in the system. I've looked at the auditor's report on the action, the mode of the firearm—I'm not sure what the hair dryer's and the soldering gun's action would be, but I guess maybe electrical—the make of the firearm, and the serial number.

On the transfers, the error rate is very high. I think any person with statistical analysis would tell you this is serious, especially when you get double-digit error rates. I think of a pilot flying into the Toronto airport who's told that the data in the air traffic control system has a 12% error rate: "But don't worry about it. Land anyway. We'll take our chances on it."

There's a lot of error in the data in this system.

D/Commr Peter Martin: As I mentioned earlier, we have made a lot of significant progress on correcting the accuracy of the data.

Mr. Chair, let me speak to the issue of registering things such as soldering guns. The volunteer verifier program has been eliminated. We have had our professional agents, who are employees of the centre, exposed to extensive training, and that has improved our ability to verify the accuracy in the qualification of various firearms.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I want to follow up on that point. You're getting me right into the area you're in. We seem to have a system that has a lot of existing errors in it, and it would seem to me if you're the pilot coming into the Toronto airport, you have to fix the errors in the system so that the system works.

We have a problem right now: there are a lot of errors in the system, there are two different computer systems here, and there are lots of problems. I've thought my way through this thing, sir. Some things...you might check the addresses and get those sorted out, but it seems to me the only way you can really verify the model and the serial number and the action of these firearms is to actually make a physical inspection of those items to get that information accurate. How many registered firearms owners do you have in your system right now?

• (1620)

D/Commr Peter Martin: I can't answer that.

Mr. Bidal, do you have that?

Mr. François Bidal (Director General, Canada Firearms Centre): It's approximately seven million.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Seven million? Do you have any idea how many government inspectors it would take to go into the homes of all those gun-registered people in the country to verify and double-check this information to get it right? Do you have any idea how many people that would take?

Mr. François Bidal: We have not undertaken that study, to come up with an estimate of having government people conduct verifications on the seven million people.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Well, how else would you do it without doing that? You can't do it on hearsay. We have legal people here; they'd understand the weaknesses of hearsay.

D/Commr Peter Martin: We have implemented analytical tools that will now allow us to go into the database and do certain checks. Certain makes of firearms have a sequence of numbers that will allow us to predict whether the validity of the serial number is right or wrong.

This program came over to the RCMP on May 17, and the address issue is one example of how some of the data in the database has been corrected. There are other examples, and we would be more than happy to provide that information to the committee.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Would you agree with me? The Auditor General, if I'm reading her report correctly, says you have a mandate, and your mandate is to improve public safety. When she looks at what's going on in the department, there is actually nothing in place statistically to show that the activities taking place are meeting that goal. There's nothing in place that is devoted to that fundamental goal, which is to reduce the risk to the public of firearms. There's lots of self-analysis about what you're doing and so on, but there is no analysis statistically to link the registration system and all the rest of the stuff you're doing with actually decreasing or increasing public safety.

Is the Auditor General correct in saying you really don't have any systems that can measure that or are measuring it?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I can't speak prior to May 16, but right now I can tell you that we do have analytical tools in place. We have a team that's working every day on the data quality issue, and there are operational examples of how this system has improved public safety.

You mentioned we're working on two systems. No, we're working on CFIS I. The issue around CFIS II is under negotiation right now;

we're not using CFIS II. Within the RCMP we have a mature technology operation under the chief information officer, and we are able to maintain the CFIS I system with those technical resources.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Martin. Thank you very much, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Christopherson, you have eight minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your attendance today.

Let me say at the outset that as these things go, this isn't too bad. There are some problems, and we're going to talk about those. But I do want to start out on a positive by saying there were huge problems prior to the 2002 audit, a lot of condemnation, and it looks like a lot of those things have been cleaned up and are on track, if not ideal. Folks are to be commended for that. I think that is a good way to start.

Having said that, however, I want to move to an item that the Auditor General has characterized as being important in her opening remarks and that has been addressed by others. I want to revisit the whole issue of performance targets and performance accountability.

Paragraph 4.36 of the Auditor General's report says, and I quote:

In particular, the Centre has not set any performance targets and has provided few examples of its outcomes. Instead of reporting the key results achieved, the Centre describes its activities and services.

The recommendation in paragraph 4.41, on page 109, says:

The Canada Firearms Centre should improve its reporting on the performance of the Canadian Firearms Program by providing targets and evidence-based results, and by showing through the use of a results chain how these results could contribute to public safety goals.

It would seem that in 2002, in the last audit, according to a brief given to us by the library staff in their report—and it's tabled, members have it in front of them.... This is the 2002 audit that says in part, and I quote:

The Centre's performance reports provide a fair to good overview of its organizational context and planned strategic outcomes. However, the Centre has not set any performance targets, has provided few examples of outcomes, and does not have a results chain showing how its activities might contribute to public safety goals. The Auditor General recommended improving reporting of performance by providing targets and evidence-based results and by developing a results chain. The Centre agreed.

While I ask Ms. Fraser a few questions, perhaps, Mr. Bidal, you can turn your mind to answering—because you're next—why nothing was done. Why are we getting a second audit report telling us that exactly the same problem, which existed in 2002, still exists in 2006? You can think about that for a moment.

Perhaps, Ms. Fraser, you can expand on exactly what we are talking about in terms of these performance results. In layperson's terms, what exactly is it that's lacking?

●(1625)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: As we mentioned, the strategic outcome of the centre was to increase public safety or reduce risks to public safety. To make the link between the registry and public safety can be difficult. There is no automatic link, so you have to build various steps to do that. This is what we call the results chain. For example, it could be providing better information to police officers, and they would use this in a certain way that could increase public safety.

We're saying the centre had to develop that kind of results chain and then try to find indicators that would indicate what the outcomes of the registry are—not simply the licensing and registering activities and the number of hits in a day, because those are statistics on activities, as we say. They don't really give you any appreciation of how the centre is contributing to better public safety.

We can take an extreme case and say, yes, there are 5,000 hits a day, but if the information is no good, are people using it? And is that helping public safety? You could make the link and say, yes, there are 5,000 hits a day, the information is good, police officers are saying they are using it, and it has helped in these cases. It's to develop that chain and logic from the actual activity through to the results.

Mr. David Christopherson: I would assume that maybe, once they have set that, it's a bit of a template; then they just go back and fit in the results—

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Over time?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, over time, to see whether or not you're actually achieving—

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's right, end results. Performance measures will have to be modified.

I think we have to recognize, too, that these are not easy things to do, and it takes time to develop the chain to find indicators that really do tell the story. Sometimes they can modify behaviours in an improper way. It does take time to develop these results chains. I think, though, in the current context, where there is a lot of discussion about the program, it would have been very helpful to have that kind of results information.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Bidal, why do we have a second auditor's report telling us this is still not fixed?

Mr. François Bidal: Mr. Chair, I can only speak to the events as of June of this year, which is when I took the position of director general as a member of the RCMP. I note that already there had been a framework put into place by the previous administration to ensure that there was an improvement in how performance is managed and how it's reported.

Mr. David Christopherson: I don't want to be rude; I'm sorry. You've only been in this job since June?

Mr. François Bidal: Yes. I'm a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I've been director general since June.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm going by this sheet. That's why I picked on you, if you will. I saw Canada Firearms Centre, and you're the director general.

Well, then, who is going to take responsibility for why this didn't happen, sir? Is it the commissioner, the former commissioner?

Mr. William Baker: Former.

When we arrived, the new team, in 2003, we had a number of problems, frankly, including that we were still very heavy on the production cycle; that's number one. We had very little confidence in the basic data. Unless you know how many licences there are, how many registrations, how many hits on the system, you're hard pressed to take the analysis any further and start suggesting impacts and effects on public safety. Our priority was to do what we could to get the data as accurate and up to date as possible.

Of course, it wasn't the only thing we were focusing on, as you can appreciate, including production, improving service to Canadians, and so on.

We had gotten to the point, probably toward the end of 2005, where we were starting to build some of the analytical tools to do this. That was not evident at the time of the audit; it was just in its infancy. And as Mr. Bidal has mentioned, further work has proceeded since then.

●(1630)

Mr. David Christopherson: I hear all that. I'm still having a little difficulty understanding, though. Concerning what you just said you needed to do first, I just heard Ms. Fraser for the most part say that those are different things, and you're mixing apples and oranges when you do it; that the number of hits, in and of itself, doesn't tell you anything.

It's the whole idea—I'm trying to get this right—of this chain to link all of these things. So it would seem to me that even in the absence of having those accurate numbers at the time you started, after this report came out you should have at least started on the template, begun the process to ensure that once you have those numbers and they're reliable, you have a context to fit them in, if I'm getting this right.

My time is up, so there you go.

Mr. William Baker: I think, with respect, the point is debatable.

My view as commissioner at the time was that if we tried to engage in that kind of analysis and reporting without having confidence in the core data, we would run the risk of being ridiculed, given the incredible scrutiny that was being placed on the data and the reporting from the centre. I erred on the side of underselling and trying to concentrate on ensuring the integrity of what we did report.

I appreciate the point. This is certainly valid for future consideration.

Mr. David Christopherson: All right.

And you know what? Thanks a lot for coming back and being prepared to carry the can for the time you were there. You didn't have to, and it's appreciated and respected.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Baker.

Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Ms. Ratansi, you'll have eight minutes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you all for being here.

I have a few questions, and I'll be very short in my questions.

My first question is, what does transferring the Canada Firearms Centre to the RCMP mean?

D/Commr Peter Martin: First off, it allows us to integrate with the infrastructure inside the RCMP. We are able to benefit from the fact that the RCMP already has a human resource component and a financial administration group, so the duplication on the administrative side is eliminated right away. Because the Commissioner of the RCMP is at the deputy minister level, we don't need to replace Commissioner Baker, so there are some inherent savings on the management team.

Another huge benefit, I believe, is the fact that we have a mature technology service inside the RCMP. It has been in place since the 1960s, and through the chief information officer we are able to provide some of the technical advice and technical work that was not available to the previous administration for the centre.

The other thing we are able to do is—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: For example? Do you have an example of technical work?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Programmers.... One of the things we are engaging in is a knowledge transfer from consultants over to employees of the government. As we complete that knowledge transfer, we are terminating the consultants, and it will eventually result in the termination of the contract with one of the vendors, EDS.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: And number two, therefore, is that you will register guns and license guns?

D/Commr Peter Martin: We will license individuals—that process involves security checking, education—and we will register firearms as well.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay. Then my next question is this. The Auditor General said—this is paragraph 4.40—“While the Centre may not be able to show direct evidence of how its activities contribute to its public safety goals, it could improve its performance reporting....” And my colleague from the Bloc asked, how do you value a qualitative life; how do you value the results of this?

So what sorts of measures, from your technical experience, what sort of useful indicators do you think you will put in to ensure that the firearms registry is useful, that it does save lives?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I think some of the information is already there, and a lot of good work has already been done. The introduction of new analytical tools that allow us to analyze will help in that regard.

But just to give a couple of statistics, right now there have been 17,861 firearms licences revoked. One of the things that happens within the centre is that the database goes back through the Canadian police information system and checks to make sure that any licensed individual hasn't taken part in an activity that would prohibit the person from having a licence. In those cases, we go back through the system; that's just one of the examples of how a licence would be revoked.

I think it's a matter of reporting some of those things.

The other link that I believe was missing is some of the reporting on how it actually benefits operational cases. Again, linking the centre with police operations facilitates that kind of reporting.

I can give you an example of an actual case out west where an individual was apprehended in the commission of a crime. He had a weapon in his possession that was not used in the actual crime. We checked the registered owner through the centre. It was not this individual; it was somebody else. We checked into the background of that registered owner. That individual had a number of weapons in his possession—an unusual number—so in partnership with the centre we acquired a warrant and went into his premises. No weapons were there. He was actually a gunrunner. We were able to bring that case to a successful conclusion based on the information we got from the centre.

• (1635)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: So you are comfortable that licensing, which is like a screening, a test, is very important as part of the ongoing giving of a licence to a person who wants to own a gun. For example, as I can see it here, the firearms officer can refuse a licence if for any reason it is not in the interest of the safety of the applicant or any person. And they use a broad basis for refusal based on criminal record, spousal notification, mental health, etc.

Are those criteria still in place? Are they working? Do you have a problem with them?

D/Commr Peter Martin: They are in the criteria, there are other criteria that are used, and I think it is beneficial; however, no system is perfect, and we're constantly monitoring for improvements.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Then my last question is this. A non-partisan coalition of 300 organizations, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Professional Police Association, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Jewish women's international organization, victims' organizations, etc., have prepared a paper, and they claim that from 1995, when the gun registry was introduced, to 2004, per annum, 300 deaths have been saved, that the homicide of women with firearms has gone down by 62%, and that robberies with firearms have reduced by 57%.

I am quite interested in knowing how they are able to extricate the data regarding this information and are able to compile it when we were just told that the data that is being used is not accurate and doesn't address a lot of things. There's a disconnect, and I want to know how to correct that misperception in my head.

D/Commr Peter Martin: First off, I'd like to thank you for making the linkage the Auditor General was looking for.

I don't know. I would have to assume they've gone to Statistics Canada. If I heard the Auditor General right, she didn't say the data wasn't there; she said the linkages weren't being made. As I just pointed out, there is some very valuable data in the database on the revoking of licences. I think part of the challenge is that we have to get out there and pull all this together and report it.

I agree that some of the data has to be cleaned up, but some of it is very good and very valid.

The Chair: We're running out of time, Ms. Ratansi, and I believe the auditor has a point.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Sure.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Can I just make one comment?

There is always a question and I think a difficulty in attribution of results. It's to show how registering a gun results in fewer deaths. There are probably many factors that do that. I don't know the study you're referring to, but I would be curious to see whether they actually can make that link between a gun registry and a reduction in deaths. It would seem to me that attribution is probably not as direct as some people might want.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Can I just speak here? This was a PhD who was doing the studies, and I was quite curious as to where they were able to get that connectivity with a system that has some flaws in its database. I'll give it to you later.

•(1640)

The Chair: We're going to move on to Mr. Poilievre.

I want to thank you, Ms. Ratansi. Thank you, Madam Auditor. Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I would encourage Ms. Ratansi to table that paper. I'd be very interested in reading it. I share the questions about the ability of any group to show attribution between a registry and lives saved, considering that the firearms office has not been able to make that attribution itself.

I'd like to discuss this continual statistic you've referred to that officers access the registry 5,000 times a day. Supporters of the registry have consistently used this statistic, and I believe it to be very misleading.

I've spoken to numerous officers—some are very close friends of mine—and have asked them about it. I have not been able to find a single officer who has ever accessed the gun registry, nor have I been able to find a single officer who knows anyone who ever has accessed the registry. In fact, I had one officer, who's very competent serving in the community, who told me he wouldn't even know how to access the registry, and he's very well trained and highly respected in the community. This is someone for whom I have a lot of respect.

So I did a little bit of research. What I found is that this statistic, 5,000 times a day, is not the number of times a day an officer actually goes into the system and says, "H'mm. I'd like to investigate whether so-and-so possesses a firearm." It includes all of the incidental occasions when someone's name in the registry is brought up for a different reason. For example, if someone is brought over to the side of the road for cross-walking and their record is brought up and they happen to own a firearm, that is counted in this 5,000 number.

I would like to know how the 5,000 number has any pertinence whatsoever to the discussion on the registry when it includes all of these incidental occasions that records are brought up.

I have had this confirmed by officials in the department, and I would be very encouraged to hear your response to it, because if it's not the case, then there is a disconnect in the information we're being given.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Thank you very much for that question.

As a matter of fact, this one came up when I accompanied Minister Day at a meeting of the Treasury Board. The thing about information in the police environment... What we're trying to do is be as efficient as possible with information and avoid duplication. People do not get checked in the registry for jaywalking; however, in certain areas of the country—Toronto, the Lower Mainland of British Columbia—for certain types of offences there is an automatic checking through CPIC into the registry. If I've been involved in certain types of activities and somebody queries me in either Toronto or in British Columbia, the CPIC check will automatically generate a check into the firearms registry.

The operational procedures—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Will that appear on their screen immediately?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Yes.

In the operational procedures in those places where there's not an automatic feed into the registry in a com centre, if a com centre operator receives a call for a check on a person for certain reasons, when they launch that query, they will go into the registry as well.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Which queries bring it up?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I don't follow.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Which kinds of queries cause a hit to be recorded in the system?

Mr. François Bidal: It's a matter of policy of that particular policing agency, so that may be an agreement. A given policing agency will decide that for a call of domestic violence or assault or what have you, as a matter of policy they will instruct their communications operators to make that check. In many cases that police officer will not have the knowledge that the check is being conducted on his or her behalf, because there was a policy decision by that chief and his management team.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Then that officer is not even using that data.

Mr. François Bidal: The decision has been made in that officer's best interest by his management team, for his safety and for the safety of those involved in that particular intervention.

•(1645)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Right, but the point I'm making is that although the officer might be involved with a citizen in a matter that has absolutely no relation to firearms ownership, the hit still registers in the system, and that's where this 5,000 number comes from. It's inaccurate to suggest that the officer has actually used the registry. Automatically it has counted as having been used, and that is where this 5,000 number is coming from.

D/Commr Peter Martin: If you talk to the police chiefs, I don't think they would agree with that, because on a domestic, as an example, if the—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We're not talking exclusively about domestic. There is a whole series. That's why I've asked you to narrow it down to all the various activities that would cause this hit to be recorded. You continually go back to domestic and other sorts of things, but what I'm being told is that these hits are being counted even when it really has absolutely nothing to do with the work the officer is conducting.

Mr. François Bidal: Mr. Chair, I believe there are two questions. For one the answer would be that as a matter of policy an individual department can decide the scope of when it would like that check to occur. That's one. In the other case, there are many checks, no matter what the incident, that are conducted on behalf of that police officer, for which he gives inherent trust to that communications operator, who will make a series of checks for his personal safety or for that of the public. A series of checks is conducted on every incident; in most cases the police officer doesn't ask for that entire series. Those are policy issues and operational issues that are joined up by that department.

D/Commr Peter Martin: As an example, we have—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I just want to point out, though, that the officers do not actually access the system 5,000 times a day. Am I right in saying that?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The officers don't, but the system is checked 5,000 times a day.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There we go. Okay, the system is checked 5,000 times a day—

D/Commr Peter Martin: —for the benefit—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: —and that statistic is being used to make a policy argument already before this committee. In fact, you've just confirmed that it is inaccurate to suggest that officers check the system 5,000 times a day.

I'd like to move on to another question, and that is with relation to the accuracy of the registry information—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

I had mentioned this number of 5,000 per day, and I was corrected and told that in fact the number has escalated, that the correct number today is 6,500. Is it?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's not a point of order; it's a point of debate.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: No, it's a point of clarification.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We don't want to engage on points of order on all these sorts of things, because they are not points of order.

The Chair: That is not a point of order, Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I trust that won't come up any more.

The Chair: We'll let the witness in this case elaborate.

Is there any difference between the 5,000 and...? What is the correct information?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Actually, I will just raise a point of order myself, Mr. Chair.

I am questioning the witness right now. I don't know how another member can intervene and begin questioning the witness.

The Chair: We're not going to do that. This does not count on your time. We've just asked the witness to clarify the information so that everyone in the room is clear on the issue.

Very briefly, Mr. Martin, could you clarify the information?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The number of times the system is accessed is growing on a daily basis. The exact number as of the second quarter of 2006 is 6,699.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, you have 45 seconds.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay, we'll just reiterate that you've already acknowledged that the number is not the number of occasions that police officers actually access the system, so it is a totally irrelevant number.

D/Commr Peter Martin: It's accessed for the benefit of police officers.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I'll now move on to my next question, which is on the inaccuracy of the system.

I note that the Auditor General indicated that verification frequently determined that information on the weapon's action, make, or serial number was wrong, and that only half of the 1.2 million restricted weapons listed in the old restricted weapons registration system had been re-registered. Can the Auditor General comment on whether she thinks these problems with the data could lead to public safety implications for officers who think they are using accurate information but in fact are not?

The Chair: That's the final question for you, Mr. Poilievre.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Again, that goes to results.

We can all recognize that the quality of the data in the system is very important, and every measure should be taken to ensure.... As we mentioned in the audit, we would have expected the centre to have set targets for quality and to have a process in place to measure quality. That didn't exist at the time of the audit. I am hearing, though, that the RCMP seems to have put some measures in place. We would expect that there would be a quality management system.

•(1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Poilievre.

Thank you very much, Mrs. Fraser.

Before we go to the second round, I have a question for you, Mr. Martin.

There had been fairly significant concerns, prior to the actual reporting to Parliament, on the firearms program. One of the main things that all departments and agencies report to Parliament on are the plans and priorities. Today, we have released to Parliament 70 or 80 fairly significant plans and priorities. We've made a quick check of the RCMP release, and we can't find anything at all on the firearms registry.

Is it being reported by another department, or can you elaborate on that?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I really can't respond to that. I don't know why it's not in there. It should be.

Mr. François Bidal: The information we have would be reported as an addendum to the RCMP report, because we're still on separate votes for this current fiscal year.

The Chair: Of course, we may have missed it too. I just wanted to clarify that. You're reasonably confident that it is there?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go on, colleagues, to the second round. This is the five-minute round. Again, keep your questions and answers short.

Could we have Mr. Wrzesnewskij again?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I'd like to follow up on questions that Mr. Fitzpatrick had.

I find it quite worrisome that the serial numbers of a hair dryer and a soldering gun—and he seemed to have intimate information and knowledge of these sorts of occurrences—were being registered in the registry. It was encouraging to hear that processes have now been put in place so that this sort of abuse does not continue.

I have to say, my concern is that people were doing this with the intent to undermine the registry. To think that a member of Parliament would be intimate with the details of this.... I was just curious.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: That's a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Wrzesnewskij—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: He is suggesting that I am an accomplice to somebody.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Fitzpatrick. Do you have a point of order to make?

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Yes.

His allegation is quite obvious. He's saying that I'm directly involved with somebody who's up to public mischief. That's totally out of order. I never said that. This was a publicly reported incident. Back when it occurred it was well known in Saskatchewan. It was reported in the media. I resent this member's allegation or suggestion that I'm actively engaged in this undermining. I think that's way out of order, and this member should apologize right now.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: As I pointed out, intimate knowledge doesn't mean that he's intimate—

• (1655)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: You should be clear about what you're saying.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: —with the individuals involved, so I don't believe an apology is required.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: It's not what I would expect from you, sir.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I'm glad you have in fact acknowledged that what this entails is public mischief. That this act of public mischief was used to undermine something as important as a gun registry, the intent of which is to save lives, is quite astounding.

Once again, I'd like to come back to something I was talking about. I am very concerned that of the 1.2 million restricted weapons that have been registered, only half have been re-registered, meaning

600,000. I know it's impossible to connect. It dates back to the promises of an amnesty by the present government.

I was just curious. You're now deputy commissioner of the RCMP, and you're in charge of making sure that this system works to protect Canadian lives. What is your feeling? It has been suggested that there will be an amnesty for the breaking of laws. How do you feel when you've now been mandated to make this registry more effective? How do you feel about this particular policy and the job you've been given?

D/Commr Peter Martin: It's not my place to comment on where the government wants to go. My place is to do as I'm told when they decide where they want to go, and that I will do.

As far as the information in the system goes, the amnesty is there, but the old information is still there as well. The dates on a current licence or registration may be an issue. The government must decide what they want to do about it and then tell us what their wishes are in that regard.

I'd also point out that the Canada Firearms Centre is more than just a registry. It's a program that involves training and education on the safe use and custody of firearms. It deals with the storage of firearms. There are a lot of pieces to this program that provide an ongoing benefit.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: You mentioned another aspect of this: the storage of firearms. Are there any particular suggestions that you would like to make regarding that aspect? We have the licensing. We have the registry. There is a component about how restricted weapons are stored. Is there anything you would particularly comment on about that aspect of it?

D/Commr Peter Martin: No.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: In that case, it's quite obvious that after some of the more recent events, such as the tragedy at Dawson, we need to revisit the idea of whether or not the registry should be scrapped, or of how we can tighten some of the aspects of the registry. It was noted earlier that police chiefs are of the same opinion.

The Chair: Mr. Wrzesnewskij, you're almost out of time.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I'd like to reiterate, once again, that most of the police forces across the country are supporters of this registry and for very good reason. I'm glad that on the tail end of the tragedy that occurred in Dawson the registry was effective in keeping a potentially similar case from taking place in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Sweet, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you.

I have a couple of questions first for Mr. Martin.

You were talking about the CPIC check, when an officer does a 28 and 29 and asks for wants or warrants. Really the police department could say that every CPIC check gets an automatic registry hit. Is that correct? Is that their policy?

D/Commr Peter Martin: No.

Mr. David Sweet: It's according to their policy, right?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Yes, we've got to think about capacity. What we would like to do is build in the facility for automatic checking. We're going to be looking at that in the future, so that it will become a seamless operation. Again, we have to deal with the issues and take care of them first. Let's walk before we run.

Mr. David Sweet: The real focus now is efficiency, right?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Right.

Mr. David Sweet: We're trying to get an infrastructure that will always be in place rather than continuing to spend lots of money building a separate infrastructure and using that. When a police officer accessed it, would there be any less efficiency or any less safety if the access was to a licensing system or a separate registry?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I don't understand.

Mr. David Sweet: Right now you're streamlining that into one system that already has an infrastructure. Is that correct?

D/Commr Peter Martin: We're linking systems together so that one query would check in a number of places.

Mr. David Sweet: Again, we're talking about creating some efficiencies as well as some increased quality in the data.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Right.

Mr. David Sweet: I had a question, Mr. Baker. I don't know if this pre-dates you or not. Sections 4.58 and 4.59 of the Auditor General's report state that as far back as 1994 there were concerns about flawed data. We've got two systems now, and I understand we're not using CFIS II, so we're back to one. Do you know why we didn't just start there with validating some of that data and beginning to improve it prior to moving onto new infrastructure?

Mr. William Baker: I think there are two issues: one was the mechanisms that were in place to verify the data that came in, and secondly, the information system that was used. They are separate in many respects.

I can say that when one looks at the history of the program, in particular, the deadline for registering firearms, which was December 31, 2002—and of course there were a few extension periods built in after that—the centre received millions of registration applications in a brief period of time. This period actually predated my arrival, but I was living the tail end of it.

Prior to my arrival, a decision was made not to do extraordinary validation of that information because our concern was about getting a registration certificate in the hands of the firearms owner so they could prove that they complied with the Firearms Act. In order to ensure the quality of the data, what we did—and I don't know if this is still the practice—is that every time that firearm changed hands, we would then use the occasion of the transfer to verify the information and ensure that the database was correct. We do not see it as administratively feasible to contact existing firearms owners and try to verify the data on the firearms that are in the possession of two million Canadians. Because of the natural turnover of firearms, that was the approach that was taken.

• (1700)

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

With respect to building CFIS II, whose decision was that to leave number one and go on to number two?

Mr. William Baker: The decision goes back to roughly the year 2000. The first system was built at the outset of the Firearms Act, around 1995. It was judged by previous management that there were some limitations to the system—for instance, it was using some older technologies and approaches.

Mr. David Sweet: I'm sorry to interrupt, but you know there's limited time.

What I'm trying to get at is that we seem to have come full circle. There was this flawed decision to build a huge registry. I'm thankful that we got something from the billion dollars; you said there was some good work done. Now we're back to the police managing it with a good infrastructure that's well matured, and I understand the verification is ramping up very quickly. I'm just wondering, was there no push back by the public service on whoever was going ahead with this to say there's already an infrastructure for licensing and that we can enhance that? How did this end up even beginning and then ballooning into a billion dollars? Do you have any kind of knowledge around that?

Mr. William Baker: The decisions to proceed with a second information system predate my time as commissioner. I can tell you—and there's certain evidence of that in the Auditor General's report—that at various times we stepped back and tried to assess whether this was still a wise investment decision for government. On balance, it was concluded by the Treasury Board during my time to continue the development of CFIS II.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much.

I'm wondering if Mr. Martin has any history from the inception of this.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Sorry, I don't have any history on that. We got involved in this in May. We were using CFIS I at the time, and the staff we had could maintain CFIS I. There are negotiations around what's going to happen with CFIS II.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, and then Mr. Laforest, *cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Since its inception in 1995, the gun registry has generated considerable public controversy. In spite of this, there have been some beneficial collateral effects. I'm convinced that the public at large — users and non users alike — is more aware of the dangers of firearms than in 1995. The ultimate outcome is enhanced public safety. We've also observed that users and non users alike are better informed about gun registration, storage and handling procedures.

Of course, statistics don't tell the whole story. I'll give you an example. I personally know some people who were involved in a firearm-related accident before the registry was set up in 1995. Two teenagers were playing with a gun that had not been stored properly and one was killed. I believe this accident would not have happened if the new firearms registration program had been in place. There is a tendency to evaluate the registry solely on the basis of the number of times it is referenced each day, the number of firearms registered, and so forth. However, the program overall has had a number of other positive effects, in terms of public safety and fewer accidents or incidents.

Mr. Martin, you stated earlier that the Firearms Centre also offers a training program. Is this program intended for the general public, or solely for gun users? I believe there would be many positive benefits if the program were to contain a component where the general public was informed of the dangers associated with firearms and with using them — after all, we must respect gun users. The general public needs to be informed of the dangers of guns and of overly restricting their use. People should be allowed to use guns, but the registration system makes their use much safer.

Ms. Fraser, shouldn't there be a better education program in place, where outcomes could be measured?

• (1705)

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin:

I think you're quite correct. There are positive results from the training program. Right now, the intention is that anyone who's looking to acquire a licence would have to go through the training program. It's not necessarily directed at people who have no intention of acquiring a firearm, but anybody in Canada, if they want, could conceivably take the training. Right now it is focused on people who are looking to be licensed to acquire firearms.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Shouldn't there be a better public education program in place, not only for gun users, but for non-users as well, to better inform people about the dangers and procedures that must be followed by users? That way, members of the general public could help to improve public safety by sounding the alarm when they observe firearms being used improperly.

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: Without a doubt. Awareness and education are beneficial, and knowledge gives people the power to conduct themselves in a safe manner. Whether or not it's practical with such a large undertaking...it would be nice if we could do that, but there again, we are trying to be efficient in our funding here. I think we have a lot of work to do in terms of getting the firearms program up to where we want it to be, and possibly in the future we could look at that as an awareness program for the public at large.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Martin. Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Laforest.

Mr. Lake, five minutes.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you.

A few questions. First, for Mr. Baker, it's a big question, but I want a fairly short answer. It seems as if there are massive information and structural problems with this system. What is the main reason for those problems? This isn't personal—you weren't there all the way through—but is it an incompetence problem with the department, is it a leadership problem, was it a lack of resources? These are huge problems that really shouldn't have happened. What's the issue?

Mr. William Baker: My first comment would be that the data isn't as problematic as has been suggested. There are problems with

the data, but not nearly to the magnitude some have suggested. By and large—

• (1710)

Mr. Mike Lake: To the magnitude the Auditor General suggested?

Mr. William Baker: Even if we look at the Auditor General's report, at the work that's been done to verify the accuracy of registration information, in less than 0.5% or 0.1% of cases is the error significant to the classification of the firearm. So yes, there is work to do.

As I said earlier, in large part this was a product of the deluge of applications to register firearms at one point, and we're continuing to live with the fallout from that.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay, so maybe lack of resources, given the amount of—

Mr. William Baker: I'm reluctant to say lack of resources because important amounts of public money were spent in delivering this program.

Mr. Mike Lake: But maybe not quite enough to do the job properly.

Mr. William Baker: It could have been a combination of resources and approaches to doing it.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay. Mr. Martin, I want you to walk me through a little bit.... We talk about 5,000 to 6,500 hits a day going on the system. The police officer gets information that tells him there's a registered gun in a house he's going to visit. How does that affect his approach?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Not hits a day, but inquiries. The inquiry could be a “no results” return. So if an officer has a call to a resident—and it will depend on the nature of the call—the communications centre gets a warning that the residents—

Mr. Mike Lake: So there's a gun in the house. How does that affect his approach?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The officer will probably call for backup.

Mr. Mike Lake: So he'd be even more careful? Okay. I want to stop you there because I have a limited amount of time. The extension of that is he would be less careful if he did not find out there was a weapon in the house.

D/Commr Peter Martin: No.

Mr. Mike Lake: Well, that's the extension of it, though. You're saying he'd be more careful if he found out there was, so if he didn't find out there was, he'd be less careful.

I want to go further on that and say there's obviously bad information. There are illegal weapons that aren't registered; half the weapons that were in the system, 1.2 million, have not been registered yet. There could be all sorts of potential for a mistake, and you could have officers being less careful because of the system, they have more confidence in the system than they ought, and it would put them in danger because of the system.

D/Commr Peter Martin: With respect, you made a lot of statements there, and I don't know which one you want me to...I don't even remember everything you said.

You talked about illegal weapons and all that kind of thing.

Mr. Mike Lake: There are all sorts of reasons why, when an inquiry is made, the answer would not tell them there's a weapon in the house, and it might be wrong. There are a lot of weapons in these houses that would not register on an inquiry to the system.

D/Commr Peter Martin: We don't know how many weapons are not registered; we know how many are registered. So when we have that piece of information—

Mr. Mike Lake: We know there are at least 600,000 that aren't registered, right?

D/Commr Peter Martin: No. If you're talking about renewals, the information is still there. Because of the amnesty, the renewal has not been effected.

Mr. Mike Lake: This is because of the amnesty? The 1.2 million registered weapons go back to 1995, apparently, from what I'm reading here, and half of those haven't been re-registered since then. Is that accurate? I'll ask the Auditor General's Office.

Mr. Peter Kasurak (Senior Principal, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): The words you have read, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: Mr. Lake, your time is up. I'm going to get a comment from Mr. Martin. You can answer the question as best you can, and then we're going to go—

Mr. Mike Lake: Can I get the clarification from Peter first?

The Chair: First I'll ask Mr. Martin to comment, and then we'll go to the auditor's office.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Mr. Chair, I really feel nervous about answering that because a lot of statements were made, and I'm not sure what the clear question is. If you're talking about 1995 data, or if you're talking about the issue of weapons that have not been re-registered or renewed because of the amnesty—it's all over the map.

The Chair: Mr. Kasurak.

Mr. Peter Kasurak: The actual statement that half the registered firearms in the RWRS have not been re-registered is correct, but it's necessary to fully understand our critique of that. It's not that the system has lost visibility of these weapons; it's that the old database was quite inaccurate, and by re-registering these weapons the accuracy was improved. So for half of them, the data is not up to the same quality as the renewed data.

• (1715)

Mr. Mike Lake: It's 11 years old.

Mr. Peter Kasurak: Yes. So that was our point—not that the system had lost sight of 600,000 weapons.

Mr. Mike Lake: So from that we know where those weapons were 11 years ago.

Mr. Peter Kasurak: Yes.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thank you.

The Chair: Before we go to Mr. Christopherson, I have one question to Mr. Martin on the amnesty.

The amnesty that was given by the government is not a matter of policy; it's a matter of law. You're a senior commissioner in the RCMP, and it is my understanding it would be an illegal act for a government to give an amnesty.

Does the RCMP have any position on that?

D/Commr Peter Martin: No.

The Chair: They have no position.

Mr. Christopherson is next for five minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Chair.

I have one question to the deputy, and it's an easy one. The Auditor General, in the eleventh point in her statement today, recommended to the committee that we consider asking the RCMP to make formal commitments, similar to those made by the centre when it was stand-alone, vis-à-vis these recommendations. In other words, they've agreed they are going to implement them.

For the record, on behalf of the RCMP, which is now responsible, would you be good enough to give us the undertaking that you also agree with the recommendations and will follow up on them the way the centre did previously?

D/Commr Peter Martin: You have that commitment. One is already completed and the rest are all under way.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Deputy.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Christopherson, for your very brief intervention. We appreciate that.

Mr. Rodriguez is next for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If I understood you correctly, Mr. Martin, you stated that these 600,000 firearms were not registered owing in large part to the gun amnesty. Under the circumstances, owners were not compelled to re-register their firearms. Is that correct?

[*English*]

D/Commr Peter Martin: I will ask Mr. Bidal to respond to that.

Mr. François Bidal: The decision made at that time, or the obligation under law, was that the people were to re-register those firearms. We don't have anything currently to link that to the amnesty.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I understood Mr. Martin to say that because of the amnesty, 600,000 firearms had not been...

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I just want to point out that the amnesty was announced after our audit. Therefore, as far as we're concerned, the two incidents are not connected. We simply pointed out that 600,000 firearms had not been re-registered. We also mentioned that the quality of the information was questionable.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Ideally, the status of these 600,000 firearms should be updated.

Mr. Martin, do you have an idea of the number of RCMP officers killed in recent years by long guns?

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: No. We had two this past year, and a number of weapons were used in Mayerthorpe.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: According to my sources, in recent years, 70 per cent of the murders of RCMP officers were committed with long guns.

Does that seem like a realistic number to you?

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: I would not dispute that statistic. I'd have to go back and check it.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I'd like to see the study.

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez, is that study in both official languages?

• (1720)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: No, sir, it's in English.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: We got it from the website.

The Chair: We can't table it.

Is it available in both official languages?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We can have it translated.

The Chair: Perhaps if it's not too lengthy you could have it translated and tabled.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That's no reason for me not to use information gleaned from internal documents. Mind you, I don't exactly see how this information is relevant.

[English]

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: If you're referring to your report, I'd still like it to be tabled so I could review it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, we can give you the address. That's not a problem. You can also arrange to have it translated.

Numerous discussions have also taken place about the number of times police officers have accessed the registry. Our Conservative friends have engaged in a few semantic debates as to whether police officers had accessed the registry, and whether the process was automatic. Regardless, the registry is consulted 6,600 or 6,700 times a day. In other words, it's a useful tool.

Is that a fair statement?

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: I would agree with that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There's a minute left if you want to take it.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: I'm glad our colleagues from the Conservative Party would like to have more detail about officer

deaths from firearms. This table can be provided, but I think just to help illustrate...and this is tragic, but it's very important information in this discussion.

In 2006, Officer Marc Bourdage, unfortunately, was killed by a long gun in Saskatchewan. The same day, Officer Robin Cameron, also from the RCMP, was killed by a long gun in Saskatchewan.

In 2005, Officer Brock Warren Myrol, Officer Anthony Fitzgerald Orion Gordon, Officer Leo Nicholas Johnson, and Officer Peter Christopher Schiemann were all killed by long guns and a combination of guns.

In 2004, tragically, Officer James W. Galloway, from Edmonton, Alberta, died as a result of a long gun.

Unfortunately, the list continues.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Wrzesnewskij. We appreciate your information.

Again, members, a lot of this information and the questions really have to do with policy issues. We have a firearms registry, until it's changed by a democratically elected government. Our job here is to look at the functioning of it, the regularity, the propriety, the economy—how it's being managed from a taxpayer's point of view.

Again, I haven't interrupted too many people.

The last intervention is from Mr. Fitzpatrick for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: An area that did cause some concern is the problem with revocation in your report. Revocation would imply to me that you're taking away somebody's right to own firearms for some valid reason. The statistics on that are rather alarming.

I assume now that it's been transferred over to the RCMP there will be more effective action taken on following up on revocation orders. Is that a safe assumption, Mr. Martin?

D/Commr Peter Martin: We will be dealing with all of the revocation orders. Where it's an RCMP jurisdiction, we will be pursuing that. Where it's in other jurisdictions, we will be referring it to the police force of the jurisdiction.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Right. But I find it appalling that all that was being done was that a letter would be sent to somebody. They may be some of these people who this individual here is referring to, and if no action is taken, I don't know how that would improve public safety.

On compliance, I think I read somewhere that the centre believes that 90% of all long gun owners in the country are registered in the system. Is that correct, or did I miss something here?

Mr. François Bidal: We don't have the information to make that type of claim today.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I'm going to make a point here and I'd like to get your comment on it, especially Mr. Martin's, because he's a police officer and I do deal with police officers. If you check this database and the database says, "Mr. Boucher does not have any pump-action shotguns or a revolver", I would suggest to you, sir, that a police officer would be making a very serious mistake to enter that premised on the belief that this person does not have a firearm.

Where I come from, every second person in rural Canada tells me they have firearms and they are not registered. For the centre to say that 90% of all long gun registrations are in the system, I have real doubts about that, and I'd like to know how the centre or anybody can say that. Unless they went into every home in this country, I don't know how they can say that.

• (1725)

Mr. François Bidal: I don't have the statistical information to support that, but having instructed police officers at our academy, I can tell you that as a matter of officer safety, using the risk management model, we always teach them to assume that people may have firearms. So it doesn't lessen the safety issue, because a police officer will be ever so diligent in assuming that this risk could always be there.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I want to make another observation. In 1995 we put into place a system on the pretext that it would prevent these sorts of tragedies that have occurred. And let's be clear: in September of this year, that tragedy did occur, and this system we created did not prevent it from occurring. Let's be clear on that. No matter how you spin it, that's a fact.

The follow-up on the 14-year-old was good police work, quite honestly. They went to the Internet and found the blogs where deranged people were making threats, and that's what they acted on. It was irrelevant whether the firearms in that home were registered or not. It was good police work to identify that 14-year-old by going to the Internet blogs. Too bad they hadn't found the other individual a few weeks before, but we learn from our bad experiences. So I think trying to make that the panacea misses a very important part—the good police work done before we even get to that stage.

I think this is a serious concern. For the police to assume that all the long guns in the country are in that system would be a big mistake. I suggest that in most of the cases this individual has referred to, we're probably talking about guns that were never registered in the system to start with. So I don't really know what that proves.

The Chair: Is there a comment on that statement or question?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I would agree that nothing replaces good police work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

That concludes the second round. What I'm going to do now is ask the witnesses if they have any concluding statements they want to make.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I'd just like to thank the committee for the interest in the report, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to your report on the issues.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, do you have anything to say?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I'd just like to thank the committee for the opportunity to be here and to share with you what we're doing with the registry today.

The Chair: Mr. Baker, anything? You lived this for three years of your life. Now you're in charge of our tax system....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. William Baker: That's right. The only things certain in life are death and taxes, and I'm working both sides.

I want to use this occasion, Mr. Chair, with permission, to thank all of the colleagues I worked with at the Canada Firearms Centre for the hard and excellent work they did in a very difficult program area.

The Chair: Mr. Bennett, anything to add?

Mr. Ian Bennett: I'd just like to say thank you for your interest, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of the witnesses for such excellent presentations. It is a controversial issue that's been around for a number of years. We will take the auditor's report and we will take the evidence we heard and we will write a report. That will be filed with Parliament in due course.

I want to remind committee members that we're back here at 3:15 on Thursday afternoon. At that time we're going to have the presentation of the *Public Accounts of Canada* for the fiscal year ending March 31. We'll have the auditor with us and also the Comptroller General.

The meeting is now adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.