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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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•(1100)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP)): Good morning. This is meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, on Thursday, November 24, 2011, and for our orders of the day, we have Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

We will be hearing witnesses this morning.

I should say just before we begin that we had an agreement among all parties that these sessions would be televised. There was a competition for resources on the Hill this morning. There are only two rooms that can televise at the same time, and the common phrase is that we came third, so this session unfortunately will not be televised.

Yes?

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't think you're allowed to get someone to substitute in for you, sir, when you're taking over as vice-chair. That would be against the rules—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): I don't believe that was—

Ms. Candice Hooppner: You can have people sit in, for sure—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): I just checked with the clerk. We have not done a substitution. We have an extra member at the table, as I believe you have.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: That's fine. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you.

I'd like to start by introducing the witnesses.

First, we have Gary Mauser, professor emeritus, Institute for Canadian Urban Research Studies, Simon Fraser University.

Welcome, Mr. Mauser.

Second, we have Mr. Greg Illerbrun and Mr. Kevin Omoth, from the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

Good morning.

Third, we have Heidi Rathjen and Nathalie Provost, from the Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for Gun Control.

Welcome.

By video conference this morning, we'll have Mr. Étienne Blais, associate professor, School of Criminology, at the University of Montreal.

We'll just check to make sure that Mr. Blais can hear us and we can hear him.

[Translation]

Mr. Étienne Blais (Associate Professor, School of Criminology, University of Montreal, As an Individual): Everything's fine.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): *Merci.*

We will come back to you at the end.

We will ask for about seven minutes of presentations from each of you to allow time for a round of questions. We'll begin with Mr. Mauser.

Dr. Gary Mauser (Professor Emeritus, Institute for Canadian Urban Research Studies, Simon Fraser University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, and fellow panellists. I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you.

I am Gary Mauser, professor emeritus, SFU. I am here as an individual criminologist to present facts, not myths. I will use my time to highlight a few issues referred to in the longer written brief that I have provided to the clerk.

For the past 25 years as an academic criminologist, I have focused on evaluating firearms legislation. The government is to be congratulated for proposing that the long-gun registry be eliminated. When a government program has failed to meet its goals, it should be shut down rather than permitted to drain funds for no good reason.

In my brief address, I will hit four points. First, responsible gun owners are less likely to be accused of homicide than other Canadians. Second, the police have not been able to demonstrate the value of the long-gun registry. Third, the long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing homicide. Fourth, the data in the long-gun registry are of such poor quality that they should be destroyed.

My first point is that law-abiding gun owners are less likely to be accused of homicide than other Canadians. This should not surprise. Firearms owners have been screened for criminal records since 1979, and it has been illegal since 1992 for people with a violent record to own a firearm.

Gun owners may be compared with other Canadians by calculating homicide rates per 100,000 people. Based on a special request from Statistics Canada, I calculated that licensed gun owners had a homicide rate of 0.6 persons per 100,000 licensed gun owners, while over the same time period there was an average national homicide rate of 1.85 per 100,000 people; thus, Canadians who do not have a firearms licence are roughly three times more likely to commit murder than those who do.

Despite these facts, the RCMP budgets more than \$20 million annually for the long-gun registry.

The second point is that the police have not been able to demonstrate the value of the long-gun registry. Scrapping the registry could not appreciably compromise law enforcement's ability to trace firearms. Statistics show that the police recover registered long guns in exceptionally few homicides.

During the eight years from 2003 to 2010, there were 4,811 homicides, and 1,485 of those involved firearms. Data provided by Statistics Canada reveal that only 135 of these guns were registered. In just 73 cases, that is, fewer than 5% of all firearm homicides, was the gun registered to the accused, and some of those, of course, may be innocent. Only 45 of these 73 cases involved long guns—fewer than 1% of all homicides. The long-gun registry could not, therefore, significantly compromise law enforcement's ability to trace firearms.

The police have not been able to show that they have solved a single murder by tracing a firearm using the long-gun registry. Nor has the long-gun registry proved useful in solving police killings. Since 1961, 123 police have been shot and killed. Only one of these murders involved a registered long gun, and it did not belong to the murderer. It is a truism that the most dangerous criminals have not registered their firearms. Unsurprisingly, serving police officers say the registry is not useful to them.

Worse, the long-gun registry has reduced the effectiveness of the police by driving a wedge between them and responsible citizens who own firearms.

My third point is that the long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing homicide rates. There is no convincing evidence that the registry has reduced criminal violence. Not a single refereed academic study by criminologists or economists has found a significant benefit from the gun laws.

Two examples illustrate this: the homicide rate fell faster before long guns were required to be registered, and the homicide rate fell faster in the U.S. than in Canada over the same time period of 1991 to 2010. Needless to say, the U.S. did not share Canada's gun laws. Also, the rate of multiple murders has not changed since the long-gun registry began.

• (1105)

The fourth point is that the data in the long-gun registry are of such poor quality that they should be destroyed. The many errors and omissions in the long-gun registry vitiate its utility for police and courts. The Auditor General twice found that the RCMP could not rely upon the registry on account of the large number of errors and omissions.

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

The long-gun registry is misdirected because it focuses on law-abiding citizens rather than violent criminals. To do their job, police require the support of those they police. Ending the registry will help to heal the rupture between the police and responsible citizens. I urge that Bill C-19 become law and the data in the long-gun registry be destroyed.

By the way, there is clearly precedent for destroying such data. During World War II, all guns, including long guns, were registered. After the war, this information was discarded in the trash bin as no longer of value or utility.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Mr. Mauser. You kept well within the time limits. I appreciate that.

We'll now turn to the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation and Mr. Illerbrun or Mr. Omoth.

Mr. Illerbrun.

Mr. Greg Illerbrun (Firearms Chairman, Past-President, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation): I'll be speaking on behalf of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

Mr. Chairman, honourable committee members, and fellow witnesses, it is an honour and a privilege to speak to you today.

Our time is valuable, so let me get to the point: the thousands of people I represent support the permanent elimination of the registry.

This is a vital first step in fulfilling this government's long-standing commitment to replace the current law with one that preserves the right to our traditional lifestyle. I have a passion for hunting and the shooting sports that I share with three daughters: two are avid hunters and the third one raids my deep-freeze.

Hunting is a widespread family tradition in Saskatchewan. I am a former RCMP officer as well as a past provincial president of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, one of the largest wildlife organizations of its kind in the world. Since 1995, I have been the chair of the Saskatchewan Recreational Firearms Committee, which works with firearm groups, local governments, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. These organizations comprise everyday people interested in the outdoors and the use of firearms. We, along with other Canadians, took great offence to the creation of the Firearms Act, still commonly referred to 16 years later as Bill C-68.

What is so offensive about this legislation?

Former Auditor General Sheila Fraser summed it up best when she stated that the initial focus was to use the registry information to target high-risk cases, but this was expanded to regard all gun owners in the same way, as the use of firearms is a “questionable activity” that requires strong controls. This law targets law-abiding citizens, but does little to stop the criminal use of firearms. That approach is fundamentally wrong. Look at the example of the handgun registry: in place for decades, yet we see increasing use of handguns by criminals today. Registries do not work to stop crime. Check the record in New Zealand.

You may be aware that Allan Rock, former Justice Minister, once said, “I came to Ottawa...with the firm belief that only the police and the military should have firearms”. This plan to rid Canada of private firearms was strategically planned and made possible by the Liberal Party through the creation of Bill C-68. The tools were carefully crafted into law, where they exist to this day, waiting to be used. Here's some quick background on the Firearms Act today.

First of all, it is a criminal offence for anyone other than a soldier or a police officer to possess a firearm. The current licence is a temporary permit that prevents the police from charging you for the crime you are committing. At the whim of government, it can be revoked or made difficult to obtain or keep. Without it, you cannot possess a firearm.

Many Saskatchewan residents have been charged with a criminal offence simply because they forgot to renew their licence. As a former police officer, I cannot support convicting farmers who need to use a firearm for pest control, and I submit to you that some of these same people were veterans, who should not have their freedom, paid for in blood, vanish with the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen. A firearms licence must be made valid for life unless the individual has lost that right through a criminal act.

Second, it is a criminal offence to possess an unregistered firearm. Some would suggest that this is the same as registering a dog or a vehicle. Dog and vehicle owners do not receive a criminal record for failing to comply. Using criminal law to enforce gun control is not acceptable yet, sadly, we have spent two billion dollars tracking honest citizens. Please kill the registry and use the money to deal with real criminals.

Third, the government can change any regulation through order in council, including firearms classification. This means that any firearm that is currently legal can be re-classed and confiscated as the result of a closed-door cabinet meeting. Confiscations have and will continue to happen as long as this insidious legislation exists in its current form.

Fourth, government inspectors—not police services—can enter your home without a warrant based on the suspicion that there is a firearm, ammunition, or documentation of a firearm. Am I painting you a clear picture? It sure doesn't seem like firearms owners are treated the same as other Canadians.

Fifth, the Firearms Act removes your right to remain silent. Inspectors can demand that you tell them where your firearms are—or any other related evidence—and if you do not assist them you can be charged and put in jail. You do not have the right to remain silent. This is not because you are a drug dealer, a sex offender, or a

murderer. It is because the law identifies you as a legal firearms owner. Criminals enjoy more rights than firearm owners.

• (1110)

Is there a long history of legal gun owners using them for illegal purposes? The answer is no. The entire regime was built for a potential risk that I can tell you today does not exist. The previous Liberal government deliberately drafted these tools and others so that over time they could bring an end to all private ownership of firearms in Canada. Leave the current act as it is, and it's only a matter of time before government will use those tools to end a time-honoured and legitimate way of life in Canada.

Ending the registry is an excellent first step towards replacing the Firearms Act. I challenge the government to continue to lead by integrity.

Keep your promise to develop a law that all Canadians can support.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Mr. Illerbrun.

Again people are being very well-behaved on time. That will leave us time for questions. Thank you.

Now we turn to the Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for Gun Control.

Ms. Provost.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Provost (Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for Gun Control): Hello. Thank you to all of you for inviting us to appear before this committee.

My name is Nathalie Provost, I am an engineer, a 1990 graduate of the École Polytechnique, and a mother of four. I represent, with Heidi Rathjen, the Student and Graduate Student Associations of the Polytechnique, the board of the Alumni Association, and many witnesses and survivors of the massacre and their families.

I was injured on December 6, 1989, at the École Polytechnique by a shot with a semi-automatic rifle while other more seriously wounded students died around me. Long guns are dangerous, as I know only too well. The shootings at our school triggered a Canada-wide movement to improve our gun control laws. The massacre highlighted the weaknesses in Canadian legislation.

At the time, it was relatively easy for a 16-year-old to be authorized to acquire an unlimited number of firearms. There were millions of long guns in the country that were invisible to the police. Soon after the murders, students at the École Polytechnique launched a huge petition calling for stricter gun control.

In 22 years, we have been able to contribute to impressive legislative and public progress, particularly with respect to the substantial decline in gun-related death and suicide rates. When Conservative politicians argue that long guns are not a problem because they are not the weapon of choice for criminals, they are ignoring the evidence and basic common sense.

The Supreme Court underscored what is obvious to all but the Conservatives. Guns cannot be divided neatly into two categories — those that are dangerous and those that are not dangerous. All guns are capable of being used in crime. All guns are capable of killing and maiming. It follows that all guns pose a threat to public safety.

Out of respect for the memory of victims of long guns, including the 14 victims at the École Polytechnique, and out of compassion for all those who, like me, have felt the burn of a gunshot, could you, Conservative Members of Parliament, stop pretending that long guns are not a crime-related problem?

In fact, every year, police revoke the licences of over 2,000 potentially dangerous individuals and confiscate the weapons in their possession. Public Safety Minister Vic Toews recently admitted to the House of Commons that in a little over two years, 4,612 long guns were seized in connection with licences revoked for public safety reasons. In all, 111,000 firearms are currently in police custody, of which 87,000, or close to 80%, are long guns.

These actions, supported by the registry, prevent tragedies and save lives. Which ones exactly? We don't know — because they haven't taken place. No massacres, no headlines, no list of names of people saved. When prevention measures work, there are no incidents to document. Just don't try and tell us that the registry is not effective.

In 11 days, it will be the 22nd anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre, in which I was injured and escaped death. So it is with a very heavy heart that I am witnessing the legislative process leading to the dismantling of one of the few positive outcomes of this tragedy: the law that helps save hundreds and hundreds of lives.

With Bill C-19, we are allowing the gun lobby to dictate the kind of society we want to live in, a society that is irreversibly going backwards towards easier access to firearms, which will doubtless lead to more lives and families being destroyed with the pull of a trigger.

[*English*]

Ms. Heidi Rathjen (Spokesperson, Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for Gun Control): Good morning. I will continue in English.

Up until now, the debate surrounding Bill C-19 has mainly focused on the registration of guns. However, the impacts of this legislation reach well beyond the issue of registration.

For example, clause 11 eliminates the requirement to keep any record of the transaction involving long guns. This means that there won't be any more paper or electronic traces indicating that a sale has taken place. There are more than 1.5 million of these private sales in about two years.

The requirement to record sales was introduced in 1977 and, in the absence of a more effective centralized registry, was at least able to

serve the public safety by helping police in some criminal investigations. For example, sales records allowed police to identify the perpetrator of the Polytechnique shooting, who was unrecognizable, having shot himself in the face.

So unless a store voluntarily keeps a detailed sales record, there will no longer be any trail linking a seller to a buyer or to a gun that was sold, nor will there be any trace indicating that the sale took place. The sales will be taking place in the dark.

Bill C-19 will also critically weaken a second crucial component of gun control: the controls on ownership or licensing.

When in 2006 the Conservative government tabled Bill C-21, an earlier attempt to abolish the registry, it nevertheless recognized the importance of verifying the validity of a licence to own when selling or transferring a gun—any gun. In the accompanying fact sheet, the Conservatives reassured the public that the proposed amendment would still “require current owners to verify that a potential purchaser or another new owner of their non-restricted firearm has a valid firearms license by contacting the Chief Firearms Officer”. It stated, “This measure will assist in ensuring that guns do not end up in the hands of individuals who shouldn't have them, such as convicted criminals”.

Yet clause 11 also repeals the obligation for anyone selling or transferring a long gun, whether it is a gun store or a private individual, to verify the validity of the buyer's licence. All they have to do is have “no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized to acquire and possess that kind of firearm”. Technically, they don't even have to ask to see a licence.

In order to properly understand the implications of this incredible loophole, consider this. Someone about to purchase a long gun can simply hold out something that looks like a licence. It could be a revoked licence, a counterfeit licence, or even a shabby but slightly official-looking plasticized card that could be produced in any copy shop.

With Bill C-19, there would be no obligation for the seller to check the validity of the licence with the Firearms Centre or to record anything about the licence, its number, the rifle being sold, or the person he is selling it to. He just has to believe that the owner is authorized to own a gun. The buyer can convince the seller: “I promise that I have a licence”. Is that enough?

In the event that the rifle is used in a crime, it will be practically impossible to hold accountable the person who sold the gun to an individual without a licence. All the person has to say is: “Yes, I sold a gun to someone. I seem to remember that he or she had a valid licence. At least, I believed he or she did at the time, but I didn't verify its validity or write down the licence number or the buyer's name”. There is no technical violation of the law unless the police can prove that this person didn't believe something.

• (1120)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Ms. Rathjen, unfortunately, you're out of time. Just conclude the sentence.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: In one more minute, I'll be done.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): I'm sorry, we're already—

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: Twenty-two years.... Can you give me one minute?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): No, I'm sorry. We have to give the same amount of time to each of the witnesses.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: All right.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Just give us a concluding sentence, if you like.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: In other words—I will just conclude with one thing—what the authors of the bill have done is actually quite incredible: they have devised a legal framework that maintains the illegal nature of a sale of a long gun to a non-licensed person but has made it practically impossible to prosecute unless the police can prove something that is almost impossible to prove.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you.

Now we'll turn to our teleconference.

Monsieur Blais, please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Étienne Blais: Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the committee, good day.

Allow me first to introduce myself. I am Étienne Blais, a criminologist and associate professor in the School of Criminology at the Université de Montréal. I was hired for my expertise in research and crime prevention methods.

Since I was hired, in 2006, I have developed a research program on the prevention of crime and injuries linked to firearms. From the start of my career, I have had the opportunity to publish numerous articles with peer committees and give many lectures on the issue of gun control in Canada.

Before presenting my position on Bill C-19, I would like to recall that the issue of those injured by firearms goes far beyond that of criminality, or violence associated with criminal groups. Of the 800 or so annual deaths associated with firearms, 75% are suicides. Furthermore, about 85% of suicides by firearm involve long guns. In many cases, suicides involve people who are suffering from mental disturbances or who find themselves in a momentary crisis.

Suicides are very often committed in the victim's home. Many studies demonstrate that access to a firearm in the home increases the risk of suicide in general. This is also so for spousal homicides. The presence of a firearm in the home increases the risk of spousal homicide. In these homicides and suicides, firearms are the perfect facilitator enabling those with suicidal or homicidal thoughts to act on them. Moreover, it is with a view to preventing such suicides and homicides that certain provisions were made in Bill C-68, respecting firearms and certain other weapons, and its regulations, including a

provision to advise current spouses or spouses of the past two years of their spouses' or former spouses' intention to purchase a firearm and of the registration of all firearms.

In my research, I have focused on the effect of these laws on homicide and suicide rates. The results of my studies have been published in reviews, with peer committees, or presented at scientific conferences, also with peer committees. In one such study, my colleagues and I evaluated the effect of Bills C-51, C-17 and C-68 on homicide and suicide rates in Canada between 1974 and 2004.

First of all, our results show that the passing of Bill C-68 was associated with a significant decline in homicides committed with a firearm, and more specifically homicides involving long guns. This decline varies between 5% and 10%, depending on the province. This corresponds to the prevention of some 50 homicides a year in Canada.

The preventive effect of the law is all the more probable in that the decline in the number of homicides by long arm is not offset by an increase in homicides committed by other methods. Furthermore, this decline may be observed solely in homicides committed by long arm. Homicides committed with other weapons, such as knives and blunt instruments, have not budged. This means that the decline that may be attributed to Bill C-68 is indeed attributable and that it is not attributable to other factors or prevention measures put in place to prevent homicides.

Second, Bill C-68 was associated with a significant decline in suicides by firearm. Once again, there is no increase or decrease in the number of suicides committed by other methods. This suggests that the decline in suicides by firearm is not offset by a rise in suicides committed by other methods, and the decline is not attributable to other suicide prevention measures. We estimate at about 250 the number of suicides prevented annually in Canada since the introduction of the Firearms Act in 1998.

Recently, we conducted other evaluations, which consolidate our conclusions that Bill C-68 helped to reduce homicides and suicides. These recent results even suggest that Bill C-68 helped to prevent spousal homicides. The effects of Bill C-68 began to appear gradually from 1998, as the provisions of this legislation were implemented.

Many studies have now been conducted on the effect of Canadian legislation pertaining to firearms control. Why look at our results? How are our results more credible than those of other studies?

First, we take into account other factors, such as the proportion of young men, beer consumption, the number of police per inhabitant, incarceration rates and unemployment rates, to name but a few of other concomitant factors.

Second, we employ statistical methods enabling us to obtain valid estimates.

• (1125)

Third, we distinguish homicides according to the weapon used and the relationship between the parties. However, the chief advantage of our studies resides, in my opinion, in the use of the province as an analysis unit, which many studies do not do.

For example, in our latest study, we take account of the various homicide rates in the six Canadian provinces and the Atlantic region for the period from 1974 to 2006. That enables us to have a sample of 231 observations. This is a large enough sample to detect the effects of the laws. A simple sample of 30 or 35 observations would be completely inadequate, for lack of statistical strength.

In addition, this enables us to take into account provincial jurisdiction respecting law enforcement. Laws come into effect at the same time throughout Canada, but it is the provinces that are responsible for enforcing them. So any evaluation of the laws respecting firearms control in Canada must take this into account.

Finally, using the provinces as an analysis unit enables us to take into account crime rate variations among them. Canada in itself is not representative of the problems experienced in the provinces.

In conclusion, the results of our studies demonstrate that Bill C-68 has helped to prevent 300 deaths a year. On the basis of data on the direct and indirect costs of deaths by firearm, we estimate that over \$400 million a year is saved in costs from the prevention of those 300 deaths. This amount compares favourably with the \$63 million dedicated annually to the operation of the Canadian Firearms Program and the \$9.1 million dedicated to registration activities, according to the RCMP report.

On the basis of our results, we think that eliminating the firearms registry may compromise the health and safety of Canadians. The requirements to obtain a firearms licence and to register firearms are two necessary and complementary measures. These measures allow us to link each firearm to its owner...

• (1130)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Mr. Blais, your time has actually expired. Could you conclude in a sentence or two?

[Translation]

Mr. Étienne Blais: All right.

This acts as an incentive for owners of firearms to comply with the regulations in effect respecting the purchase, storage, sale, loan and gift of a firearm. The registry also provides support for the police in the performance of their duties. Moreover, none of these measures prevents in any way the legitimate use of firearms by their owners.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you, Mr. Blais.

We'll now turn to our first round of questions.

On the government side, I believe we'll start with Mr. Leef.

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

I will be sharing my time with Mr. Armstrong today.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for coming today.

This question will be for Mr. Mauser.

We did hear the last testimony here, and I'm just wondering if you'd be able to comment from your perspective as a criminologist,

because I definitely heard some differences of opinion there in regard to the drop in homicides by long guns being attributed to Bill C-68.

Can you comment from your findings as to whether we're talking coincidence here or if there's some cause and effect that can be attributed to the registry for the drop in homicides rates by long guns?

Dr. Gary Mauser: I would like to point out that I've looked at one of the articles that Professor Blais has published, and I believe it's the one he's using to base his claims on. There were serious methodological errors defining the independent variable, the covariate included, and a lack of trend lines, and this invalidates, I think, his claims.

If you look at the overall homicide rate, you see that it declines, as I pointed out in my testimony. The rate fell rapidly before the introduction of Bill C-68, that is to say, it was put into effect in 1998-2001, and the long-gun registry was completed in 2003. If you use those break points, you can see that the homicide rate fell a lot faster before it was introduced than afterwards. So how it could have increased that when it obviously decreased is not clear at all.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

My next question will be for Mr. Illerbrun.

I have just a quick point. You're representing members of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation. Do you have women who hunt in your organization?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: I have my two daughters, as I pointed out in my presentation, but yes, we have more women entering the field all the time now, and in some cases they're better hunters than the men.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Then we could conclude from this that women also own guns...?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: Oh yes.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Over the course of the testimony, we've seen a split between trying to create this idea that it's a man against woman issue and a victim versus offender issue. That's not really, in my opinion, capturing who Canadian gun owners are in our country, so thank you for pointing that out.

We did hear some recent testimony from a gentleman from the Northwest Territories who spoke about education and literacy rates of people in the north and the cultural and traditional heritage of hunting, which certainly would apply to rural and even to urban Canadians. We certainly understand some of the difficulties in completing the registration forms.

You've testified that women are gun owners. They're hunters. They're shooters. We've heard from female athletes involved in the sport.

Then we hear how people have actually failed to register their guns. They have made a conscious choice not to register their guns. Where people have made a conscious choice to do that, we have no idea of how many guns are out there in Canada. By deduction, that would include women who are gun owners, who have decided they are not going to subject themselves to this registry, and who have not registered them.

When we consider the education rates, literacy rates, female gun ownership, the need for them in rural and northern areas to provide subsistence for their families, cultural and traditional practices, the fact that some have refused to register their guns, and then the criminal implications of that, would you agree with me, with all of that considered and the difficulties and inaccuracies in this registry, that we run a great risk—and we have for many years—of making criminals of these law-abiding Canadians? That would actually victimize women in rural areas and victimize females who rely on subsistence, who rely on culture and traditional practices, and who absolutely need long guns to maintain a way of life. Some of them are single parents with a family.

Could you comment on that? Would you agree that we don't want to be running a risk of victimizing those women any further?

• (1135)

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: I don't think we want to run a risk of victimizing any of us. We're all criminals, because the mere possession of a firearm makes you a criminal, so that's what I'd say about that.

We support gun control; we just support gun control that is effective and focuses on the real problem, not the legal and law-abiding owner. That's what we would like to see happen.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

Scott? I'm not sure how much time there is.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): I know there's probably not much time left, so just really quickly, Professor Mauser, when I listened to both you and Professor Blais, it strikes me that your research specifically was about the long-gun registry itself, whereas the research of Professor Blais surrounded more the entire firearms legislation in place as a total. Could that explain the differences in some of your research, particularly in the area of suicide rates?

Dr. Gary Mauser: That's correct. I'm only looking at the long-gun registry.

As you can see in the brief and the presentation, my efforts have been to focus on the statistics about long guns that were held by licensed people and that were registered. For example, only 1% of all homicides involved registered long guns. We are talking microscopic numbers, so I'm looking at the impact of the registration process. Professor Blais is looking at the impact of the entire legislation.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

How much time do I have left?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Okay.

Mr. Illerbrun, one of the greatest criticisms of the legislation that has been recently brought in is the fact that they're saying we're destroying the data and we shouldn't destroy the data—we should maintain it.

Is it accepted in your membership, and probably throughout the rural areas of this country, that the only purpose for maintaining this data would be to start up a new registry sometime later on? Whether that is true or not, is that the perception people have in the rural parts of this country?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: That's definitely part of it, all right, but the data is the registry—

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Right.

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: —so if you're destroying the registry, you have to destroy the data or you haven't destroyed the registry.

Do I think they would resurrect it? You're darn right they will.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: so when people voted across the country on May 2 and elected a Conservative majority government and the long-gun registry was a major plank in the campaign—

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): On a point of order, Chair, this is a political question here about what people voted for and didn't vote for in the election. This witness can't talk about that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Unfortunately, that is not a point of order.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I'll continue.

They expected that when the long-gun registry disappeared, the data would as well. That was a firm expectation they had on the day they went to the ballot box. Would that be true?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: Exactly: the data is the registry, and the registry is the data.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you very much.

Professor Mauser, in your research about suicide rates, there was a specific difference between your research and that of Professor Blais. Can you talk about how that would have come up?

Dr. Gary Mauser: My research presented today is merely on the long-gun registry and homicide. I did not look at suicide. If you look at suicide, you can see that suicide rates have been declining for a long time, and that while the use of firearms in suicide—by long gun or handgun—has declined and started declining way before Bill C-68 was introduced or implemented, hanging has increased.

The problem with suicide isn't access to a particular kind of method, but access to any method. Ropes are eminently available to people who wish to hang themselves and, unfortunately, our aboriginal population has a cultural predilection for ropes rather than guns. This is uncontrollable. This is very sad. We should focus on suicide prevention, not gun access or restriction.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Mr. Mauser.

The time for the government side has expired.

We'll turn to the opposition.

Mr. Harris would require either a substitution form or unanimous consent.

We have a substitution form.

Mr. Harris, you have seven minutes.

• (1140)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

First, thanks to both of you from the Polytechnique for coming here. Knowing the excruciating circumstances which bring you here, I think it's very courageous to do this. You, Ms. Provost, being present for that, it must be a horrible memory that you have.

Ms. Rathjen, I want to give you a chance if you need a minute or two to finish anything else you might want to say.

As well, could you comment on the fact that if this bill goes through, the gun that was used at the Polytechnique, the Ruger Mini-14, is a part of this registry.... That particular gun is part of that registry and it will no longer be required to be registered. Any information on this type of gun or assault rifles will be destroyed, along with everything else.

With the changes in the act, there will be very little—if any—opportunity to trace guns and to follow up on when they are sold or who they go to. The RCMP has said that without the tracing and tracking it will be “almost unenforceable”. Could you comment on that and indicate what your concerns might be, if you have any?

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: One of the problems in the last few years is that the government has not updated or reclassified certain weapons that should be classified as restricted or prohibited weapons. Our position is that we think all assault weapons—all weapons that have military characteristics—that are designed to kill people rapidly and effectively should be banned.

Unfortunately, among the seven million long guns that will be deregistered, that will become invisible to police, you have a number of these guns that should, according to the spirit of the law and the regulations, be classified as restricted. The police will lose track of them.

To continue with my previous point, the debate about this bill has been mostly about registration, because that was the stated objection communicated by the government for this bill. At the same time, the government professes its devotion and its faith in the issue of licensing, saying that it is what real gun control is. We disagree with that, but we support licensing.

By disconnecting the transfer of gun sales from the system, by saying that you don't need to have any records of sale and that at the same time you don't need to check the validity of a licence of a person you are selling guns to, you're removing the mechanism that allows the police to enforce licensing provisions.

The way the bill is written, it builds in a default assumption that the person you're selling to has a valid licence. It is only if a reason comes up to make you believe that is not true that you are then not allowed to sell it. But if you believe the person has a licence—and we don't know what that entails—then there is no violation even if the sale of the gun to an unlicensed person is illegal. It is a huge loophole that you could drive a freight train through and it completely undermines the licensing provisions.

We do not know why this is. What possible benefit could there be for the government to do this? It has professed in the past that verifying licences is essential to protect public safety.

We have no answer. All we know is that it's a step closer to what many gun lobby groups are now advocating, which is the elimination of the licensing provisions also.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Professor Blais, you are a professor of criminology. Is that correct?

Prof. Étienne Blais: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: You are a professor of criminology at the University of Montreal?

Prof. Étienne Blais: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: You have a degree in criminology?

Prof. Étienne Blais: I have a Ph.D. in criminology.

• (1145)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. I just wanted to check that, because you say that these papers you have referred to are peer-reviewed as well.

Prof. Étienne Blais: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Professor Mauser, I understand from your website that you are a professor of business administration and that also, according to your website, you have written two books, one on political marketing, another on the manipulation of public opinion, and that you also represent the National Firearms Association.

I'm just wondering in what capacity you tell us that you appear here as an “individual criminologist”. What does that term actually mean?

Dr. Gary Mauser: A number of your facts are incorrect. First of all—

Mr. Jack Harris: I'm just going by your website, sir.

Dr. Gary Mauser: —I do not represent any organization. I am not a member of the National Firearms Association. I do not represent any firearms organization.

I am here as an individual criminologist because I am in two departments at Simon Fraser: the department of criminology, as well as the faculty of business. My training was in statistical methodology. I have published analytical statistical papers in criminology, marketing, business, and economics. So I feel perfectly qualified.

For the last 15 years I have published criminological journals, in peer-reviewed criminological journals, and this is what my university uses to evaluate my research. This is an academic competence. I am here as an academic criminologist.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay. Again, I'm just reading again from your website, which says:

I am Gary Mauser, Professor Emeritus, of Simon Fraser.... I represent the National Firearms Association.

That's on your website: garymauser.net.

I'm sorry if I have my facts wrong, but—

Dr. Gary Mauser: Apology accepted.

Mr. Jack Harris: —that is the source.

I have a question for Mr. Illerbrun. I understand your position in that there are differing opinions on this, but you've described the changes that are being made in this legislation as a good “first step” towards replacing the firearms scheme. What would you see it as a step on the road to...? Do you share the view that Ms. Rathjen has talked about, which is that there should be a very different system?

We talk about law-abiding gun owners and by definition, of course, law-abiding people don't commit crimes of any kind. Most Canadians are law-abiding, and the laws are made, I guess, to keep people law-abiding and to provide respect for the law. If this is the first step, what other steps do you see happening and where do you see this going?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: I see people as law-abiding people and this act made criminals out of all of us. It uses the Criminal Code to punish legal, law-abiding firearms owners.

The steps I see are that we need to get this legislation taken out of the criminal act, quit punishing the legal people, and quit treating us as criminals. An act of Parliament is trampling the Constitution here. It has removed our right to remain silent. It's a reverse onus.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Mr. Illerbrun.

The time has expired in this round.

We'll return to the government side.

Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Breitzkreuz.

I have just a very brief question for Mr. Mauser. It might take him a couple of minutes to answer it.

We've been hearing from front-line police officers quite strongly that they're concerned that other police officers who would depend on the long-gun registry...or that if chiefs instruct their front-line officers to depend on the data in the long-gun registry, doing so puts their lives at very severe risk. We heard one police officer say that if even one officer's life were saved by abolishing the long-gun registry, it would be worth it.

Of course, we've heard the reverse said. I know you've been following this, Mr. Mauser. Have you ever known or heard of an incident, even recently, in which a police officer depended on the

flawed information in the registry and it cost that individual officer their life?

Dr. Gary Mauser: Yes, I have. It's very sad. I was told by an instructor at the Ontario Police College that he is frequently confronted by young aspiring police trainees who believe and place their trust in the long-gun registry. They believe what they see on the computer.

In one case, Constable Valérie Gignac, a constable in Laval, Quebec, checked the registry on December 14, 2005, before she confronted a trouble call. When she knocked on the door of this man's apartment, he shot and killed her through the door with an unregistered rifle, a rifle that the long-gun registry did not know was at this residence, a rifle that the man was prohibited from owning but that he nevertheless had. Obviously, trusting the long-gun registry can get people killed.

As I've shown in my statistics, there are exceptionally few cases of long guns being found in homicide cases. We have 4,800 homicides, with almost 1,500 firearms homicides in this time period, and 73 long guns registered. That's it. How can a long-gun registry have any impact on anything?

• (1150)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you.

That does confirm as well what an officer told us, and he is a front-line officer. I'm not a front-line officer, but there are a couple on this side—and I don't know whether there are any on the opposition side—and I wouldn't scoff at what front-line officers are saying. They say that if you do look at the information in the registry, it's as though something changes in your cautionary radar. This individual police officer said it would be a detriment. He won't even look at it, because he has to go in with an alertness and a frame of mind.

Thank you very much for that. That certainly is a tragedy.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): One minute.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I'm going to give it to Mr. Breitzkreuz. Thank you.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

I think one of the disservices that has been done in this whole discussion is that gun control has been equated with, or the terms have been interchangeable with, the gun registry and with Bill C-68, and nothing could be further from the truth.

Professor Mauser, I want to follow up what my colleague asked you about. I have staff sergeants in my constituency who have voluntarily come to me and told me that they have instructed their officers not to consult the registry. One of the statements you made is that the registry has reduced the effectiveness of police. I would like you to elaborate on that.

The second thing I'd like you to elaborate on is the fact that the U. S. rate for homicides has fallen more rapidly than the Canadian rate. I find that interesting.

Maybe you could comment on both of those.

Dr. Gary Mauser: Yes. Thank you very much for your question.

First of all, it is arguable that if gun control is effective in any sense, the only way it can be effective is by limiting access to firearms. That is a very different approach. In the United States, they also have gun control, but it is not designed to limit the access to firearms.

Homicide rates have fallen faster in the U.S. during the 1990s and the 2000s. They have a set of laws that encourages law-abiding citizens to own and carry firearms. That has now covered virtually all of the states in the United States. If that were a threat to peace, their homicide rate should have increased. It did not.

Our gun control has attempted to criminalize formerly law-abiding citizens—hunters, target shooters—and restrict access to firearms on the assumption, as I've said, that doing so will decrease homicides. It has not; it cannot be shown that it has.

Second, the basic notion of police is not that of a military occupying force. The basic notion of police is to cooperate with the policed. Sir Robert Peel, when he started the police, made a very clear statement that the police and the policed must cooperate for effectiveness and efficiency. The police, certainly in all Anglo-Saxon countries, argue that they must cooperate and encourage cooperation with the police.

Bill C-68, by criminalizing law-abiding citizens, has created a breach, a rupture, between citizen and police. This discourages contact with the police. It discourages cooperation and in that sense decreases the effectiveness.

A third point—and I get back to the point that was asked before about trusting the registry—is that data as presented by computers, and to all people, not just to police, has a worshipful quantity. In data processing, we call it “garbage in, gospel out”. You can put anything in. The weak part of the registry—and of licensing, for that matter—is that there has been very little verification and very little check on the data that goes in.

Your own earlier ATIs, Mr. Breitreuz, show just how many errors and omissions are in the registry and in the licensing system. Nevertheless, when a normal person looks at a computer-generated display, it looks as though it must be true—the government, the computer—doesn't it? It's not. That puts officers' lives at risk.

Mr. Garry Breitreuz: Thank you very much.

Mr. Illerbrun, here is a quick question.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Mr. Breitreuz, your time has expired.

We'll turn now to Mr. Scarpaleggia.

• (1155)

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

Mr. Mauser, you mentioned that the suicide rate has been going down.

Dr. Gary Mauser: Yes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Perhaps you're correct, but you're aware that the interparliamentary committee on compassionate and

palliative care released its report last week. I'm looking at the stats in the chapter on suicide prevention. The stats I'm seeing are that in 2007 suicides were 3,611; in 2006, 3,512; and in 2005, 3,743. It seems to be bouncing up and down. You're saying there's an actual downward trend in suicides?

Dr. Gary Mauser: In terms of actual number of suicides, the numbers, as you correctly state, are increasing. In 1991 there were 3,593 suicides in Canada. In 2008, in the most recent number, there were 3,700. As you also realize, the population in Canada has increased substantially since 1991, so the rates have gone down while the raw numbers have increased.

The key question, of course, is the methodology, but you have not asked me that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: You're saying that there's a downward trend in per capita suicides.

Dr. Gary Mauser: That's correct.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It's not bouncing around or anything.

Dr. Gary Mauser: The population has increased, as you know.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But the RCMP, in one of its case studies, has said that firearms were twice as likely to have been present in the homes of suicide victims than in the homes of suicide attempters and a control group. I guess you would dispute that study.

Dr. Gary Mauser: You notice they did not say that the firearms were involved in the homicide.... Many houses outside of urban areas have firearms in them. If the person committed suicide with a rope, a knife, gas, whatever, the fact that there is a firearm in the house is as instructive as if there is a washing machine.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So you're saying that there is no correlation between firearms in a home and suicide?

Dr. Gary Mauser: Suicide researchers around the world dispute the argument that firearms are linked to suicide, that firearms ownership or access is associated with suicide rates. As you know, we have a serious social problem in Canada with aboriginal communities. They prefer hanging to shooting, and gun control is least effective on native reserves.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Do you believe in minimum sentencing for crimes?

Dr. Gary Mauser: Do I believe in minimum sentencing...? I think Canada would be safer if we put serious and repeat offenders in jail for a longer period of time. That also gives them access to rehabilitative programs, so yes, I support—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Minimum sentences—

Dr. Gary Mauser: —keeping serious offenders in jail longer.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Serious offenders? Okay.

Again, I don't understand why you basically dismissed Mr. Blais' research. It was peer-reviewed by—

Dr. Gary Mauser: The journal that he—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Excuse me. I'd like to finish my question, Mr. Mauser.

Dr. Gary Mauser: Certainly. By all means.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It would have been reviewed by Ph. D.s, by statisticians. It seems pretty credible to me.

There could be disagreements. Obviously you disagree. Your analysis gives you different results.

We're in the realm of social science; we're not in the realm of space science. I think we have to admit that. So there will be disagreements. There will be margins of error.

Yet people still say quite categorically, as though it is the gospel truth.... You talk about "garbage in and gospel out", but there are people who, on social science issues, make categorical statements, such as that the gun registry, in all its years of existence, has never, ever—it's impossible, it's not within the realm of this universe—saved one life. Do you believe that statement?

Dr. Gary Mauser: Yes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): You have one minute remaining, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Illerbrun, you essentially don't think that a firearm acquisition certificate should ever be revoked. That's what you said.

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: No, that's not what I said. I said that it should be made for a lifetime, unless you do a criminal act, and then it should be revoked.

• (1200)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Fine. That is what you said.

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: The reason I'm telling you this is that farmers right now in my home province are being charged with criminal offences because their licences have expired.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I understand that.

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: That's wrong.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Right. That's what you said, absolutely, but if we find that someone becomes suicidal or mentally unstable, you don't think that their firearm acquisition certificate should be revoked? Only if they've committed a crime?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: No, if they're mentally unstable they shouldn't have gotten it in the first place. They shouldn't have that licence.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: No, but people go through different phases. Sometimes everything is fine, but then they can run into some mental issues. So you'd be in agreement with taking away the certificate if a psychiatrist or someone said they were suicidal?

Mr. Greg Illerbrun: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thanks to both of you. Unfortunately, the time for the session has expired.

My thanks to all the witnesses for their presentations today.

We will suspend briefly to allow the second panel to take their seats.

Thanks to all of you.

• (1200)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Could we have order, please?

Could I ask those who are doing media interviews to please take them outside? Thank you very much.

This will be the second panel of witnesses today. I believe the order is a bit other than I expected, so pardon me while I try to welcome the witnesses.

They are: Mr. Caillin Langmann, emergency medicine resident at McMaster University, appearing as a doctor; Mr. Duane Rutledge, appearing from the New Glasgow Police Service, but as an individual; Mr. Bruno Marchand, from the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide; and from the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Manon Monastesse and Eve-Marie Lacasse.

Welcome.

We will begin with Dr. Langmann. Because of the time, I'm going to have to shorten it to about six minutes each, and we'll also have to shorten the questions.

Please proceed.

Dr. Caillin Langmann (Emergency Medicine Resident, Fellowship Program of the Royal College of Physicians Canada, Division of Emergency Medicine, McMaster University, As an Individual): Thank you for letting me present my research regarding Canadian firearms legislation. I am an emergency physician in Hamilton. I treat suicide and violence on a daily basis.

During the next seven minutes, I will summarize research I have recently had accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* regarding Canadian firearms legislation's effects on homicide from 1974 to 2008. In particular, I will focus on the long-gun registry today. As well, I will go into brief detail and analysis of the association between the long-gun registry and suicide.

Several figures will be assessed during this brief that I present to the committee. I would ask that you examine the figures I am referring to during this discussion.

Briefly, three statistical methods were used in an attempt to find an association between firearms legislation in 1978, 1991, and 1995, and the long-gun registry. In particular, it is important to note that the long-gun registry was enacted in 1999 and was mandatory by 2003. The study is significant and is the only peer-reviewed study examining 1994 to 2008 and the only study using three methods to confirm results. The search for effects was conducted over several years. Surrounding legislation—as well as gradual effects—was examined, as some legislation, such as that for the PAL, are implemented over years.

To summarize the results, no statistically significant beneficial associations between firearms legislation and homicide by firearms, by the subcategory long guns, and spousal homicide, as well as the criminal charge of "discharge of a firearm with intent", were found.

In the next five slides, I will attempt to demonstrate some of the results pertaining specifically to the long-gun registry in graphical format, as I hope this will be easier to understand and interpret.

Figure 1 is a graphical depiction of a homicide regression analysis. In this example, the homicide rate prior to the intervention is marked B_1 . At the time of the intervention, B_2 , there is a sudden impact, shifting down the homicide rate. The trend of the decline of homicide after the intervention, B_3 , continues post-intervention over time. Statistical analysis is done to determine if these effects at B_2 and B_3 are significant and not due to yearly variation. Successful legislation would be expected to have an effect depicted in this picture.

Figure 2 shows the homicide firearms rate, minus the effects of contributing variables such as aging population, on the bottom of the graph. As can be seen visually, right along the bottom of the graph, there is no sudden shift or decline such as might be expected from effects explained by legislation associated with firearms. For example, as the median age of the population increases by one year, the homicide rate drops by 8%.

Figure 3 demonstrates a two-dimensional depiction of multiple regression of factors associated with firearms homicide, such as socio-economic factors as well as the long-gun registry. Post-long-gun registry in 1999, there is no significant immediate decrease or a decrease in time after the long-gun registry. In fact, as you can see, the effect increases, and homicide goes up.

Figure 4 shows the same thing for homicide by long gun. Prior to the long-gun registry, you have a decrease in homicide. There is no statistically significant impact effect after the registry is implemented; there is no decreasing trend.

Figure 5 depicts the same thing for spousal homicide. Once again, this is multivariate analysis with multiple socio-economic factors included. Once again, there is no significant decrease in 1999, and afterwards, the trend effect increases.

A similar analysis is done on the suicide rate post-1991 to account for any potential background effects of legislation introduced in the early 1990s.

Figure 6 depicts total suicide. In 1999 there is no significant statistical immediate impact effect or impact effect over time. These trend lines are not significant.

Figure 7 demonstrates suicide by firearm. There is no significant impact effect in 1999, when the long-gun registry is implemented, and afterwards there is no decreasing trend; the trend lines are the same. A similar analysis was done by Gagne et al.

I'd like to close. In my humble opinion, the money that has been spent on the long-gun registry is unfortunately wasted; however, we can prevent further waste by taking the money we currently spend on the long-gun registry and spending it on things shown in the scientific literature to be beneficial at saving more than just one life. Those things are women's shelters; police training in spousal abuse; and psychiatric care, which is sorely lacking in this country. We are not winning the battle against suicide.

●(1210)

I have a quote from an emergency department chief, who said: "In a town where I have over 15,000 registered firearms—and probably as many unregistered—and 22 trains travelling through every 24 hours, guess which one gets used for suicide more often? What we need are more resources to fund mental health and treatment rather than registering inanimate objects in our rural community. Psychiatrists and outreach workers offer tangible results that are saving Canadian lives, something no gun registry on earth can provide". That was from Dr. Ramirez, chief of the Stevenson Memorial Hospital.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Dr. Langmann.

Now we'll turn to Mr. Rutledge. Again, I would ask you to try to keep your remarks to six minutes so we have time for questions.

Sergeant Duane Rutledge (Sergeant, K-9 Unit, New Glasgow Police Service, As an Individual): I will.

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Duane Rutledge. I am a police officer, a sergeant with the New Glasgow Police Service in Nova Scotia. I have 30-plus years of experience in law enforcement, and I continue today to be a front-line officer. I have worked in general duty, in drug investigations, and in general investigation sections and major crime. I'm on the emergency response team. At present, I'm a police service dog handler. To most people, that's a K-9 unit.

I've held and used firearms since I was 8 years of age and now the only time I use them is at work. I'd like to speak briefly on the fact of the gun registry and how it has failed to protect both the public and the police from the illegal use of firearms in this country.

Early on when it was proposed, I think everybody who owned a gun in this country knew that registering a weapon would not make it safe. People in this country continue to be the problem, not the weapon of choice, whether it be a firearm, an edge weapon, an explosive, or whatever device they tend to use when they sink to the depths of depravity to take the life of another human being.

I think we've wasted a lot of money, which everyone seems to understand. Even people who were in favour of it are horrified at the amount of money that has been spent to gain so little. I think the lack of buy-in by gun owners in this country, who felt they were being lied to when they were told that the registry would make things safe, pushed them to the outside, and they began to hide guns in this country.

As a front-line police officer, I believe there are more hidden guns today than there were when this legislation was introduced. This, therefore, makes it more dangerous for me now, because I'm guessing every time I go to a house if I rely on the registry to give me the facts. I don't believe it can do that, simply because there are so many people who haven't registered guns.

I took the time to speak to a number of different people before I came here. I spoke to one judge and a prosecutor. I speak to the general public in my community. I've lived my entire life in the place where I work. I've served my community for 30-plus years and protected them. I wanted their opinions on how they felt about the gun registry.

I sat down and spoke to the lady who runs our transition house, Tearmann House, which does a great job for battered spouses in our community. I spoke with her and told her I was coming here to testify to the fact that I did not believe in the gun registry.

I've taken this very seriously. I have opinions from everyone, even from some of the people I've arrested. I sat down and talked to them and asked them their opinion of the registry and what effect it has. It's more of a chuckle from them. When the government tells people what it's going to do and what the end result will be, the average person believes, well, it hasn't happened....

Some people registered all their weapons. Some people registered a few of their weapons. Therein lies the problem now. When you check a registry that has only some of the guns registered, as in the case of the female officer who was murdered in Quebec.... She checked the registry and found that a gentleman had been prohibited from possessing firearms, but he was given the right to have a firearm to dispatch animals that he was trapping, which left a huge gap in the system. She paid for it with her life.

And then, some people haven't registered any guns. I was thinking about this on the way up. If I had a better than fifty-fifty chance when I flew up here yesterday of making it on the airplane, I wouldn't be here today, and unfortunately, when our officers are going on calls now, that's what they're faced with.

I feel bad for the big city forces who do not really know the population they police. I've lived my whole life in my community, so I do have hands-on knowledge, and I know the people we police. I realize I'm in the east; the west and the north of this country are hunting cultures and we expect to see firearms. On the way to the airport yesterday, we passed numerous trucks on the secondary roads, and probably every second truck had a high-powered rifle on the front seat.

We do not panic when we hear about guns, as people think we do. It's an everyday event that people do have weapons. Also, 90% of the people in this country are good people and will not do anything wrong. As for the criminals, we will always have them. As well, when good people have mental health issues and they slip offside and commit an act, we will never be able to control that either. I think we've targeted the wrong people.

•(1215)

I am 100% in favour of licensing, as most of my people are. To keep guns away from people who shouldn't have them is what we should be looking at, because people will use other weapons.

In 1991, I was looking at some of the graphs after Bill C-17, I think it was, came into effect, on actual safe storage, handling, education, and training for people who have firearms, and we've seen some drastic changes in gun crime. For most people, when a policeman shows up at the door and there's something going on, between 30 and 45 seconds is the time it takes for people to vent and

for there to be a de-escalation. I can safely say that having guns locked up, with trigger locks on them, and ammunition separated, has had more impact on this country's safety for firearms than this new legislation of registering firearms has; I don't see how that brings any safety to anyone and, unfortunately, I am guessing as much today as I did 30 years ago when I started.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much, Mr. Rutledge.

[*Translation*]

We will now go to our next witness, Mr. Marchand.

Mr. Bruno Marchand (Director General, Association québécoise de prévention du suicide): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In addition to being the Director General of the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide, I am also a member of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention.

Suicide is a major public-health problem, a significant one that is recognized by everyone, that takes the lives of 10 Canadians daily. Tomorrow there will be another 10 people who will die and again the day after tomorrow. It takes the lives of three Quebecers every day. Contrary to what was said earlier, in Quebec the suicide rate has not been declining since the 1960s or 1970s. The suicide rate rose until 1999. The decline began that year and continued up to 2008.

We're opposed to C-19 and profoundly worried about its consequences. Suicide is a complex problem, which will not be controlled solely by the control of firearms. Still, it is one of the ways that may have an effect on in the lives of our fellow citizens.

I wish to refer to the World Health Organization, which on its Web site answers the question "How can suicide be prevented?" as follows:

Not all suicides can be prevented, but a majority can. There are a number of measures that can be taken at community and national levels to reduce the risk, including:

reducing access to the means of suicide (e.g. [...] guns [...]);

I remind you that this is the first measure mentioned. Why is that? Because, as rational people who enjoy sound mental health, we might think that the means is only a means and that, if a firearm is not available, well there is a rope or drugs. For someone who is vulnerable, someone who enters a process of cognitive constriction and whose condition deteriorates and who doesn't find ways of ending their suffering in their life other than this poor option, the means is not just a means. It's not as though they were choosing a car, a means of transportation to get from one place to another; it's much more than that. If we take away this means from them, there's a good chance of keeping them alive and with us.

By means of a process both rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious, related to their values, culture, themselves, a person chooses a means. If they have chosen firearms and if there is less access to firearms, a definite advantage is created. This is why we're convinced that we've prevented suicides by putting up anti-suicide barriers on the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal. When the means was no longer available, the person who had selected this as their means of committing suicide didn't seek another one, even though there are other bridges around Montreal Island.

The same is true in Toronto regarding the subway and anti-suicide barriers. It was the same in the Northern European countries, when the quantities of acetaminophen and ibuprofen available over the counter were reduced. Yes, someone could go back to the drugstore 50 times. But this had a direct effect on the number of suicides because barriers were put up for the person who was vulnerable and wanted to put a permanent end to some temporary problems.

The firearms registry and all its components have prevented 250 suicides a year. Mr. Blais came to this figure and it's also what we believe since we see that the trend has declined. This cannot be compared with the relative importance of other means used. Obviously, the less firearms are used in suicides, even though the number remains more or less constant, the more the relative importance given to hanging increases as a percentage.

The registry affords more time for a vulnerable person. It means we can intervene. It allows the authorities to take the action required by a situation, and it also enables us to link the firearm to its owner. The registry ensures an accountability and traceability that most certainly allows us to let people who have a weapon and are completely entitled to have one know that they must act appropriately by protecting the people around them.

The registry enables us to take action that would not be possible with other means, for example, taking firearms away from people who are temporarily going through difficult times in their lives and who, if they had a weapon, might commit an irreparable act.

We strongly believe that the registry has had some positive effects. We're convinced of that. I wish to quote a Public Security Canada document from the government of the day in 2006 when it wanted to make some changes to the registry:

The amendments made to the bill tabled today will force current owners to check, by contacting the Chief Firearms Officer, that potential buyers of firearms and any other future owner of a non-restricted firearm have a valid firearms licence. This measure will help to ensure that weapons do not end up in the hands of individuals who should not have access to them, [...]

• (1220)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Mr. Marchand, can you speak more slowly, please, for the interpreters?

Mr. Bruno Marchand: Thank you.

At the time, we were already talking about this measure as a way of not putting in the hands of people who shouldn't have access to firearms, tools that could put an end to their lives.

In conclusion, on October 4, you all voted — Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals — in favour of a national suicide prevention strategy. Today or tomorrow, if this bill is adopted, you will be going

against this measure, which you have all approved, because you believe in suicide prevention.

I don't know how, a year or two from now, you're going to look in the eye a father who has lost his daughter or son by firearm because of the great availability of firearms, because it was easier to buy a firearm and less trouble than borrowing a book from the library. I don't know what you're going to say to that person, but you won't be able to say you didn't know. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you, Mr. Marchand.

We go now to the final witness today, Ms. Monastesse or Ms. Lacasse.

Ms. Eve-Marie Lacasse (Main Coordinator, Fédération des femmes du Québec): Good morning. Thank you for welcoming us here today. We are grateful to the members of the Opposition who have lined up on the side of public safety. We note that this is not what the government has elected to do.

One of the FFO's objectives is to combat all forms of violence and to stand up for the right to live in an atmosphere free from violence, especially for women, and the right to life and safety. We are of the opinion that this bill is inconsistent with these fundamental rights. Violence, and particularly firearm violence, still affects the lives of too many women. In Quebec, from 1997 to 2006, firearms were the method used in nearly two thirds of spousal and familial homicides, while in Canada they were used in nearly a quarter of spousal homicides between 2000 and 2009.

We observe, however, that firearms control works because, despite these high percentages, overall, the number of homicides by shotgun or rifle has fallen by 41% since 1991, while the number of non-firearm homicides fell by only 6%. The Firearms Act has therefore brought about significant progress by reducing the number of firearm assaults in spousal or family violence contexts.

Thus the number of murdered women killed by gunshot fell by nearly 50%, from 43 in 1995 to 22 in 2008. The rate of spousal murders committed with a rifle or shotgun has fallen by 70%. Although obviously there are multiple factors explaining that decline, such as more access to resources for women who are victims of violence, greater public awareness and improvement in women's socioeconomic situation so that they are able to leave a violent relationship faster, nonetheless this substantial decline is also, in part, a result of changes in gun control policies.

In terms of preventing violence against women, without the information in the long-gun registry, which the authorities can use to determine who has how many and what kind of non-restricted weapons, in real time — according to a very recent study by the RCMP, the Canadian police consult the registry an average of 17,000 times a day — it will be difficult for police to enforce prohibition orders imposed by the courts.

Although the government claims that Bill C-19 is an uncomplicated bill that simply eliminates the registration procedure, that is clearly not the case. The changes proposed, by clause 23, among others, will have serious consequences for public safety. This clause makes it optional for gun dealers to verify firearms licences when a gun is purchased or transferred. The only way to tell that a licence is not valid, the individual wanting to purchase a gun has a prohibition order against them, or the licence presented is forged is to check with the Firearms Officer. If the check is not done, a dangerous individual could easily purchase a non-restricted firearm, or more. Does the fact that in 2009 there were 254,036 firearms prohibition orders in force not highlight the need to preserve preventive measures like these, including the need to verify that licences are valid? Verifications, when a gun is purchased, should be of a higher degree than those carried out when a book is bought or borrowed from the library. I am using the example of the gentleman seated beside me. I'd also like to recall that the verification of licences became mandatory in 1998 to make up for the deficiencies of former measures, following the murder of a woman by her spouse.

In closing, we firmly believe that the safety of all Canadians should prevail over what some people regard as bureaucratic hassle, hassle that saves lives. In our opinion, the question should not even be asked.

• (1225)

Ms. Manon Monastesse (Managing Director, Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec, Fédération des femmes du Québec): My name is Manon Monastesse, of the Fédération de ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec. Last year, 9,000 women and children who were victims of violence took shelter in our 37 houses. Thank you for welcoming us here, especially on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, on November 25.

I would like to add this to what my colleague has just said. Hunting rifles and shotguns are also the weapons used most often to threaten women and children. Threats made with firearms are not counted in the statistics, but the damage they do is very real. How many women in shelters have told us that the simple fact of there being a hunting rifle beside the door was a constant threat to their safety! It is thanks to the fact that the police have seized such firearms that women have had access to our service and that they have been able to go to a shelter to ensure their complete safety and their physical integrity.

While Canada is often cited on the international scene as a leader in the area of firearms control, the repeated efforts in recent years to dismantle firearms control indicates a marked change in attitude. Freedom from fear is a fundamental human right, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the prevention of human rights violations with small arms and light weapons and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women have both pointed out that countries that did not adequately regulate firearms were not in compliance with their obligations under international law.

We firmly believe that the safety of women in Canada and Quebec must take precedence over what some people consider to be "bureaucratic hassle," which we feel are just basic formalities that are

an integral part of a functioning democracy. A little hassle to save lives? It is not a question that should even be asked.

Since 1995, Quebec has been the only province with a spousal violence intervention policy. It is called *Prévenir, dépister, contrer la violence conjugale*. It required the police to:

Ensure the safety and protection of victims and their families: [...]

If possible, by seizing firearms at the time of arrest, and otherwise, by ensuring that interim release provisions provide for them to be delivered forthwith to a peace officer;

This is why we expressly ask that you respect the position taken on September 22...

• (1230)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Ms. Monastesse, can you conclude, please?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Yes, I'm concluding.

The decision was made in the House of Commons on September 22, 2010, namely that the firearms registry be preserved in its entirety.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you.

[*English*]

If we're all very cooperative, we may get through a first round of questions here. We'll go for about six and a half minutes.

Ms. Hoepfner, please.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Aspin.

Dr. Langmann, I want to begin by thanking you very much for your research. We have some questions on that. I'm going to let my colleagues ask you some questions, because there seems to be a real contradiction between the evidence you presented to us—which was right before our eyes—and the evidence given in an oral presentation. I'm going to let some of my colleagues ask about that.

Mr. Marchand, I couldn't agree with you more that we need to reduce any kind of access, any kind of method... I think you said we need to make firearms less accessible to individuals who are at risk of suicide, at risk of committing any violent act against themselves or any individual—their spouse, their children, or a stranger.

I can tell you personally, as I've fought to end the long-gun registry and have sometimes received criticism for it, that I believe very strongly that we need to strengthen the licensing process. I think we need to make sure that an individual actually looks someone in the eye and is interviewed personally—that's my personal belief—before they are allowed to have a firearm. So I agree with you and I follow your logic on that.

Where we disagree, and where I still cannot find any evidence, is that once we say to an individual that they can legally own a firearm, that we believe they're safe, that they're not going to hurt their wife or themselves, so they can own a firearm, there is no connection to counting that individual's firearm or firearms in a registry—for a couple of reasons. First of all, because it won't stop them from doing an act that is, many times, spontaneous—sometimes it's premeditated, as in a suicide or a domestic violent act—and as well, most of these people are only registering half their firearms.

Although there could be a slight argument—and I'll go to Sergeant Rutledge when I'm finished with this statement to hear from a front-line officer—our government's belief is that with suicide prevention, the best thing we can do is help people with mental illnesses and the mental issues they're struggling with, and then deal with the methods they're using. I think that includes doctors who give prescription drugs to people who will use those prescription drugs to kill themselves. It's a huge picture and I think we need to really talk seriously about how we can help people and prevent suicide.

Sergeant Rutledge, I want to ask you two questions, or you can describe two situations. First of all, let's suppose you were going to enforce a prohibition order. Someone has a licence to own a firearm, that licence is revoked, and you have to enforce that. Do you look at the registry to see if they have any guns registered, collect two firearms, and know that you're done? How do you actually enforce that licence prohibition?

Sgt Duane Rutledge: You have to attend the residence and search it. You're only going to acquire what is there. My experience is that these people take their weapons and share them with their friends and family. They have other people who will hold the weapons for them. That's part of the issue with the whole registry. An individual registers the guns, but there's no way to track where that person keeps his weapons. Candice Hoepfner has guns: where are they? We have no idea where your guns are. To enforce these things is really tough. It's up to the individual to be honest and say, “Yes, here are all my guns”.

As I said, most people will register a few and hide the rest. With anybody who has family heirlooms, that's what we're finding. They may register the ones they use to go hunting, but people are hiding their guns. Let's be honest about it: they have an inherent distrust of government and they believe their guns will be seized. I'm not a big gun guy, but because you like to shoot, it's not for me to say that you can't do it. I don't understand why people golf, but I don't knock them for doing it.

• (1235)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Sergeant Rutledge, what about a domestic call? if you're called to a domestic situation, it's the same thing. Obviously you've told us that you don't depend on the registry, so—

Sgt Duane Rutledge: No—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: —can you just explain that process? If someone calls you and says they're concerned, that they're being threatened, how do you make that a safe situation in terms of any kind of weapon?

Sgt Duane Rutledge: Any time we receive a call about domestic violence, whether it's a threat of violence or violence, we attend. In

Nova Scotia there's a provincial policy: it's pro-investigation, pro-charge, and pro-arrest. We take it very seriously.

You show up there and do a search of the residence in exigent circumstances. You search the residence for firearms. Most times, if you can get the victim away from the spouse or boyfriend, the first person you're going to ask who has the current knowledge of what's in that house...they'll be honest most times, and you can work with them. That's how we go about it.

I'll go back to the female police officer who was shot in Quebec. She had full belief that the person was prohibited from having firearms and she let her guard down. Complacency is what gets police officers killed. I'd rather have no hope than false hope.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much.

Mr. Aspin, go ahead.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Dr. Langmann, I was particularly impressed by your analysis of the association between the long-gun registry and suicide by firearm. My background is in mathematics and I like to rely on empirical evidence.

I'm going to read you testimony from the Canadian Labour Congress:

For law enforcement, firefighters, emergency personnel, social workers, information about potential risks is crucial in ensuring their safety on the job. Like any worker, they have a right to a safe workplace. By denying them access to information about the possibility of guns in a home, this legislation puts their safety at risk.

Could you give us your comments on this and the impact on workplace safety?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Give a brief response, Dr. Langmann.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: As a physician, I cannot access the long-gun registry. I also cannot disclose any confidential information between me and a patient. If a patient is just contemplating suicide, I cannot refer him to the police and have them go to his house.

I could be held accountable and my licence could be at stake with the College of Physicians and Surgeons if I disclosed any private confidential information. The best I can do—and have done—is ask them to get their friends to take their guns away. But I have also had other patients die from hanging after their firearms were taken away.

We need more—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Dr. Langmann, unfortunately the time has expired.

I'll turn to Madam Boivin.

[Translation]

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

I wish to thank the various witnesses.

I also wish to point out to everyone that this is the last group of witnesses in this process, which I liken to a high-speed train. We have had five short sessions. In fact, four, because the next session will be for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. This bill is very divisive and gives rise to as many arguments from all sides. To me, this is particularly absurd and absolutely abominable.

As one of the representatives of the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the Fédération des ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec said, we're at the dawn of a very dark period. This is the time of year when we recall sad events. We recall the extent to which violence against women and girls is still very much present in our society. I confess that this upsets me deeply.

I've just been to a press conference given by the YWCA, which was launching its Rose Campaign, aimed at ending violence against women. You're going to see tons of politicians wearing beautiful badges and white ribbons.

What concrete response can we give to women who are asking that the registry be kept, without it hurting anyone? In any case, no one has proved to me, in four sessions, that someone has died because of the registry. Whereas, conversely, we can have our suspicions but we can't be sure. I always take what looks like the surest option over the least sure.

As you put it earlier, we're weighing bureaucratic hassle against the saving of lives. It seems to me — you'll forgive my English — it's a no-brainer.

So you're going to see politicians wearing ribbons in their buttonholes. And what are we doing? We're getting rid of the registry. That's what we're telling the women of Canada, the women of Quebec, the victims' associations. We use them, though, to support other bills, like Bill. C-10. This step is absolutely unbelievable in its inconsistency.

There also seems to be a lack of understanding. They're trying to divide people who tell us it's not perfect. I agree with you. The registry is not perfect. First, you, the Conservatives, imposed a moratorium. Of course it's not up-to-date. It's not up-to-date because you imposed a moratorium five years ago. For five years, no data have been gathered. So it's pretty obvious that it's not up-to-date.

If an argument can't be used in law, we say that no one can plead his own turpitude. But this is what they are doing. They give us the argument that the registry isn't up-to-date. But this is something that can be corrected and improved. If there are mistakes because a postal code isn't right, that can be fixed.

Several of our police officers have come here to tell us repeatedly that it's dangerous to rely on the registry. Please, I hope there's not a police officer who's thick enough to consult a registry that hasn't been brought up-to-date for five years, and then go to someone's home thinking that there's only one firearm there. Come on! I don't

think anyone would do something like that. I imagine that our police officers are a lot more professional than that.

The registry is a tool. If the registry tells us there are three firearms, it's better than nothing at all.

Yet it still looks to me as though bureaucratic hassle is being weighed against saving lives. I can't get over it. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police came here to tell us that it's a tool. Nobody said it was the only tool, but it's a tool.

Mr. Marchand, of the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide, told us and the statistics demonstrate it. No one can contradict it. No one can be 100% sure, on either one side or the other. But shouldn't we be in favour of life, rather than just falling in with the other side? That's the crux of the debate, to my mind. Unfortunately, our Conservative friends have used the debate to try and be divisive. I'm not against hunters. I eat meat and I like it, darn it!

If a hunter registers his firearm and we don't turn him into a criminal, that should solve the problem, it seems to me. If I sort out the things that aren't working in the registry, it seems to me that that will solve the problem.

Some survivors from the École polytechnique were here earlier. The people from the Fédération des femmes du Québec tell us that the registry is important, it helps and the statistics demonstrate it — it has brought down the rate.

● (1240)

Perhaps it is not entirely due to the registry. However, personally speaking, if it were, I would not want to have that on my conscience. It is as simple as that. I am sorry but perhaps it is not something that bothers you but it does me. I should have a whole host of questions to put to you but I am starting to get a little tired of this being spun as an attempt to criminalize hunters. This is patently false.

We are endeavouring to get a proper handle on the issue. Section 11 is obviously a problem area. You have raised the issue yourself. There have been attempts to confuse the issue of firearms licenses with that of the purchase of a registered firearm. Come on! Imagine that I am a hunter with a license who wants to give up hunting. I need to make some money. So, I decide to sell my firearm to Mr. Rutledge on eBay without asking him to produce any documentation. How can you prove that I checked whether he could lawfully acquire the firearm once it is no longer registered? Quite simply, you cannot.

This legislation has shortcomings and the Government does not even realize. We are going to relive what we went through with C-10 all over again. My colleagues and I will all work like dogs to table sensible amendments based on the solutions proposed by Quebec, which of course, wishes to recover the information held in the registry. But no, the Government is going to throw it all out! For goodness sake! We should leave the registry alone. It saves lives! We will table amendments and they will raise their hands like little robots to defeat them all. What a shame.

● (1245)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Madam Boivin.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Thank you. That was the last thing I will say before we move on to clause-by-clause consideration.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): *Merci.*

We'll turn to the other side. I assume that Mr. Breitreuz is no longer substituting for Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I listened quite intently to Ms. Boivin's speech, and although I respect her, I too look for a path towards truth and valid evidence as opposed to hyperbole and half-truths. In that vein, I think I feel the need, Mr. Chair, to correct the record.

Ms. Boivin said that we have heard no evidence of the gun registry contributing to the loss of life. Also, she did preface her comments by saying that she had another meeting this morning, so that's fine. So I think she missed the testimony of Professor Mauser, who indicated very clearly that in 2005 in Laval, in her own province, there was a police officer who relied on the evidence—

A voice: That's the problem—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I have the chair, if you don't mind—

A voice: The floor—

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I'm sorry—I have the floor.

A voice: That's true.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: She relied on the long-gun registry, to her own peril. She did a registry search prior to attending a potential crime scene. The registry indicated that there were no registered weapons at that domicile. She attended and was shot by the occupant, by an unregistered firearm, so there has been at least some evidence that the long-gun registry is relied upon by law enforcement officers to their own peril.

In fact, we haven't heard any evidence in the other direction. In fact, one of the witnesses in the first panel—and a good witness, quite frankly—admitted that you can't prove that the long-gun registry has saved any lives because you cannot prove things that haven't occurred when there are no headlines. I accept the reason why she said that you cannot prove the long-gun registry has saved lives, but nonetheless she admitted that there's no evidence the long-gun registry has saved lives.

But I will ask some questions.

[Translation]

Mister Marchand, if you do not mind, I will ask you my question in English.

[English]

You indicated that in your profession, suicide prevention, which I respect, and I think it's a challenging job you have.... But if I heard

you correctly, you said you're very concerned that the suicide rate in fact is not going down in Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Bruno Marchand: No. In actual fact it has declined since 1999.

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Right: so that sort of proves Dr. Langmann's research. The long-gun registry became law in 1995 and there was a delay with respect to implementation, but it has been the law since approximately 2000 that all long arms be registered, and it hasn't done anything to diminish the incidence of suicide in your province. You're confirming that.

[Translation]

Mr. Bruno Marchand: Absolutely not. We are saying that although the register came into force in 1995, it took a few years for all its components to be fully implemented. Quebec's suicide rate began falling in 1999. Between 1999 and 2009, 500 lives were saved. We fail to understand how you can contend that the registry has had no impact.

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I'm confused. Maybe it's an issue of translation. Did you not say in your opening comments that suicide rates in Quebec are not going down?

[Translation]

Mr. Bruno Marchand: No. The suicide rate is going down in Quebec. The actual number and the rate have been dropping since 1999.

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay. Then I misunderstood you. I apologize.

But you also said something that I know is factually incorrect, and again it might be an issue of translation. You said that assuming Bill C-19 becomes law, it will be no more difficult to buy a firearm than it will be to buy a book at the *bibliothèque*. That, sir, is not correct, because you know, or you should know—and if you don't know, I'm going to tell you—that nothing in Bill C-19 affects the licensing provisions. An individual would still require a firearms acquisition certificate before he or she purchases either a firearm or ammunition for that firearm.

I need you to reconsider that statement that it is going to be no more difficult to purchase a firearm than it is to purchase a book at the *bibliothèque*.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mr. Bruno Marchand: I would refer you to Monday's *Courrier Parlementaire*, which reports the exact opposite to what you have just said. These are not my words. It was in the *Courrier Parlementaire*.

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: If you read the bill.... Let me give you a little hint here: not everything the media says is true. If you have read the bill, and the bill is also on public record...there is nothing in Bill C-19 that affects the licensing provisions of firearm acquisition and purchase. It's only the registration.

Ms. Lacasse, you said the same thing. I'm curious, because you're both being put here as witnesses against Bill C-19. Is it really your understanding that, if Bill C-19 passes, purchasing a firearm will be no more difficult than to

[Translation]

to borrow a book from the library?

Ms. Eve-Marie Lacasse: I would refer you to your own Bill. The Bill will not make it more difficult to obtain a license. However, it will complicate license checks on someone purchasing a firearm. Checks by firearms dealers will not longer be compulsory but optional. Dealers will be able sell guns on the good faith of the customer alone. Those purchasing firearms will no longer be required to produce their license either to prove it is still valid or that they do indeed have one. Consequently, your Bill will be a significant incentive for those, who either should probably not have a firearm or who have been banned by the courts from possessing one, to purchase and trade firearms.

[English]

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Your interpretation of Bill C-19 differs from mine and certainly from that of those who have drafted it and others who have appeared before that committee, but I'll leave that there.

Dr. Langmann—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Please be brief, Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: How much time do I have?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Very little.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay. That's fine.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your attendance here today.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you very much.

We'll turn to Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Langmann, correct me if I'm wrong, but according to the *National Post* your study showed that of criminal record checks, 28-day waiting periods, and the long-gun registry, none have done anything to stem Canadian firearm homicide rates. In other words, three pieces of legislation, including the 1977 bill that imposed the requirement for criminal record checks, the 1991 bill that imposed mandatory safety training, and the 28-day waiting period, had no effect. Is that correct, according to your research?

Dr. Caillin Langmann: You can examine the figure yourself, right?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But that's what your conclusion is.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: There is no statistical association—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's fine.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: —between any of this legislation and either an immediate impact or a trend effect post-legislation in the reduction of firearms homicide.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: It is mostly due to socio-economic factors such as age, poverty....all right?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay. So you're against the registry based on the evidence from your study.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: I'm against the registry for two reasons.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'm just asking you. That is one of the reasons.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: Well, I'm not only against the registry because of the study. I'm also against it because you are taking money in a time right now when we have—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's a whole other issue.

Dr. Caillin Langmann: You should be spending it on psychiatry, sir.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Absolutely. By the way, please note it was the Liberal Party that presented—

Dr. Caillin Langmann: Well, you don't have to deal with these patients every day. I do.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: —our national suicide strategy, so we're all in favour of prevention and we're in favour of strategies.

So that means you're against the 1977 bill as well because, according to your study, that had no impact either. You're against criminal record checks and 28-day waiting periods, based on your analysis. Is that correct?

Dr. Caillin Langmann: We have to look at the science. The science doesn't show any statistical benefit. The National Academy of Sciences has also conducted an analysis on this and they've come to the same conclusion. Dr. Mauser has also conducted a study on this and he's come to the same conclusion.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: And no doubt—

Dr. Caillin Langmann: My personal opinion doesn't matter.

• (1255)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: No doubt the government relies on studies like yours and studies like Dr. Mauser's, which show that neither the registry nor the criminal checks or firearms acquisition certificates have any impact on anything. But they're cherry-picking their evidence, and they're saying, for political reasons, “let's get rid of the registry, and we won't get rid of the firearms acquisition certificate because that goes a little too far for public opinion right now”, but there are people in this room working towards that.

Mr. Rutledge, I'd like to quote from a study: A decision to kill is easier and safer to implement with a gun than with other commonly available weapons. There is less danger of effective victim resistance during the attack and the killing can be accomplished more quickly and impersonally with less sustained effort than is usually required with a knife or blunt object.

Do you agree or disagree with this?

Sgt Duane Rutledge: Oh, I agree with you.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

Because what a lot of people who have come here opposing the registry have said.... The standard line we hear over and over again—and obviously you don't buy it, and I congratulate you for not buying it—is that it's not guns that kill people, it's people who kill people. Now obviously it's a truism: people kill people because there's somebody behind the gun. But it's easier with a gun than with another object. I think that's—

Sgt Duane Rutledge: Well, I've never been to that point, so....

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: No, but—

Sgt Duane Rutledge: Physically, it's a weapon that could be used...it's a distance weapon, whereas a knife is very up close and personal.

[*Translation*]

M. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mister Marchand, you have many years experience in this area. Although I realize that you probably do not have them to hand today, I am sure you must have examples of specific cases where you consider it highly likely that a suicide was prevented either because the person did not have access to a firearm or because it had been removed from their possession shortly before they attempted to kill themselves.

Would this be a fair assessment?

Mr. Bruno Marchand: You are quite right. Just such an case occurred in Montreal. A father had told his daughter he intended to commit suicide. She called the police and they were able to check whether any firearms were in his possession. The police were then able to go to the man's cottage and prevent him from shooting himself with the guns he owned. The registry gave a fuller picture of the situation and therefore enabled the appropriate steps to be taken.

M. Francis Scarpaleggia: That is just one isolated case but a real one nevertheless.

Mr. Bruno Marchand: Yes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Ms. Monastesse, you said that people were more inclined to use your services because the gun kept next to the door had been removed. I suppose the registry made this possible.

Am I quoting you correctly?

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Indeed.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Advocates of the abolition of the Long-gun Registry contend that your position is purely based on emotion. The opinions of either emergency-room doctors working to prevent suicide or of those running womens' shelters are not science based and, therefore, worthless. You realize that this is how you are viewed. I wonder whether you could comment on that.

Ms. Manon Monastesse: Firstly, I find this type of statement somewhat inappropriate because it challenges the word of those most intimately affected, i.e, the victims themselves. We see tangible examples of how the registry saves lives everyday. Indeed, women come to our facilities as a preventive measure. They are only able to do that because firearms have been seized.

Secondly, as I said earlier, Quebec is the only province that has developed a policy on domestic violence. One of the guiding principles is to ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence. Three action plans have been implemented. They contain specific measures for law enforcement and the family law system. The Government built these provisions, which require the police to confiscate firearms, into the Manual of Police Practices. Emotion is no longer a factor. It is now official Government policy.

The evidence is tangible. The various associations of police chiefs are advocating the retention of the long-gun registry. The Quebec government is even prepared to recover the data. Consequently, there is now commitment at the political and practical level. Emotion does not come into it.

● (1300)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Randall Garrison): Thank you.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, our time has expired.

Thank you to all the witnesses who have appeared today.

Thank you to the members for their cooperation in my first session in the chair.

The meeting is adjourned.

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