



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

SECU • NUMBER 012 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 17, 2011

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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, everyone, and welcome.

I'm encouraged to see the amount of interest there is in our meeting here today, as is evident by the good attendance and also by the cameras and the media.

This is meeting number 12 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, on Thursday, November 17, 2011. Today we are continuing our study of the consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

In our first panel today, we will hear from Robert Dutil, Minister of Public Security, from the Government of Quebec.

Welcome to Ottawa and to our committee.

Also, from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, we have Mario Harel, vice-president and chief of police, Gatineau Police Service; and Matthew Torigian, chief of police, Waterloo Regional Police Service. From the Canadian Shooting Sports Association, we have Tony Bernardo, executive director, and Diana Cabrera, administration manager. Also, from the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs, we have Hélène Laurente, volunteer coordinator of the women's hunting program.

Our committee wants to thank all of you for appearing before us today. I understand that each one of the groups or organizations you represent will have a member who will make the presentation to our committee, so we thank you for that. We're going to try to keep these to about seven or eight minutes. I'll let you know when we're at about that seven-and-a-half-minute mark so that we can get as many questions in as possible.

I would like to begin with the Minister of Public Security from the Government of Quebec.

Monsieur Dutil, please.

Mr. Robert Dutil (Minister of Public Security, Government of Quebec): Thank you, sir.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to be here today for this presentation. Good morning to all the committee members.

I am going to go over the various positions on the firearms registry. We know that, since 2006, the Conservative government's

position on the firearms registry has been very clear. It has presented several bills to abolish the non-restricted firearms registry many times. But it is important to understand that in Quebec, our position is also clear. We believe in a universal firearms registration system, which is very useful for crime prevention and police work. This position is also unanimously shared by all parliamentarians from Quebec, Quebec police organizations, organizations that work in public safety and security and the families of victims of tragedies in Quebec.

In addition to the Conservative government's firm position on abolishing the registry, the federal government has had an amnesty on the registry of long guns, which has been renewed every year since 2006 and has contributed to weakening the application of the Firearms Act.

Bill C-19, as presented and studied, is aimed not only at abolishing the firearm registry, but also at destroying all the data related to the registration of non-restricted firearms entered in the registry since it was created, something we deplore.

Bill C-19 is even a step back in terms of the rules that existed before the Firearms Act came into effect in 1998. Actually, before that time, there was an obligation for the merchant to keep a registry of their firearm inventory and information about the firearm sales transactions, including information on the purchaser. Bill C-19 does not provide for keeping this obligation in place. According to Bill C-19, when someone who wants to purchase a weapon enters the merchant's store, the merchant will no longer have to verify whether the purchaser has a firearm possession and acquisition licence, which we think is a major step backwards.

If I may, I would like to give you some historical background on the events. Since 1984, several Quebec families have experienced tragedies involving firearms. There was the attack in the National Assembly on May 8, 1984; the killing at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989; the shooting at Concordia University on August 24, 1992; and the tragedy at Dawson College on September 13, 2006.

Since these tragedies, we have strengthened our measures to exercise better control over firearms in Quebec and participated actively in drafting the Firearms Act, which came into effect on December 1, 1998, as you know. After the shooting at Dawson College in Montreal, Quebec also adopted the Act to protect persons with regard to activities involving firearms and modifying the Act respecting safety in sports, an act that was called "Anastasia's Law", in memory of Anastasia De Sousa, a student who died during that incident.

Quebec has also put in place operational measures, which has included strengthening the Sûreté du Québec's cybersurveillance and monitoring unit. It implemented a joint unit against firearms smuggling. But it wasn't enough. The firearm registry is an essential tool for police investigations and interventions. According to the latest statistics from 2011, the registry is queried over 700 times a day by police officers in Quebec, not just automatically—I'd like to clarify—but through a voluntary query by police officers who need this tool.

Consulting the registry helps the police make informed decisions during their operations, particularly by making it possible for police to establish the number and type of weapons that the targets of interventions have, and to subsequently intervene.

Querying the registry may also be the starting point for an investigation, when a firearm has been found at the crime scene, and helps to establish the chain of possession. So far, 1,560,359 non-restricted firearms have been registered by individuals in Quebec, or 91.2% of all firearms. Abolishing the registry means that we would lose track of these weapons.

Spousal abuse is a phenomenon in our society, and the registry also contributes to preventing tragedies and crimes against the person. In Quebec, between 2006 and 2010, we counted 264 incidents of spousal abuse involving rifles or shotguns. The statistics show that hunting weapons are used more often than handguns when it comes to spousal abuse. When the police enter these types of situation, consulting the registry lets them know quickly whether a violent spouse is in possession of any firearms.

As a result, the police can tailor their interventions or even remove them for preventive purposes.

•(1105)

As for suicides, statistics from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec show that, of the 650 suicides committed using a firearm reported in Quebec over a four-year period, 565 of them involved a non-restricted firearm, so close to 9 out of 10 suicides.

So the firearm registry is a very important tool for suicide prevention. Registering non-restricted firearms makes them less accessible to people who are likely to misuse them, individuals suffering from depression, for example.

It also contributes to protecting individuals with mental health problems and their loved ones. Universal registration enables the chief firearms officer of Quebec to determine whether the weapons are in the possession of people under an application for an order to confine them to an institution, or calling for a psychiatric assessment.

Under Anastasia's Law, the chief firearms officer is systematically informed of these applications. Between January 1, 2008 and November 1, 2011, 18,661 applications for orders were reported to him, and consultation of the registry made it possible to conduct more than 1,000 interventions to ensure the safety of persons. I am convinced that many lives were saved because of this. Abolishing the registry will limit the application of Anastasia's Law.

For all these reasons and many others that I do not have time to list, I would like to repeat that the government is against the abolition of the firearm registry.

We are in no way questioning the legitimacy of activities such as hunting or target shooting, when practised in compliance with the law. Rather, we aim to raise citizen awareness of the need and importance of registering their firearms, as they agree to register their other personal belongings.

I would also like to mention that, in most cases, it takes only three minutes to complete the registration.

To conclude, the Canadian firearm registry is of considerable importance for Quebec. All Canadians, including Quebecers, have participated financially in the program.

For all the reasons mentioned, I am reiterating the Government of Quebec's position and am requesting that the firearms registry be maintained in its entirety and that failure to register non-restricted firearms be decriminalized.

Failing that, I ask that you amend Bill C-19 by removing the provisions relating to the destruction of information and begin discussions as soon as possible to transfer the information to Quebec, information that the citizens of Quebec have paid for.

If the registration of non-restricted firearms were to save just one life, from a moral standpoint, we would be justified in continuing our efforts to keep it. But we already know that the firearms registry has saved more than one life. It has saved many.

Thank you.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dutil.

[English]

Now we will move to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Harel (Director, Gatineau Police Service, and Vice-President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): Good morning. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has stated its support for the long-gun registry from the beginning. Let me briefly reiterate our reasons why.

First, we view this as a public safety issue based on our ongoing responsibility to ensure the safety of our communities, our officers and the most vulnerable among us.

Second, it provides preventative and investigational value to law enforcement and the communities we serve.

Third, notwithstanding the initial set-up costs, today, it operates in a very cost-effective and efficient manner as detailed in an internal audit of the RCMP.

Fourth, we believe it promotes further responsibility and accountability by firearm owners.

Finally, it provides a reasonable balance between the exercise of an individual privilege and the broader right of society to be safe.

Only a year ago, the RCMP's Canadian Firearms Program reported that law enforcement officials make 11,000 queries per day into the registry. Today, this number has climbed to 17,000. There is truth to the fact that a number of these are what has been referred to as "auto-queries". However these cases are rare, which we believe is an endorsement of the fact that law enforcement views this information as a valuable tool, a bit of information that, when combined with other information, assists in assessing a situation an officer may face.

We are concerned that with the dismantling of the long gun registry, we can ask ourselves what controls there are to prevent individuals from stockpiling firearms or access by criminal organizations when we don't have the information.

We are concerned that there will be no record-keeping during transfers of long guns. And we note that between 2006 and 2009, 1.85 million long guns changed hands.

We are concerned that it inhibits our ability to enforce prohibition orders. It will add significant costs to our investigations, costs which will be downloaded to police services and lead to crucial delays in gaining investigative information.

And those are just some of our concerns. There will no longer be a required record to indicate what firearms were sold to whom or how many. Many ask the question, has the long-gun registry saved lives? Like our drunk driving laws or even our Criminal Code, the impacts will never be known with qualified numbers, but we know that the registry saves lives.

The fact is that homicide rates by long guns have come down significantly. Statistics Canada confirms firearm suicides have dropped 48% since the act became law in 1995. We can only hope that this continues. Prior to the implementation of the long-gun registry, there was a formal requirement for firearms vendors to record sales. Now, they will not even have to register their sales. Imagine the extraordinary and costly efforts which will be required to trace a firearm for investigative purposes. Our passion on this issue runs deep.

[English]

Chief Matthew Torigian (Chief of Police, Waterloo Regional Police Service, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police): *Merçi.*

We know that nothing we say here today will change the fact that this bill will move forward and be passed by this government. We also acknowledge that on the issue of repealing the long-gun registry this government has been very transparent with Canadians in stating their intention to introduce this legislation.

In our parliamentary system, in our great democracy, we must and we do respect the desires of Canadians who elected this government and their stated objectives.

We, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, have supported many of the approaches of this government on crime. In fact, just last month, four CACP representatives were called upon to support the government's Safe Streets and Communities Act. In providing overall endorsement of the bill, Chief Dale McFee, president of the Canadian Association of Chief of Police, stated, "The CACP continues to support legislative amendments which assist in making

Canada's communities safe...". The difference here is that the long-gun registry, we believe, provides preventative value, not just a focus on toughening penalties.

But throughout the debate on the long-gun registry, there has been a disturbing attempt to discredit the view of law enforcement and chiefs of police and an attempt to create divisions. One MP issued a press release referencing a very non-scientific poll and stating that "the vast majority of police are calling for the end of the long-gun registry" and making this statement regarding the CACP: "It begs the question, exactly who are they speaking for?"

You cannot accept our opinion when it serves your purposes and then dismiss it when it does not. We ask that you respect our opinion or, at the very least, respectfully disagree. Especially when it comes to this issue, the latter has not occurred. Please know that this is not a message targeted just to this government; it is a message to all elected members of Parliament, whether it be on this issue or other issues affecting law enforcement.

In respect of our desire to maintain the long-gun registry, police leaders from across this country—federal, provincial, and municipal—have shown unprecedented support. CACP positions are adopted based on a majority of our membership's views. Individual positions are respected, and members are free to speak. In fact, at our 2010 annual general meeting, we had unanimous support to maintain this very effective tool. A few within this government would rather give voice to the exceptions and claim that they are actually the real voice of policing.

Almost unbelievably when it comes to the issue of the long-gun registry, there has been no consultation with law enforcement and the chiefs of police. In May, the CACP national firearms committee provided this government a letter recognizing the government's intention to dismantle the long-gun registry. We offered to be a part of the solution going forward and provided suggestions as to how to mitigate the impact on law enforcement and public safety. Despite numerous attempts to follow up, we were not provided a single opportunity to discuss this with them.

In that letter, the CACP proposed options related to maintaining the existing data; records of sales by firearm business vendors; the transfer of weapons between individuals; and including the law enforcement representatives on the government's firearms advisory committee.

● (1115)

The Chair: Can you wrap it up in about 30 seconds?

Chief Matthew Torigian: Sure.

In conclusion, we wish to be respectful of the concerns of responsible gun owners and respect their rights. We know that both sides want safe communities; therefore, we must all learn from our polarized positions going forward.

The public, the citizens we serve, expect the government and police to provide leadership when it comes to public safety. When our views are different, it should suggest that we need to sit down together to find some commonality moving forward.

We are allowed to disagree, but we should always be respectful in doing so. We are hopeful that this will become the preferred way of doing business by all parties moving forward. We can all do better. Canadians deserve better.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll move to Madam Larente, please, who is appearing as an individual.

Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Larente (Volunteer, Coordinator, Women's Hunting Program, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs): Good morning. My name is Hélène Larente. I am from Rapides-des-Joachims, Quebec. I am a female hunter very involved in the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs in Quebec. I am an instructor for the Programme d'éducation en sécurité et en conservation de la faune. I am also an instructor for the Canadian Firearms Safety Course, and I am the founder and coordinator of the Women's Hunting Program. For over 25 years, I have been involved in hunting and fishing organizations and in the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et des pêcheurs, which represents hunters and anglers in Quebec.

I am here today as a Quebecker and as a Canadian and I join the federation in saying that I am in favour of scrapping the long-gun registry as per Bill C-19. I feel that keeping a registry like that is pointless for a number of reasons. I don't believe it protects women or society. It gives a false sense of safety, since, just because a gun is registered, it does not mean that it cannot be used to commit an irreversible act. To think along those lines is to bury your head in the sand. Peace officers have to assume—and always must—that there are weapons in the places where they intervene because there are—and always will be—unregistered guns, even with a registry. The long-gun registry has not been effective at all in achieving the main objective of reducing crime. Unfortunately, the infamous registry has not prevented other appalling acts from being committed, similar to the one that led to the tragedy at the École polytechnique de Montréal.

As a hunter, I don't think it is fair that we are being treated like criminals and that we are being penalized in their place, since the real criminals circumvent the law and don't register their guns. I would even argue that the registry encourages smuggling. In addition, the debate around this registry we hear so much about casts a negative light on hunters. It is not the gun itself that's dangerous, but the person using it. The fact that the gun is registered changes nothing.

So far, billions of dollars have been wasted, and the wrong people have been targeted. Maintaining this registry will cost taxpayers some additional millions of dollars. But it is never too late to make positive corrections. I am sure that this money needs to be used somewhere else, where it can really protect or help Canadians. In order to make public safety a priority, the money should go to: measures that have a real impact in controlling crime; increasing the police presence in our streets; being better equipped to monitor offenders; supporting social programs and the fight against crime; developing education, awareness and accountability programs.

Education and awareness are key factors in encouraging people to report acts of violence before tragedies happen. It is also important to consider and develop tools and ways to combat violence, which is still far too present in families, in schoolyards and especially in disadvantaged areas. People have to feel that they are being heard and that they have the support they need to report those acts. If needed, additional resources must be provided to help people in distress, who are often left to fend for themselves. People have to be urged to safely store their firearms at all times. In desperate or similar situations, the reaction time and the obstacles that make it more difficult to get hold of a gun can actually change the course of events. A few minutes, even a few seconds, can make all the difference in the world and can help to avoid a tragedy. All this is simply to say that storing guns properly can save lives.

It is important to remember that firearm suicide rate has declined over the past few years. That is a result of legal obligations to store firearms and of education campaigns. Professor Jean Caron's studies at the UQAT have showed that storing firearms has a direct impact on the suicide rate. I would also like to point out that we are already subject to screening in terms of gun ownership in the form of the mandatory firearms possession and acquisition licence. The RCMP automatically does an investigation on each person who applies for a licence. Just like the federation, I believe that the mandatory qualification process for gun owners has to be maintained.

While I sympathize with the families affected by the events at the École polytechnique, I feel that we have to open our eyes and stop making decisions solely based on compassion for people in a certain category. There is much more to it than that. Like those families, I also feel that we have to find real solutions to fight against crime and gratuitous violence. We need to invest in the right things to further protect Canadians and to help people in distress, as well as those with illnesses.

• (1120)

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you, madam.

[*English*]

Now we will move to the Canadian Shooting Sports Association. They have two representatives here today: Tony Bernardo and Diana Cabrera.

Please provide your information for us.

Ms. Diana Cabrera (Administration Manager, Canadian Shooting Sports Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank you and the members of this committee for inviting my colleague and me to present our members' point of view on Bill C-391 and to answer any questions you may have in this regard.

My name is Diana Cabrera. I'm an international competitor shooter. Although I'm Canadian, I currently compete for the Uruguay national team, as Canada refuses to pay my training expenses.

I would like to say that we fully support the purpose changes in this bill. These changes also aid the pledged goal of a system that is effective in concentrating precious resources where they belong and is focused on the criminal misuse of firearms, not on responsible licensed firearm owners.

The challenge of obtaining the public safety goals of the firearms legislation depends largely on a number of firearms issues and the cooperation of those most affected by the legislation. These issues are major concerns: the fear of confiscation, the perceived social stigma of firearm ownership and its demonization, and the many costs and burdensome processes involved.

The bill will greatly aid in rebuilding the bond of trust that existed before its erosion by overzealous legislators aiming at the wrong target. Maximum compliance for firearms legislation is dependent on addressing these concerns.

At this point, I would like to focus on the effect of long-gun registration on sport competitors and other legitimate users. There is no question that the long-gun registry has deterred individuals from entering the shooting sports. Many believe that this was one of its original intentions. The inclusion of specialized air target and muzzle-loading firearms in the registry seems predetermined to achieve those goals. These firearms are virtually never used in crime by the nature of their physical makeup and cost, yet they are treated with the same legislative zeal as more common firearms.

Across the world, exemptions have been made in law for these types of firearms. In Britain and the United States, the ownership and use of these firearms is much less regulated than in Canada. Many are not even considered to be firearms and are subject to almost no regulation, as misuse is very rare, yet in Canada these firearms must be registered and are subject to the same regulatory restrictions as other firearms.

These regulations entail long and confusing paperwork for international competitors and also present huge challenges to our junior shooters, who are not permitted to own airguns producing a velocity of more than 152.4 metres per second. This situation often leads to an adult or coach having to go through all the steps to purchase a junior competitor's competition firearm. They cannot leave the junior competitor in sole possession of the firearm; therefore, coaches and junior competitors must take responsibility for the regulatory care of these firearms while they are in use by the junior competitor.

Around the world, living history events such as re-enacting and cowboy action shootings are fast-growing activities. Re-enactors participate using authentic period costumes in re-enacting famous battles and other events, using period firearms, from muzzle-loaders to the World War II period. Cowboy action shooting is similar, but also involves shooting skill with an historical western bent.

The main issue for competitive participants is the fear of imminent criminality. They may easily find themselves afloat of uninformed law enforcement or CBSA officers, even if all paperwork is in order. Any paperwork error may lead to temporary detention, missed flights, missed shooting matches, and confiscation of property. I experience a primal cringe every time I am asked for my papers, as I

fear what might happen when officers apply personal interpretation to our confusing laws.

Law enforcement and media coverage of firearm issues have made the situation even worse. Firearm owners are subjected to spectacular press coverage in which reporters tirelessly describe small and very ordinary collections of firearms as an "arsenal". During the recent blitz in Toronto, police used old computer records to track down ordinary people who had simply failed to renew their paperwork. They described the operation as "getting guns off the street" and a triumph for the long-gun registry, as if they were preventing a crime.

If ever there was a case for destroying the old records, this is it. How do you think this makes a legal firearms owner feel? Am I next? Did I forget some nuance of my paperwork that will bring police to my door? Will my face wind up on the 6 o'clock news vilifying me to my friends, family, and co-workers? Will I be shunned if anyone finds out I own firearms? Will I be targeted at a traffic checkpoint if a CPIC verification says I possess firearms? Firearm owners live with these fears every day, all to justify a failed system that never prevented a crime.

• (1125)

In conclusion, let's please restart this from a clean slate, concentrate on more productive public safety areas of the legislation, and redirect funding to more beneficial areas to help make Canada a safer place for all.

Thank you. I will now pass on this presentation to my colleague.

Mr. Tony Bernardo (Executive Director, Canadian Shooting Sports Association): Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the standing committee. Thank you for allowing Canadian Shooting Sports to address this committee.

My name is Tony Bernardo. You've heard a lot about the good aspects that are alleged to come from the gun registry. I'd like to talk to you about a few of the bad ones.

First, I need to give you a little bit of a historical perspective. Based upon the Canada Firearms Centre's polling figures, in 1998 there were 3.3 million firearms owners in Canada. On January 1, 2001, 40% of Canadian gun owners—over 1 million people—became instant criminals.

Anticipating these statistics, the Canada Firearms Centre acted quickly to calculate consent for the legislation, with the results of a fall 2000 survey indicating that gun ownership in Canada had declined substantially since 1998, and that there were only 2.3 million firearm owners in only 17% of Canadian households. This was done by asking this question: does anyone in your household own a functioning firearm? This was done in a telephone survey. For those of you who are not familiar with the social stigma around firearms, you don't talk on the phone to anybody about your firearms, because you have no idea who is on the other end.

To accept the reduced number, you must also accept, without any evidence whatsoever, that firearm owners declined by one million people in two years. Previous surveys reported that the average firearm owner possessed 2.87 firearms, low by current CFC statistics, which now show an average of four guns per owner. A million people divesting themselves of 2.87 million firearms would have been noticed either by police or certainly by the gun stores in Canada, which would have gotten an awful lot of guns turned in. At the time, we did a little bit of mathematical calculation and we determined that was a sufficient number of guns to bury every single police station in Canada to a depth of 33 feet. That's a lot of guns.

In 1976, Liberal justice minister Ron Basford tabled a document in Parliament detailing the number of firearms in Canada, based on Canadian import and export documents and domestic production figures. Minister Basford told the House there were 11,186,148 firearms in Canada. By adding the number of imports since that time to the indigenous production, subtracting all exports and destroyed and stolen firearms, we can make a reasonable estimate for the number of firearms currently in Canada, allowing for a generous error rate of 15% for lost, destroyed, and misreported firearms—

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Bernardo, can I give you about another 40 seconds...?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Sure. Okay.

Why is this important? Fewer than half the guns in Canada are actually in the registry. There are whole piles of them out there.

There's another very important thing I wanted to touch on. We need to talk about the impact this legislation has had on the relationship between firearms owners and police.

Last year we did a survey of 2018 firearms owners at random and asked legal gun owners who they were more afraid of, the police or criminals. Of those surveyed, 63.93% said the police. That's 64%.

They were asked, "Since the implementation of the Firearms Act, do you trust Canada's police?" Seventy-five per cent said no. They were asked, "Do you believe police associations represent their members' views?" To that question, 94% said no. They were asked, "Does Canada's long-gun registry actually reduce crime?" Ninety-six per cent said no.

They were asked, "Do you believe police target firearms owners?" To that question, 83% said yes. When asked if they personally knew—that's personally—someone who had been unjustly charged with a firearms offence, 46% knew someone. That's half the people.

At this point I guess I'm going to have to not present the rest of this—

The Chair: Yes, I'm going to have to cut you off. As much as I was enjoying those statistics, I'll have to cut them off there.

We'll move into our first round of questioning.

Right off the bat we'll go to the government side with Ms. Hoepfner, please.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing today.

I want to begin by saying thank you to you, Chief Harel, for finally acknowledging after almost three years of your organization's saying that police are checking the registry 11,000 times a day, and now it's apparently up to 17,000....you are finally acknowledging today that those are automatic hits. The majority of those are generated by automatic hits across the country. As well, any time the firearms database is queried, even if an individual calls the firearms centre, a hit is documented. So I want to thank you for acknowledging that today.

One of the problems, Chief Torigian, is that during this argument, your organization, which deserves tremendous respect.... You do a great service to our country and to the cities you represent. You're in a uniform, and Canadians, when they see you on television, believe what you say. So when you stand in front of a television camera and say that police are checking the registry 17,000 times a day, when in fact that is not the telling the truth of how police are using and not using the registry, you do this whole discussion a great disservice. When you talk about the fact that you believe the chiefs of police unanimously supported the gun registry in Edmonton, again, the question posed to your chiefs of police was, do you support the national firearms program? This question was never posed to your chiefs of police: do you support the long-gun registry?

So again, to both of you gentlemen, we do have very different views on this issue. There is a gap and a wedge between your position and our government's position, and sadly that gap has not been closed.

I just want to direct my question to Mr. Bernardo. There has been some misinformation today as well in regard to individuals selling or transferring firearms to people who are not qualified to purchase those firearms. I know that you're very familiar with the bill. Can you please talk about the legal requirements? Just inform everyone listening—inform the people on the rest of the panel—of the legal requirements in regard to transferring firearms. Can a store owner sell a gun to somebody who doesn't have a licence?

• (1135)

Mr. Tony Bernardo: No, of course not.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Can you please expand on that?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Yes. I'll describe the whole process.

First of all, when any firearm comes into Canada, right out of the gate it has to be registered with the chief registrar of firearms. All imports and all newly manufactured firearms in Canada still need to be registered.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'm sorry, but can you please expand on that? What do you mean by that?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Yes. Section 60 of the act says that any firearm coming into Canada must be recorded with the chief registrar as to the firearm, the type, the serial number, the date it entered the country, and its legal status as it comes into the country. That firearm then goes to a dealer's inventory; they are obligated to keep an inventory book. It's colloquially known as "the green book". Every single merchant in firearms has to have that green book, and every firearm coming in or going out has to be recorded in that green book.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Would that relate to income tax purposes as well or just inventory...?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: I don't think so. I think it's an inventory control.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: All right.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: That green book has been the status quo for at least 30 years; I mean, it's a long time that the green book has been there. It's still there now, to this day. Even with the registration, merchants still have to do that; they have to maintain that book. Now, they also have to, by law, see the person's firearms licence and see that it's a valid licence. So you can't sell a firearm to somebody who doesn't have a licence.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Why not? What's the penalty, Mr. Bernardo?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Four years in jail.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Does that include a store owner, an individual or...? I mean, we were told by three officials today...we were told by the minister from Quebec and we were told by a representative from the chiefs of police that store owners can now just sell guns to anyone and there will be no record; they can sell a gun to anyone.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: No, that's absolutely false, because of course the store owner has to enter the firearm into his inventory.

For example, let's say you had to trace a Remington firearm. You call Remington. It says it shipped that firearm to the distributor on a certain date. The distributor has to have records. The distributor says it was sold to a dealer on another date. Now you know the firearm's there, and at that point in time you say, "Okay, Mr. Dealer, where did it go?" He has to have where it went in his inventory control. Dealers cannot be selling to somebody who doesn't have a licence because that's just going to bring the whole world down on their heads.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I guess unless they want to go to jail.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Oh yes, absolutely.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Because that's a criminal offence.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: It's a very serious criminal offence.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I mean, we do know that the majority of crimes are committed with guns that are being sold illegally—

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Sure.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: —and they're not being sold by people who are following the rules.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Yes.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much, Mr. Bernardo.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: You're welcome.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Do I have a few minutes left?

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I want to go to Madam Larente.

Thank you so much for being here.

We've heard that people in Quebec want to keep the long-gun registry. That has been the overwhelming message we've heard, especially out of Montreal. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit

about the rest of Quebec, the regions of Quebec, where people are hunting and using firearms for law-abiding purposes. How do you think they feel about their interests as Quebecers not necessarily being represented in this discussion?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Larente: I did not understand all of the question.

Did you understand the rest of the question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you have...?

She does not have the translation.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Oh. Can I repeat that question, then?

The Chair: You can repeat the question. We'll—

Ms. Hélène Larente: I—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: No, that's all right. You get your translation and then I'll repeat the question.

The Chair: Actually, our time is limited so I'm not able to give you too much extra time. I want everyone to have a chance to get in a question.

• (1140)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: But, Mr. Chair, I do—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: You still have a minute and a half, so go ahead.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Are you hearing me all right through the translation?

Ms. Hélène Larente: Yes.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: All right. Thank you.

I wanted to ask you if you could describe how Quebecers who don't necessarily live in Montreal, but in other regions of Quebec, who use guns for legitimate purposes...yet we're being told that all Quebecers want to keep the long-gun registry. How do you think Quebecers outside of Montreal feel when their views are not being represented on this issue?

The Chair: Madam Larente.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Larente: Indeed, people in the regions do not want the gun registry to be maintained. These are hunters, in the regions especially. There are even hunters in the urban areas. They consider that the weapons they use are hunting weapons. Sometimes they are used once or twice a year. We are not criminals. Hunters in general are not in favour of registering firearms.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to the opposition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Boivin, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Thank you.

I thank the witnesses for having come here today.

I'm going to try to be very brief because this whole process here, in Parliament... I would never have thought that things moved along so quickly, but it seems that things are done at the speed of high-speed trains, trains we still don't have in Canada.

It is nonsensical. I sit on two committees, this one which is considering the elimination of the gun registry and its data, and on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights—I have just come from there—where we are examining Bill C-10, and discussing safety on the streets. Chief Torigian, I found what you had to say very compelling, as it was similar to what I have to say in both of these committees. I think that our world is upside down here. I hear witnesses here who are in favour of the government's vision, and yet when I go to meetings on Bill C-10, they are against the government's vision, and vice versa. They are against it here, and yet they are in favour of it there.

I find this problematical. You say that we should not only accept what is said when it suits us, but that we must also accept statements in light of their credibility.

I noted that my colleague questioned your credibility by saying that you were not pointing to the truth. This is almost telling someone quite openly that they are lying. I find that rather remarkable. Is the same association lying here, or there? I find this approach somewhat dangerous.

We are in a hurry because we don't know if they will pull the same stunt on us in this case as they are pulling with Bill C-10. This means that 208 clauses will have to be studied before midnight, since that is the motion the government has introduced. And yet, I remember very well that the current prime minister used to object vehemently when the former Liberal majority government did this sort of thing.

This demonstrates what kind of "democratic" system we have here. I'm putting the word in quotes because I have some serious doubts. I have with me a young woman from McGill University who—poor girl—did not know that the day she chose to come and see us and shadow us, we members of Parliament, was going to be a day that would provide her with such a lesson in democracy. I regret to have to say to her that this is a pretty peculiar system.

My questions are addressed to the minister because we know that this is exceptional. We know that people from one jurisdiction do not like to come and tell people from another that they don't agree with what they are doing or suggesting, and to try to convince them to see things their way.

Have you had any discussions with your federal counterpart on the specific question of Quebec's perspective on the unanimous motion with regard to the elimination of the gun registry, and the deletion of all the data contained in that registry?

Mr. Robert Dutil: In fact, we had a brief telephone conversation, before learning that the act provides for the destruction of the registry. I think that that is causing more debate than anything else.

I would like to remind you that Mr. Paradis replied to a question put by Mr. Blaney on this topic in the House.

Mr. Christian Paradis said the following: Mr. Speaker, it is clear; we have always wanted to abolish the long gun registry, which makes criminals out of honest hunters and farmers who do not register their firearms. By

decriminalizing it, it is clear that the Canadian Parliament no longer has jurisdiction. That said, if the provinces want to have a long gun registry, they have that option. The registration of goods and property is a provincial jurisdiction.

That is where we have more to say. We can see that the government is determined to abolish the Canadian gun registry and we deplore that fact. We are in a democracy, but this is a majority government and it seems to want to impose its agenda. So what can we do?

We understood at that point that we could have a decriminalized registry, as it would be a provincial registry. In other words, this would no longer give rise to criminal offences, but rather to penal offences, and this is something we'd like to see.

Last year, 9,000 firearms were taken from people who could no longer own them for valid reasons, such as a psychiatric diagnosis or something like that. The same thing can happen with motor vehicles. It is unfortunate, but sometimes people have to give up their driver's licence because of illness. For instance, people who are subject to epileptic seizures cannot drive. People who are too elderly cannot drive either, and their licences are withdrawn.

I am sure that there are people right here around this table who find it very unfortunate that their parents had to lose their driver's licences and they consider this to be dramatic. The objective is to ensure the safety of citizens, as well as that of the person who can no longer drive and does not know it.

So I think that the analogy is a sound one for firearms as well.

• (1145)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Unless I am mistaken, the only contact you had with your counterpart took place before this bill which mentions the elimination of the data was tabled.

They like to say on the federal side that all of Quebec is "soft on crime". They also say that Quebec has a strange way of doing things.

What would you reply to that type of comment?

Mr. Robert Dutil: I think that there is room for different ways of doing things in Canada; we can't all think the same way. We share a large array of common values across Canada. We may have different ways of doing things. As for the gun registry, there seems to be a considerable difference in attitudes and perceptions.

The lady was saying earlier that people are against the gun registry in the regions. I am from the Beauce, which is a region. I can tell you that there is some reluctance. A lot of people do not like criminalization and that is one of the factors. I'm not saying that there are no irritants. I agree with Chief Torigian when he says that we have to sit down and discuss things.

How can we eliminate the irritants without throwing out the baby with the bath water? We want to keep the baby. We think there are advantages to keeping it. We acknowledge that there are things that irritate hunters and sport shooters. We admit that. Let's respect that and find imaginative solutions. Let's try to eliminate as many irritants as possible. However let's keep the main item so as to reduce—and we have seen this to be the case—the number of suicides, domestic violence incidents, and other such things.

This has been done with motor vehicles. It has been done successfully with motor vehicles. If you ask me who this has saved, I could not answer, but I know that in less than 30 years we have gone from 2,200 deaths a year to 500.

I think that we have seen similar results in the case of firearms.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Minister, I do not mean to be pessimistic, but the experience I am gaining so quickly here by working at a breakneck pace makes me doubt that either you or Quebec are being heeded. Many share your position, which is not only Quebec's. Many Canadians feel the same way.

Are you considering taking any steps? We will do our duty as the official opposition. During the clause-by-clause study, we will of course try to add to the bill the positions Quebeckers are voicing clearly. We want the provinces that wish to keep the data to be able to do so. I can assure you that the opposition will work on that.

Will Quebec take any steps? Are we likely to have a long debate ahead of us at the federal level?

[English]

The Chair: Very quickly, please. We're already over—

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Dutil: To use an expression that is popular in Quebec right now: we will see.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Dutil: I must say that we believe in cooperative federalism. We want to have a dialogue, and it's not too late for that. Both sides are unhappy. It definitely goes both ways. We must find a way to get along.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dutil.

Mr. Breitkreuz, welcome to our committee again, and thank you for all your work on this issue.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you very much.

Yes, I've followed this for quite some time, and I just want to comment on the previous exchange before I pose my question.

The many people who are watching this debate may find it confusing, because I think it has intentionally been made confusing by the people opposing Bill C-19. They confuse licensing and registration. Many of the benefits they attribute to the registry are actually from licensing, such as making sure that certain people who may have psychological problems don't have firearms. That's the result of the licensing system. I just want to clarify that, because many people watching this may not understand that.

I want to pose my questions to Ms. Larente and Ms. Cabrera.

Could you elaborate on your comments that this is a women's issue? The argument has often been made that this legislation, the registry, is needed to protect women. I hear that all the time. Could you please, maybe just briefly, comment on that?

• (1150)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Larente: No, the registry does not protect women any more than it does society as a whole. The fact that a firearm is registered does not mean that it will not be used, either against women or anyone else. I feel that there is no direct correlation there. I want to add that I am in charge of an orientation program. Women who participate in that orientation learn how to handle guns and realize that the gun itself is not dangerous. The person using it must be educated.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Cabrera.

Ms. Diana Cabrera: I agree. I take care of my own firearms, my own training, my own flights, everything that has to do with me; it has nothing to do with being a woman or a man. It's just something that is personal.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Do you think this legislation, which was enacted in 1995, has had a negative effect on people getting into some very healthy traditional heritage activities, such as sport shooting and hunting?

Ms. Diana Cabrera: I believe so. With all this paperwork, there are too many headaches. It just turns you off. If you're a junior shooter, especially with the coaches.... As I stated, if you're a junior, you have to be with an adult who has that paperwork in order to possess your firearm. You're always going to need that person available, so you get turned off.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Do you think this has had a negative effect on people getting into the hunting and shooting sports in Quebec?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Larente: That certainly has a negative effect. The process for gaining the right to hunt—which is now a right—is already very complicated. We must attend courses, have our licence, and so on, to then be required to register a firearm. If we are hunting and have, by some misfortune, forgotten our registration or have not had the time to register our weapon, we are breaking the law. If we are stopped, we are seen as criminals because our gun is registered. We use our gun once, twice or three times a year, unlike a car, which is used daily and requires a registration. We feel that this is a recreational activity. We risk committing an offence if we forget our registration. We feel that we should not need a registration to partake in the recreational activity of our choice.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Thank you.

Mr. Bernardo, I was very interested in your statistics, but I was wondering if you could elaborate a little more on the fact that this registry was put into the Criminal Code. We often hear the comment that this is absolutely essential for enforcing prohibition orders and that it keeps firearms out of the hands of criminals.

You started mentioning the number of firearms registered. What percentage are registered? Second, maybe you can comment on what it would take to actually put in place an accurate record of where all the firearms are. Is it useful now to determine exactly where the firearms are?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bernardo.

Mr. Tony Bernardo: Yes, realistically, you would have to spend at least the same amount of money, and possibly more. Part of the presentation in terms of the relationship between firearms owners and police was on the whole breakdown of trust between the firearms owners of Canada and officialdom, period.

You have about half the guns in the registry. The other half are out there. Getting the ones that are out there to actually come into the system would be like pulling teeth. People now say that 15 years ago they didn't go into the system, they opted out, and boy are they ever glad they did, they say, "because my buddy had this happen to him, and my buddy's buddy had this happen to him, so boy, I'm glad nobody knows I have them".

To get those people to come forward now, you would have to go right back to the very basics of the act and change the very premise of the act; the first sentence says that it's a criminal offence to possess a firearm without a licence. As soon as you put the word "criminal" in the first sentence of this, you change the whole demographic.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: The comment has often be made that we register dogs and we register cars, so why not register firearms? What would be your reaction to that?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: They don't put you in jail for not registering your dog; it's just such a bogus argument. We register cars, okay? What impact has the registration of cars had on impaired driving? Zero. Licensing? Sure. You can take away somebody's licence, but you don't take away their car registration. If somebody's car registration expires, do people come to the house and take the car out of the driveway because its registration has expired? I don't think so. I've never seen anyone who had a driver's licence plate expire and had his car seized because that happened.

• (1155)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Not in Ontario—

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: We heard the comment today that—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Please continue, Mr. Breitkreuz. You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: We heard the comment today that this is needed to keep firearms out of the hands of criminals. How does it do that?

Mr. Tony Bernardo: That's a good question, because nobody has ever made that case. No one has ever said how you get from point *a* to point *b*. The case wasn't made when the bill was introduced and it has never been made, from then until now. Criminals still have firearms. Our police friends see this every day. Criminals still get them, so I guess the registration didn't work. We've had registration of handguns since 1934.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's a good place to stop.

We'll now move to the final question of the day.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome the minister and the other witnesses.

The Conservative government is claiming that it has the mandate to destroy the registry data because it was elected by a majority. However, unless I am mistaken—and I did follow the last election campaign quite closely—their platform made no mention of destroying the registry data. In addition, Ms. Hoepfner's Bill C-391, which was debated in the House not too long before the election was called, did not seek to have the registry database destroyed. I want to add that, in Quebec, Conservatives received no mandate—far from it. They actually lost seats.

Minister, do you feel that the federal Conservative government has the moral right to destroy a collective asset paid for by Quebec's taxpayers?

Mr. Robert Dutil: Our position on that matter is clear. As I mentioned earlier, we were very surprised that the bill talked about destroying the registry data because it wasn't mentioned during the election campaign.

We thought just the opposite after Mr. Paradis' answer to Mr. Blaney—I quoted it earlier. He said that, if we wanted to set up our own registry, we could, but it would have no criminal bearing because we have no criminal jurisdiction. He said that a registry would be our business and we would have to pay for it. We agreed to that.

However, how can we re-establish a registry if the data is destroyed? How much will we have to pay for a registry we have already paid for? I have to point out that we have already paid for it. Quebecers also participate in the Canadian federation through their taxes. They have already made their contribution. Why would this data be destroyed? I have not received any answers to that question. We can understand the Conservative Party's position. They made a campaign promise, which they are honouring. That's what an election is about. People make commitments and want to make good on them. We disagree, but we can understand that part of the process. However, we don't understand the second part, the fact that they are trying to stop us from having a registry. It would have no criminal bearing, since we have no such jurisdiction, but at least the data would be available and would enable us to do what we think is important in terms of prevention.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It was not mentioned during the campaign that the registry would be destroyed. In addition, Ms. Hoepfner's bill was debated a few weeks before the election was called. Also, considering some of the ministers' statements and the fact that the data is now to be destroyed, it seems that we were somewhat misled. I'm not asking you to answer this question. As a minister, you must maintain a certain level of diplomacy.

I have with me a letter dated November 2, written by the Director of the Montreal Police Department. It says the following:

Although the gun control registry is not ideal, its implementation costs were seen as excessive and it cannot guarantee that this type of violence will stop altogether, all police officers consider it to be a fundamental tool for reducing firearm-related risks.

The government and other people who want to do away with the registry claim that Canada's police leaders are out of touch with the police corps, that they do not represent the opinion of police officers in the field. You are at the head of Quebec's public security organization. Do you think that there is a gaping chasm between the police leaders and police officers in the field? If that's the case, I think that the firearms registry is just one of our concerns.

•(1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Very quickly, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Dutil: Police officers support our initiative. I'm not talking only about police management, but also about union representatives.

Joining us today are Mr. Francoeur and Mr. Côté, who represent unionized police officers. Later on, they will speak at a news conference and will confirm what we said.

We are not getting our information from people who are not familiar with the situation, but from those who deal with crime on a daily basis, those who do the work that must be done and take the necessary measures to reduce crime.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Garrison?

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): On a point of order, since we started late this morning—

The Chair: We didn't start late.

Mr. Randall Garrison: —due to things beyond our control—

The Chair: We didn't start late.

Mr. Randall Garrison: —and we had some problems with the translation, I would ask that the meeting be extended for five minutes, which would give us an opportunity to allow the chiefs of police to respond to the very serious accusations that were made against them in this meeting.

The Chair: Actually, that's not a point of order.

I guess you can make a motion to extend the meeting, but we have other witnesses waiting.

We were in a little bit of a pinch this morning, because we had a committee beforehand, but we still began this meeting right at 11 o'clock even though all your members weren't here—or maybe not all the members were here.

Anyway, we're going to suspend momentarily, allow them to make their exit, and allow the next group, very quickly, to come in, because the next hour of the meeting will be only 55 minutes right now, and the longer we take in the transition, the less time there will be for those witnesses.

We'll suspend for about one minute, if that's possible. Thank you.

•(1200)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1200)

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting back to order.

Again, in our panel this afternoon we have witnesses appearing as individuals. We would welcome all our witnesses to take their places at the table.

We have with us Randall Kuntz, a constable with the Edmonton police force.

Also appearing as an individual is Donald Weltz. Mr. Weltz retired in 2007 with 32 years of service as an Ontario conservation officer with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. He was named officer of the year for 2007.

Congratulations and welcome.

From the Coalition for Gun Control, we have Wendy Cukier, president, and Barbara J. Kane, psychiatrist.

Again, welcome.

From the Dawson Student Union, we have with us Audrey Deveault, chairperson, and Mathieu Murphy-Perron, executive director.

Our committee wants to thank each of you for attending today. I understand that a number of you have brief opening statements before we proceed to questions from members of our committee. Our committee asks that you try to limit your statements to seven to eight minutes. I'll try to give you a 30-second warning. We look forward to your comments.

Let's start with Ms. Cukier, please.

Professor Wendy Cukier (President, Coalition for Gun Control): Thanks very much.

I'll try to be brief because I want to save some time for my colleague, Dr. Barbara Kane, to speak.

The Coalition for Gun Control is a non-profit organization. It was founded more than 20 years ago. Its position on firearms regulation has been supported by more than 300 public safety and community organizations across the country. We maintain that Canada's Firearms Act as it is written is an important piece of our national strategy to prevent gun crime and injury and to support law enforcement, and considerable research has shown that effective regulation of firearms is linked to reductions in firearm homicide, suicide, accidents, and crime.

In our opinion, the amendments contained in Bill C-19 will put Canadian lives at risk. Like previous legislation aimed at ending the requirement that individuals register their non-restricted firearms—guns that include the powerful semi-automatic Ruger Mini-14, which was used in the Montreal massacre, as well as sniper rifles, including some .50 calibre variants—this bill will allow a licensed individual to acquire an unlimited number of guns without even checking if their licence is valid, which was an important improvement in the 1995 legislation. There will also be no means of knowing who owns these guns, who sold them, and how many are owned.

There will be no way to trace a gun recovered at the scene of a crime back to its original owner. We are losing not only an important public safety tool, but an important investigative tool.

Briefly, registering all non-restricted firearms to their legal owners is key to the effectiveness of our gun control policy, because these guns are used in homicides, suicides, and unintentional injury. They account for a substantial proportion of firearms recovered in crimes and for the majority of guns used in the murder of women, in suicides, and in the murder of police officers. It isn't just an urban issue, as you will hear from Dr. Kane, and it's important to emphasize that the registration provisions in the legislation reinforce the licensing provisions by reducing the chances that legal gun owners will divert their firearms to unlicensed owners.

The link between the licensing of firearm owners and the registration of firearms was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in its unanimous decision on the Firearms Act in the year 2000. The firearm registry has demonstrably helped remove firearms from dangerous individuals. It was also significant in aiding police investigations, including the prosecution of two men as accessories to the murder of four RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta.

In Canada, the rates of firearm death and injury have fallen dramatically with successively stronger firearm regulation, and the costs of maintaining the registration of rifles and shotguns are dwarfed by the cost of gun death and injury.

However, Bill C-19 goes far beyond simply repealing elements of Bill C-68, the 1995 legislation. It removes critical measures that have been in place since 1977, including the following measures.

It eliminates the requirement that businesses keep a record of sales. In 1977, the government introduced the requirement that all gun transactions be recorded in firearm business records. Your legislation makes no requirement to reinstitute this.

It also eliminates the requirement that a firearms licence be verified when guns are purchased, increasing the chances that someone who is prohibited from owning firearms and represents a risk to public safety will be able to access guns.

●(1205)

Of particular concern is the fact that this legislation requires the erasing of the data on 7.1 million rifles and shotguns currently registered, in spite of the fact that the data is essential as an investigative tool for police officers. Several international treaties require that countries maintain these records.

We may not be able to prove exactly how many lives the registry has saved. We know for certain, however, that the firearms registry never killed anyone, and this legislation may in fact put Canadian lives at risk.

I would like to give my remaining time to Dr. Kane.

●(1210)

The Chair: Dr. Kane, you have about a minute and a half.

Dr. Barbara Kane (Psychiatrist, Coalition for Gun Control): I'm a psychiatrist working out of Prince George, B.C., which is an area with a high rate of firearm suicides. I've been there for 22 years, so that's before and after the registry. The rates of suicide and

domestic violence are higher than they are in urban centres. Most of those are with non-restricted firearms.... I wouldn't want to minimize the impact of any type of suicide on a family, but suicide attempts with firearms seldom fail. Families are often left traumatized forever after finding someone with their head blown off or a part of their face shot off. These are some of the reasons that health care professionals are so vocal about the need to maintain gun control and the registry.

I regularly get calls from people asking me if I can comment on the level of risk a person poses given their behaviour. Usually, one of the things I want to know about is if they have a gun, because obviously an unstable person with a gun is a far higher risk than one without. Prior to the Firearms Act, without a direct threat, there would be little that could be done to determine someone's risk. Similarly, when I called the police to see about getting guns taken away from someone who was suicidal, they were very hesitant, as no crime had been committed and they weren't sure whether someone had a gun or how many they had.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Dr. Barbara Kane: Now, since the registry, the police have much less hesitation in going into those situations. That has happened several times and those tragedies have been prevented. Unfortunately, when prevention occurs that doesn't make the newspapers, so people don't know how useful it is. Psychiatrists use it on a regular basis.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kane.

We'll now move to Monsieur Murphy-Perron and Madame Deveault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Audrey Deveault (Chairperson, Dawson Student Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Audrey Deveault, and I chair the student union of Dawson College, in Westmount, Quebec. The union represents 10,500 students.

As students, we are encouraged to show curiosity, criticism, respect and involvement in terms of the world around us. We are taught that this is the foundation of a functional society.

On September 13, the fifth anniversary of the shooting at our school, we tried to get an audience with the Prime Minister in order to discuss his government's plan regarding the long-gun registry.

We had hoped that, as the Prime Minister, he would show a willingness to meet with us, his electors. Our invitation, phone calls and e-mails were ignored. We were not refused an audience; we were completely ignored. The way the government is rushing the passing of Bill C-19 and all the other bills is very worrisome.

At school, we are taught to be mindful and understanding. Yet, our elected representatives are exhibiting a closed and narrow-minded vision. We feel that society benefits more from a government that consults individuals and groups.

A country cannot be governed for four years based on the platform of a three-week election campaign. We are worried by our government's refusal to hear from just over 300 groups that have data to share about the effectiveness of the long-gun registry.

We are worried by our government's blatant disregard for reports from doctors, nurses, psychologists and law enforcement officers.

We are worried by the fact that our government prefers to orchestrate a war that sows discord among Canadians, rather than to help us find common ground.

We are worried by the fact that, not only is our government refusing to talk to Canadians, but it is also using procedure to try to silence the opposition parties and its elected colleagues.

In light of the way the government is dealing with bills C-10 and C-19—coupled with the suppression of Statistics Canada and the elimination of the long-form census—we, as students, have a hard time holding back our skepticism when our elected representatives chose to govern blindly.

Statistics, research and science should be the pillars upon which policies are built. Students are urging all elected representatives to distance themselves from political games whose goal is to silence all those who do not agree with the ideologies of a controlling and power-hungry individual.

Do the right thing. Don't agree to pass Bill C-19 quickly so that it becomes law. Give yourselves and your voters the opportunity to thoroughly study Bill C-19 and its repercussions on public health. You were elected to listen, debate and be open to discussion.

Please, keep in mind that the country's students and youth are watching you and looking up to you for guidance on how society should work. Keep that in mind that over the coming days, months and years.

• (1215)

Mr. Mathieu Murphy-Perron (Executive Director, Dawson Student Union): Some people may say that the required debate took place, since previous incarnations of the bill have been before Parliament. However, those incarnations did not contain measures that would eliminate the mandatory licence verification for individuals who buy weapons and the mandatory keeping of firearm sales records by vendors. Those two measures date back to 1977.

They are healthy and rational measures. Doing away with them quickly, in the wake of the debate on the long-arm registry, is very worrisome, especially considering the limited debate the government held on this bill.

We at the Dawson Student Union are used to hearing the tired old argument that the registry did not stop the shooting from taking place at our school. We tell cynics that it's precisely because we were victims of violence caused by firearms that we are deeply interested in working with all levels of government on improving the current system and reducing the risk of future shootings.

Consider the following. In the months preceding the shooting at our school, Kimveer Gill tried to join the Canadian Forces. He was rejected because of mental instability. If licence security control had included the information exchanged between our military forces and

the registry, Mr. Gill's file would have been flagged and the events of September 13, 2006, might have never happened.

When our laws let us down, we mustn't just shrug and accept defeat. Our collective responsibility is to find the holes in the system and fill them. Students know that. Students also know that it is better to fix and improve than to forget and set aside. Elected representatives should know that as well. They mustn't let themselves be guided by ideology alone. They have a moral responsibility to strengthen the programs society has paid for.

All Canadians have paid for the registry. Quebec has paid for it. Quebec sees the registry as an integral part of its pacifist values. On three occasions, Quebec's National Assembly voted unanimously to keep the registry data in order to facilitate the creation of its own provincial system. Every elected representative of the Quebec nation voted to keep the long-gun registry.

Why does the federal government seem to think that it has the power to refuse a national assembly the information paid for by its constituents?

Even the handful of Quebec's Conservative MPs have at times spoken out in support of Quebec's right to keep the registry. The federal government has no reason to deny Quebec its portion of the data it has paid for. The cost of maintaining the current registry is less than \$4 million dollars a year, or 15¢ per Canadian.

At Dawson College, a survey was conducted 18 months after the September 13 shooting. Almost 1,000 individuals took part in that survey. Fifty percent of the respondents said they had heard gunshots, 54% hid during the shooting, 35% witnessed an injury or murder, 13% saw the shooter and, finally, 24 people helped an injured person.

Eighteen per cent of those asked showed signs of developing psychological problems after the shooting. Those problems ranged from post-traumatic stress disorder to social phobia, from alcohol dependence to suicidal tendencies.

A number of participants also said they had attempted suicide in the 18 months following the shooting. Those people are students, professors, administrators, and cafeteria and maintenance staff. They are all real people who were left with very deep, sometimes permanent, scars after the September 13 events.

We are talking about thousands of adolescents who will forever live with the memory of bullets whistling through their school's hallways. We are talking about hundreds of students with the image of the shooter running through their school etched into their memory. We are talking about dozens of people who helped get their blood-covered schoolmates out on the morning of September 13.

The lives that were lost and scarred by that event need not have been in vain. If the registry can help save one more life or help one less person be affected, is it not worth keeping?

With such a low operating cost, why do anything but try to improve the system?

We have had productive discussions with the members of the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party. They all have very interesting ideas on how to improve this registry to better serve all Canadians.

We understand that some Canadians have doubts about the program's usefulness. We understand that some of them see registering their firearms as a difficult and complicated task. We extend our hand to you with an open mind, so that we can find common ground.

We were there when the vote was taken to refer Bill C-19 to this committee.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, your time is up.

Very quickly, please. I will give you a few more—

Mr. Mathieu Murphy-Perron: I have 10 seconds more.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Murphy-Perron: When the votes were read, we were deeply saddened to see that the Conservative Party's elected representatives had laughed in the faces of mothers who had lost their children because of gun-related violence.

We know that Canadians don't like this type of governance. We hope that this committee will agree to undertake a careful and lengthy study to better analyze the potential consequences of Bill C-19 before referring it for a third and final reading without any amendments.

We thank you for your time and would be more than happy to answer any questions from the committee members.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

We'll now move to Mr. Kuntz from Edmonton, and then to Mr. Weltz, for seven minutes.

Constable Randall Kuntz (As an Individual): Thank you for your invitation. I am proud to be here.

Prior to the implementation of the long-gun registry, I had a meeting with then Liberal justice minister Allan Rock at the Edmonton Police Service Southeast Division station. There were approximately 20 police officers there. I managed to ask Minister Allan Rock at the time if the gun registry would save any lives. That was my primary concern. He would not commit to saying this registry would save one life. Sixteen years later, I see why.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has said that police officers support the registry. I am one who does not. I conducted a self-funded survey of 2,631 heroes of law enforcement across this country. They were all identified by their police-issued e-mail. They were all serving police officers. Of the 2,631 who responded to me between March 2009 and June 2010, 2,410 were in favour of scrapping the long-gun registry. In April 2011, the Edmonton Police Association surveyed its members: 81% voted to scrap the long-gun registry.

The registry is just a list of people based solely on their private property. Some may see it as a list of potential offenders based on the possession of their personal private property that's in the database. This would be no different from registering every male in Canada, along with a DNA sample, as a potential sex offender. It would be no different from registering every woman who ever suffered from postpartum depression as a potential child killer or from tagging as a potential pedophile any member of the clergy, or any soccer, hockey, or football coach, or any Scout leader or teacher—and you could class all members of the military as potential homicidal serial sex offenders.

Now that I've offended about 99% of Canada by suggesting such a registry, think about the firearms registry. It was implemented and enforced against the same type of people, based solely on their private property.

A firearm is a firearm. It only becomes a weapon when it is used against another person. This watch in my hands, at a certain time, could be a weapon. I guarantee that. Ask 100 people what this is and they will tell me that's it's a wristwatch. A firearm is no different.

People kill people. It's a fact. The ways and means are limited only by their imagination.

I have two dogs in this hunt: I'm also a victim. In my personal life, I have 15 friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers who have committed suicide with a firearm. I also have three friends who were murdered with a firearm.

If anyone is keeping score, that's more people than Dawson College and École Polytechnique combined. I am still sitting here in front of this committee telling you that I do not support a firearms registry. I tell you that it does not save lives. That is the premise behind the chiefs of police...they say it's for public safety; I am telling you it is not.

We spent \$2 billion and millions and millions more every year on the registry. We got nothing. But what I've never heard is that there was also over \$2 billion collected. If it was spent, somebody collected it, and I suggest that those are the only people in this country who are going to miss the long-gun registry.

I realize that I have a lot of time left. I do not need it.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kuntz.

We will now move to Mr. Weltz.

Mr. Donald Weltz (As an Individual): I would like to thank the chair and the members of the committee for allowing me to appear before you today.

My name is Donald Weltz. I come before you in support of Bill C-19, an Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

I will attempt to briefly outline my introduction to firearms and my enforcement background so that you have a more informed understanding of my experience with long guns.

As was stated earlier, I retired in 2007 with 32 years of service as an Ontario conservation officer with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and was named officer of the year in 2007.

I have owned long guns since I was 12 years of age. I was instructed in the safe use and handling of those guns by a police sergeant with the Kitchener Police Department, as it was known then, and by a World War II vet who was a lifelong friend and father figure for me over the past 46 years until his passing in February 2009. I also hunt, although as I get older I find that I spend less time hunting.

My primary duty throughout my 32-year career as an Ontario conservation officer was fish and wildlife law enforcement. I was issued with and I carried a side arm as part of my uniform and was required to qualify yearly in its use. I was trained in the powers of search, seizure, arrest, and the use of force, similar to the Ontario Provincial Police. In 1975 I attended the Ontario Police College in Aylmer, Ontario, for my basic enforcement training.

Throughout my career as a conservation officer I have personally checked thousands of long guns being used by hunters in the field, and I have been required to search under warrant numerous homes and other buildings to secure evidence of crimes. These searches included buildings located in isolated bush areas in remote parts of the province, and dwellings, outbuildings, and commercial buildings in rural and urban areas.

I can tell you that the registration of long guns did not make my job as a conservation officer safer. It doesn't matter whether as an officer you search one house in your career or 2,000; the legal requirements are the same, and the possibility of violence and resistance from the occupier of the building you are about to search is always present. To go into a search with a semi-complacent attitude, believing that there are no guns present—and thereby being left with a perceived diminished risk to your safety and that of your fellow officers because a check of the firearms database has indicated there are no guns registered to the individual at that location—can be a deadly mistake.

As an officer, I was trained to expect the unexpected. I preferred to enter situations relying on my training, my fellow officers, and my heightened awareness of what might be waiting for me. An officer who enters a building in a search situation and who lets his or her guard down as a result of relying on information relayed to the officer that there are no firearms registered at that location is placing himself or herself and others in a dangerous situation.

Although as a conservation officer I had the ability to run checks through the firearms data centre, I can only remember doing so once or twice, and those were on occasions when I was trying to determine whether the hunter I had stopped for a routine check legally owned a specific firearm in the hunter's possession.

Similarly, the registering of long guns does nothing to increase the safety of the public. The fact that a long gun has been registered does not prohibit that firearm from being used by an individual with criminal intent. It is not the long gun that commits the criminal act, but the individual in control of that long gun who has spontaneously, or through deliberate and premeditated intent, taken it upon himself or herself to carry out a criminal act.

How does the registration of a long gun stop someone in a fit of rage induced by drugs, alcohol, or a nervous breakdown from going to the locked gun cabinet, unlocking it, taking out that registered firearm, removing the trigger lock, loading it, and hunting down and shooting the people he believes are responsible for his problems? The act of registering long guns does not stop this type of situation.

• (1230)

I have heard people ask why individuals would be upset with registering their long guns. We have to register our vehicles, they say, so what's the difference? In looking at that analogy of registering your vehicles, I would ask this question: has the fact of registering our vehicles reduced the number of impaired drivers? In an impaired driving situation, is the vehicle the problem or is it the driver who decided to drive while their ability was impaired with alcohol?

To the best of my knowledge, I do not know of any criminal who has registered their firearm knowing that they intend to use that firearm during the commission of an offence. Long guns, as their name suggests, are just that: long guns. They are not the weapon of choice of criminals because they cannot be concealed easily. Long guns are typically used by hunters, target shooters, and farmers, who generally are regarded as law-abiding citizens.

As for the destruction of firearms records upon removal of the long-gun registry, I am in favour of that data being destroyed, as there will be no legitimate reason to keep it when the long-gun registry is repealed. The police already have driver's licence and vehicle registration information on file for millions of individuals in Canada.

Of all the tragedies that have occurred in Canada involving firearms, did the firearm actually commit the offence, or was it the person in possession of the firearm who caused those devastating events that changed so many lives?

In conclusion, I believe that firearms owners should be licensed and that firearms should be stored safely, which will go a long way towards reducing careless or accidental firearm incidents. I also believe that the registration of long guns in the current registration system is costing taxpayers millions of dollars each year and is doing absolutely nothing to make our police or the public safer. Therefore, I would ask this government to repeal the long-gun registry.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weltz.

Thanks to each one of our guests who brought different perspectives to us. That's what we hoped would happen here: that we would hear different opinions and different perspectives and be able to respect those opinions as well.

We will move to the first round of questioning. I think we can still do six minutes each.

Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will be splitting my time with Mr. Aspin, so I'm going to be quite brief and to the point.

I want to thank all of you very much for being here and for your testimony.

Mr. Kuntz, I wasn't familiar with your background. Can you please tell us if you an active police officer and where you are serving?

Cst Randall Kuntz: I've been a member of the Edmonton Police Service for almost 24 years. I've served as a patrol officer and as an intelligence analyst, have worked for three years in cold-case homicide and the criminal investigation section, and currently am working in the stolen property unit, south division, of the Edmonton Police Service.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much.

So you are an active front-line police officer: thank you so much for what you do.

Mr. Weltz, I wanted to ask you further about what you talked about: going into homes or buildings to do a search for firearms and the danger posed to anybody going in and doing that kind of a search if they're counting on the information in the long-gun registry database. This confirms testimony we heard previously from other front-line officers, including Murray Grismer from the Saskatoon Police Service. I think many of us may forget the dangers placed in front of police officers when they count on the registry. He stated very adamantly—and I won't forget it—that if only one police officer's life could be saved by abolishing the long-gun registry, “it is worth it”.

Can you please talk about the dangers the police face when they count on this registry that is so flawed? We've heard that there are about sixteen million long guns in Canada and only about seven million are registered. Can you talk about the dangers that those in law enforcement face when they count on that information?

• (1235)

Mr. Donald Weltz: Yes, I can speak to it personally. Of the very many different places that I personally searched, even though I probably had the ability to check that registry ahead of time at least in the last 10 years of my career, I chose not to, and I did so specifically so that my mind would not have some kind of little innuendo hiding there that would lead me to take my guard down for a split second.

When you enter places that, number one, you are not familiar with—you have no idea what the inside of that building looks like or what it contains and you have no idea who's present—you need to have your complete senses about you and you have to be prepared for anything that can possibly come up. Although that's sometimes impossible to do, you have to be ready.

On the continuum scale, you need to operate in “the zone orange”, as they say. You have to be ready to take action. If you have the perception that there is nothing there that really can hurt you, you have a tendency to not be as careful as you should be.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Mr. Aspin.

The Chair: Mr. Aspin, please. You have four minutes.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the presenters for their insightful presentations today.

I would like to zero in on Mr. Kuntz as a police officer. I found your presentation concise. It was to the point and, with me, it had a very clear impact. I was particularly interested in your two surveys. I found them indeed very revealing. You indicated in your testimony that you've had some personal experiences with firearm-related deaths. Is this something you feel comfortable sharing with this committee?

Cst Randall Kuntz: I have no problem at all, sir.

Mr. Jay Aspin: Could you share those experiences?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Statistically, six of these suicides occurred prior to the gun registry, nine after. Of the two murders, they were both a friend of the RCMP and a friend of mine and a member of the Edmonton Police Service. The other murder was that of a friend; it was in conjunction with a murder-suicide. I lost two people that day. If you want an age range, the youngest was 12 years old. I believe the oldest was in the early sixties at the time.

When a person goes through something like that, you would think the first thing they would do is say to ban guns, period, because they're evil. I like to think of myself as a little smarter than that, because I know that no matter what the instrument is, people are going to kill other people, and they're going to kill themselves.

People need to intervene with people. No database is going to save somebody's life. You need people—like the good doctor—who will take the time to spend time with people. I've found that's the most successful way. That's where I've had the most success in my police work: in sitting down and talking to someone face to face. That's what works. Relying on a database that has so many errors.... As intelligence analysts, we had a saying: garbage in, garbage out. You had to confirm everything.

Millions of people register their firearms by pieces of paper. I know there are model numbers, because I've spent hours correcting things for older and younger friends of mine who received their registration documents on which the information was not correct. I took it upon myself to help them that way so that they did have the correct information on it, because I am law abiding and I want good information in there. But it's only done because of the risk of prosecution, not because of the value of the system. That was the deterrent. The criminality was the deterrent. Knowing what I know about the registry, in 10 years we will look back at this and you will see no difference.

• (1240)

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

We'll now move back to the opposition side.

Madam Boivin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Thank you.

My question is for the two Dawson College representatives.

Your school has suffered a terrible tragedy. Watching the events unfold on television was disturbing enough; so we can imagine how hard it must have been to be there in person. Mr. Murphy-Perron talked about the sound of bullets whistling through the air, and so on. If I have understood correctly, your student association has been trying to contact the Prime Minister for the last five years in order to set up a meeting to discuss your point of view, but has never obtained an audience. Is that right?

Mr. Mathieu Murphy-Perron: Some of our colleagues and Anastasia De Sousa's parents did obtain an audience, but the meeting never took place. On September 13, we sent a very official invitation. We expected it to be refused, but not ignored. That's when we felt somewhat insulted.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I just wanted to be completely sure that I understood correctly. When commenting, we want to be factually correct because we are always being told that we are using inaccurate information here.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Kuntz, did I hear correctly? You said you don't support any firearm registry. Is that what you said?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Yes. That is—

Ms. Françoise Boivin: So any firearm...not just long gun, but any firearm registry?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Yes. In my experience, both long guns and handguns have played a part in murders and suicides. That's why I support—

Ms. Françoise Boivin: So you disagree with Bill C-19, I guess, because you wish it would go on for everything....

Cst Randall Kuntz: I agree with Bill C-19. It's a good start.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Oh, it's a start? Okay. At least it's clear.

[Translation]

My next question is for the Coalition for Gun Control.

I understand your passion. I know that this is something you have been working on for years. The government is twisting the coalition's claims a bit. It is trying to make people believe that this matter and the coalition's stance only apply to women, that the objective is purely to criminalize hunting, and so on.

I would like you to remind us again of the issue underlying the firearms registry, especially the long-gun registry. Maybe you could explain things because some people here don't understand that clause 11 may be the most dangerous provision in the whole bill. Why? Because the government is giving the false impression that there is no need to worry because registration will still be required, that licensing is one thing and registration, or the registry, another, and that all of us who want to keep the registry have not understood the scientific side of the matter.

You said that the new provisions would not aim to re-establish companies' obligation to keep a record of firearm sales and that long guns could be transferred without being subject to control.

You can have the rest of my time.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Cukier.

Prof. Wendy Cukier: I apologize. My French is not great and the translation is not working well, but I understood that you want me to comment on some of the provisions in the law that—

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Yes, on clause 11, maybe, as a start, on the fact that there will be no obligation to really....

[Translation]

I don't want to do the interpreter's job.

[English]

Prof. Wendy Cukier: Verify on a transfer...?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Yes, exactly.

Prof. Wendy Cukier: It's the verification on transfer. Under the old firearms acquisition certificate program that was introduced in 1977 and strengthened under the Conservative government in 1991, people had to present their firearms acquisition certificate—*theoretically*—when they purchased firearms. In stores, a record was kept of the person who had purchased the guns, and the guns they had purchased, and those records were kept for a period of time.

The challenges were.... If you go back to the testimony of law enforcement officers at that point in time, the problem was that often the FACs had been issued five years previously and people who had undertaken criminal acts in the interim still had an FAC in hand.

Another problem with that process was it was very difficult. For example, I know that in northern Ontario there were cases of people routinely selling firearms at garage sales. Theoretically, the seller should check to ensure that someone had a valid FAC, but as no record was actually kept of the firearm being transferred, there was no way to really hold the original owner responsible for that weapon, that firearm. In the United States, straw purchases and the diversion of legal guns to illegal sources are an ongoing problem. The same situation existed in Canada. Law enforcement also talked about the problems around guns being stolen and not being reported stolen.

One of the real challenges in this legislation is not just the elimination of the registration and the accountability measures, which police have said repeatedly, with few exceptions, are essential to doing their job and to public safety, but also the elimination of the requirement that a licence be verified when a gun is purchased. I could have a licence that I got in 1999 and I could be purchasing a gun a few years later. When I present my licence, there's an automatic check made to ensure that the licence is valid, that there are no prohibition orders against me, and that there are no outstanding concerns. With the new system, that will no longer be the case.

We know, from the testimony of people working in the firearms centre, that there have been a number of cases where the process of verification when firearms were sold actually has resulted in criminal charges being laid. For example, a very large smuggling operation out of Toronto was stopped because, during the course of processing the transaction, the licence was checked and red flags came up. It was stopped.

With this law, those provisions are going to be absent. People have said they support licensing. If you support licensing, this law undermines licensing in a very serious way.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move back to Mr. Leef, please, for about six or seven minutes, and then we'll go to Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll just note off the top that I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Norlock.

First, just to clear the record, I don't think 2,631 respondents voting to scrap the registry would be characterized as "with very few exceptions", especially considering our testimony earlier in the week in which we heard that 98% of those polled in the Saskatchewan police officers' association responded in the exact same manner. Also, of all the front-line police officer constituents that I have in the Yukon Territory, I could say that the vast, vast majority of them are speaking in the exact same manner as Mr. Kuntz and as Mr. Weltz.

The one thing I'll make a comment on, rather than ask a question, is that we're hearing tremendous confusion being put forward by the opposition around the differences in the registry, the Firearms Act, and licensing. There are still very solid and sound provisions within the Firearms Act that make it a serious offence to violate it.

We're talking about smuggling, criminal organizations, and criminal operations; we're talking about the organizations and the people not registering their guns. It is misleading to Canadians and irresponsible to suggest that the registry and licensing or the registry and the Firearms Act have anything to do with one another. Those provisions still stand and they will still continue to protect Canadians.

What we're also missing—and I find it very disturbing—is the connection. We're adults here and we know there is a big difference between coincidence and cause and effect in a scientific test. We haven't heard any empirical evidence whatsoever that can show us, yet we hear these broadband statements that say 650 suicides were prevented. I have yet to see any empirical evidence before this committee to show us that this coincidence is actual cause and effect.

Then we move that into the broad picture of crime prevention, but we have no empirical evidence from a scientific standpoint to show us that the declining murder rate in this country, which started well before the long-gun registry, actually is more than a coincidence and is cause and effect. We're not seeing that, and we haven't seen that, before this committee.

I'm just wondering if Mr. Kuntz, from his personal experience in studying suicides, could say whether he knows of any study in this country of suicide where firearms weren't the weapon of choice, yet firearms were present. Is that kind of study being undertaken? I can tell you now that in January of this year a close personal friend committed suicide by a means other than a firearm, but a firearm was present in that home. The guns were registered, but suicide by firearm wasn't the method at that time.

How can we say that a registry has prevented 650 suicides in this country? Do you know of any empirical evidence to clearly demonstrate that for the committee?

• (1250)

The Chair: Who is your question directed to, Mr. Kuntz or Mr. Weltz?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Sorry, it's to Mr. Kuntz.

Cst Randall Kuntz: I understood that if I'd looked into any surveys or any statistics in regard to suicides.... To be totally honest, I haven't, because suicides have taken enough time out of my life, and I just did not ever make a study of it. I guess my life experience would be my study.

Mr. Ryan Leef: I'll now pass this over to Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I thank the witnesses for appearing today. I have a couple of questions.

Most of the members of this committee know, of course—but perhaps you don't—that I have over 30 years of experience with the Ontario Provincial Police. Although I'm very reticent to draw family into this, I can say that this issue has brought my emotions and the emotions of many, many folks to the forefront. If I thought that my brothers and sisters in uniform, one of whom is my son, would be imperilled by Bill C-19, I would be sitting as an independent. I don't believe that.

I have spent 10 years as a politician. That's why I left policing: to get involved in the political arena in order to make our country safer for its citizens, which is the primary responsibility of every MP. I don't disparage any member of Parliament for a view opposite to mine. I don't question their motivation or anything else. I just wanted to get to that off the top. I don't question the veracity of any police officer, be they chiefs of police, or constables, or probationary constables, for that matter.

Would you not say that the registry is the data and the data is the registry? So if you're going to do away with the registry, what you're saying is that you're going to do away with the data. Would you agree with me, Mr. Kuntz?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Yes, that's exactly what it is.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Weltz, would you agree with me?

Mr. Donald Weltz: Yes, I would agree with that.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Secondly, to both of you, would you not agree that, to be of assistance to law enforcement officers, having more substantive penalties for serious violent crimes is of greater use than a registry?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Absolutely.

Mr. Donald Wertz: I would maybe even go one step further into putting in minimum penalties.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

Would you not agree that more police officers on our streets are of greater use than a registry?

Mr. Donald Wertz: Yes.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Would you not agree that giving police more tools—such as more access to information on the Internet vis-à-vis cracking down on child pornography or the extension or improvement of the DNA data bank and other such laws—would be of more use to police than the registry?

Cst Randall Kuntz: By far.

Mr. Donald Wertz: Yes.

Mr. Rick Norlock: If a government were to do all the suggested things I mentioned, as this government is—and it's currently, in another committee, going through Bill C-10—such as having more substantive laws and better assistance to the police, would you not agree that's of more use than a registry and makes police and society safer?

Cst Randall Kuntz: Yes.

Mr. Donald Wertz: Yes.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. You still had seven seconds left—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —but we are going to get to Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay, finally.

The Chair: Hopefully in this round he will have his full time.

Go ahead, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Ms. Cukier, the minister came before the committee. I thought he said that—even with Bill C-19—store owners would still be required to keep records of who they sold guns to. I reread the testimony and he didn't actually say that. He kind of skated around it.

But the point has been made that Bill C-19 will not remove that requirement, so there is some confusion around it. I'd like to get your opinion about that.

• (1255)

Prof. Wendy Cukier: Well, I'm not a lawyer, but what I've looked at in terms of the 1977 legislation, the 1995 legislation, and this legislation is that in 1977 there was an explicit requirement. It was done away with in the Firearms Act, because the registration process obviated the need to maintain this document that no longer exists.

As a result, because this bill is silent on the need for store owners and gun sellers to maintain documents such as this—or an electronic database in the current age, which would be the equivalent of this—our conclusion is that in fact Canada will have less information about gun sales than the United States of America does, and that we will no longer meet our international obligations.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: If indeed the store owners would be required to keep this data, essentially all we're doing is decentraliz-

ing the gun registry away from the government, which has privacy controls and so on, and into the hands of store owners.

I would like to ask you a question, Mr. Wertz.

For both Mr. Kuntz and Mr. Wertz, I appreciate your first-hand experiences of these issues, and I respect them greatly. But we're in the realm of social science. Mr. Leef said that we can't establish causation 100%, but if we're in the realm of social science, we never will.

You've said that registration has not diminished drunk driving, but we actually don't know, because if people felt they could hit someone while drunk and kill them, and just leave their car in a field somewhere and it would never be traced back to them, who knows what people's attitudes might be?

The other thing you said, which I found a bit contradictory, was that of course you believe in the safe storage of weapons, but then you went on to give a hypothetical example about how if somebody really wants to seek revenge on someone, whether their weapon is stored or not, they're still going to get a hold of it.

There has been data that shows suicide rates have dropped since the gun registry was instituted. Is there any evidence to suggest the registry did not contribute to that?

Mr. Donald Wertz: I know of none.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Kuntz—and again, I respect your concrete experience with this—a report was released today called *Not to be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians*. I was part of the all-party committee that produced this report. It mentions that when you restrict the means of suicide, you restrict suicide. It gives the example of China and India, where “death by pesticide intake is a common way of committing suicide”. It states, “The development of stringent controls on access to and storage of pesticides and industrial poisons has resulted in a reduction in suicide rates...”.

Then it mentions an RCMP document and states:

Case studies have shown that firearms used in suicides tended to be readily available—the victim either owned the firearm or borrowed it. Firearms are rarely obtained specifically....Case-control studies have found that firearms were more likely to have been present in the homes of suicide victims than in the homes of suicide attempters, psychiatric inpatients, or other control subjects.

I think storage and access is very important, because—and I'm sure you can testify to this—many of the crimes committed with firearms in a conjugal violent situation involve alcohol as well. So the harder it is to get your hands on that weapon when you've had a few drinks and are mad, the more I would think it would help save lives. I appreciate your first-hand experience and what you've gone through, but I don't think this is perfect science. It's social science, and we have to give the benefit of the doubt to precaution and to saving lives.

Do you believe, Mr. Wertz, that we should get rid of the handgun registry as well? As Madam Larente said before, criminals don't register their handguns, and registration makes lawful owners feel like criminals. So if you got rid of the handgun registry, you wouldn't be missing much, because criminals would not have been in that registry anyway. What about those lawful owners of handguns? They would feel much less criminalized.

I find that there's a contradiction. Can you explain that?

• (1300)

Mr. Donald Wertz: Well, I think it was brought up earlier in the other committee that handguns have been registered since 1934 in Canada. Yet how many crimes, how many murders, are being committed every year in the city of Toronto with handguns? Is the registration system working? Is it stopping crimes with handguns from taking place? I would have to say probably not.

I would say that I hadn't given it much thought until your question. But to answer the question you originally put to me, I would have to say that removing the registration of handguns probably wouldn't really make much difference, as Mr. Kuntz had said, because the strict registration part appears to not be working either.

The Chair: Unfortunately, our time is up.

We thank each one of you for coming. We thank you for the submissions you've made to our committee. If some of you think or believe that you have not answered as fully as you wanted to, I would encourage you to please make another submission to our committee, and we'll see that we get it.

We are going to suspend momentarily. We have to pass a budget so we can make certain that of all our witnesses get paid for coming here.

It's going to be very quick—about two minutes.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'd like to move that we conduct today's committee business in public, as there's nothing in this business that requires confidentiality. It would also allow us to raise an important public issue we have in mind, which is to invite the new Commissioner of the RCMP here to discuss his intentions with

regard to accountability, and in particular, with regard to the issue of sexual assault in the RCMP.

The Chair: All right.

We don't have any standing order that says that we have to go in camera for this, but we do have to adjourn quickly.

Do you want to pass the budget?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes, I move that we pass it.

The Chair: All right.

We have a budget. You have a copy of the budget. I have to go to the Liaison Committee on Thursday, I think, when they meet next. Have you all had the opportunity to take a very quick look at it? It's standard. The total package is for \$69,900 for the study on Bill C-19.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I second the motion.

The Chair: All we all in favour?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Just a second. Since I sit on the Liaison Committee, being the chair of another committee, I just want to say that to have witnesses come for five minutes...be ready to have good arguments. I just want you to be prepared because of the speedy way that the government functions. It is kind of a bit redundant—

The Chair: I'll take that as a fair warning.

An hon. member: I had my hand up because—

The Chair: Just a moment, please. I hope that doesn't mean that I can't count on your support.

Thank you very much.

Folks, are we all in favour, then, of this budget?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. That's carried.

On the other point that you mentioned, we can put committee business together, provide a motion of who you'd like to see—that's the manner in which we do this—and then we can deal with that at another time.

We are adjourned.

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