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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, April 28, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Daryl Kramp**



## Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

•(0845)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)):** Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to meeting number 65 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We are discussing Bill C-42, an act to amend the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code and to make a related amendment and a consequential amendment to other acts. We have two hours of witness testimony and Q and A.

For the first hour, we have with us from the Coalition for Gun Control, Wendy Cukier, president. We are also expecting from the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Tony Rodgers, executive director. We also have with us by way of teleconference from Swift Current, Saskatchewan, from the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, Greg Illerbrun, firearms chairman.

I would just like to see that we have a connection with Mr. Illerbrun and then we will proceed.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune):** He's on teleconference, so it will be voice only.

**The Chair:** Mr. Illerbrun is on teleconference, so it will be voice only. We have no visual with Mr. Illerbrun, but we do have voice. That is what the chair has been advised, given the facilities that were available at that point.

We will start as usual with opening statements. To all of our witnesses, you have up to 10 minutes to make a statement. The chair would respectfully request that if it's possible to reduce it a little bit. That certainly gives the committee an opportunity for the more personal dialogue that I know everyone looks forward to.

We will start off with an opening statement from Ms. Wendy Cukier.

**Ms. Wendy Cukier (President, Coalition for Gun Control):** Thanks very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee on behalf of the Coalition for Gun Control, which is an alliance of approximately 300 organizations from across the country that have been working on this issue now for about 25 years.

I apologize, as a professor I'm used to talking in three-hour blocks, so I will need help with my time, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to start by reminding the committee members, some of whom did not live through the development of the Firearms Act, of the purposes of the firearms legislation and the key elements. The intent of firearms regulation is to reduce the risk that firearms will be

misused, while allowing the legitimate purposes of law-abiding gun owners.

The key elements of the legislation, and in fact any regulatory system in most parts of the world, are aimed at reducing the chances that firearms will be misused by their owners on the one hand, and on the other hand will be diverted, stolen, or misused by others. The key elements of that are: screening all firearm owners; licensing all firearm owners so we know who the lawful owners are, as distinct from those who have not gone through the screening process; holding firearm owners accountable for their firearms, and in Canada now that includes the registration of restricted and prohibited weapons; and reducing access to firearms where it is viewed that the risk outweighs the utility. In Canada since the 1930s, there have been higher levels of control over handguns, for example, because the view is that unlike rifles and shotguns, they serve more specified purposes, and because of their concealability, represent a higher risk to public safety.

I think the evidence is strong that suggests that as Canada has increased and strengthened its controls over firearms, we have seen a reduction in firearm death and injury. Remember that the risks of firearms are not just associated with what we normally define as crime, but also suicide and increasing political violence, which we have seen, for example, targeting police officers and members of the House of Commons.

When the legislation was introduced, the licensing provisions were intended to provide rigorous screening, and to take into account not just criminal acts or criminal records but also to require additional information, for example, from references, ensuring that spouses, for instance, were notified in the event that they had concerns. At the same time that the legislation was introduced, it was recognized that many existing firearm owners would be inconvenienced if they had to go through the same level of screening as individuals who wanted to acquire new firearms. That was why the distinction was made between possession-only licences, which allowed the owner to retain the firearms they previously had, versus possession and acquisition licences. There were about a million possession-only firearm owners at the time.

Because of time constraints I won't go into this in great detail, but I also want to refer the committee to the program evaluation of the firearms legislation that was done for the RCMP, because it reiterated both the value of the legislation and also identified a number of gaps in areas where the legislation needed to be strengthened. Most of those areas had to do with screening of licensing, with keeping licensing records up to date, and so on.

●(0850)

I think it's critically important to point out that were we concerned primarily with public safety, we would be looking at ways to strengthen the licensing provisions in this legislation, not to weaken them. One of the key messages in this document is that enhanced screening is important. The information required to ensure public safety does not reside just in police databases. There's more outreach required, for example, to public health professionals because of the risks associated not only with violence but also suicide.

We also know that recent explorations of risks associated with political violence or terrorism have also indicated that there are risks in Canada, not perhaps where the media focuses our attention, but among groups, for example, who oppose government intervention and involvement in their business. We've seen a number of cases, for instance, where police officers have been targeted by individuals who hold those beliefs. There is also evidence that stockpiling of firearms has been a problem with some groups over a long period of time.

With that in mind, I just want to walk through—in the few minutes I have remaining—the key elements that we are concerned with.

One is the proposed relaxation of the authorizations to transport, to make them less specific and more generic. While on the surface this may seem simply technical, as I mentioned at the outset, one of the reasons that Canada has far lower handgun violence rates than the United States is because we have been very strict in terms of controlling access, to the point where the current Prime Minister, for example, once stated that handguns are virtually banned in Canada.

We believe that relaxing the controls over the authorizations to transport will increase the risk that these firearms will be misused. If you can transport your firearm to any gun club in the province, it means you can be virtually anywhere with it.

The second area of concern is the automatic renewal of licences. As I said, the RCMP were very clear that the renewal process for licensing is an important complement to continuous eligibility checking. It allows information to be collected about aspects of an individual who may present risks to themselves or others, and also ensures that the information about who has guns and where they live is kept up to date. In the absence of firearms registration, this too is important.

I mentioned previously that the possession-only licences were designed to provide lighter screening than possession and acquisition licences because it was viewed that people acquiring more firearms present a bigger risk than people who already have them. We think that merging those is an error.

As well, when we look at other forms of regulation, there is normally an effort to rely on expert opinion. We have real concerns about changes that suggest that the minister has the power to reverse decisions by the RCMP with respect to the classification of weapons. This is something that has been an area of concern by police for at least 15 years. While there may be ways to strengthen transparency and rigour in the process, we would oppose shifting that to allow more political interference.

Finally, we believe that the roles and the powers of the chief firearms officers are critically important.

●(0855)

That of course is reinforced again in this evaluation report for the RCMP. Allowing the firearms officers to take into account a wide range of concerns in issuing authorizations to carry, as well as the transfers of firearms, is a critical piece of public safety and also allows more discretion around responding to local needs.

I will leave it at that point. I think I'm at 10 minutes.

**The Chair:** You're a tad over, but the bell did not ring on the class and you did have the attention of the class, so we will certainly carry on. Thank you very much, Ms. Cukier, for your presentation.

We will now go to Mr. Illerbrun, the firearms chairman from the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

You have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun (Firearms Chairman, Past-President, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation):** Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, honourable committee members, and fellow witnesses, it's an honour to speak to you today.

I'm 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. I'm also a family man, and I share the shooting and hunting sports with my wife, daughters, and grandchildren.

I've been the chair of the Saskatchewan recreational firearms committee for over 20 years and continue to work with firearms groups, local government, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. These organizations comprise everyday people interested in the outdoors and the legitimate use of firearms.

The thousands of people I represent support the total repeal and replacement of the Firearms Act with a new act. We want a new act that provides a common-sense approach to firearms ownership in Canada. Therefore, we do support the measures being brought forward here today, but please understand this: respectfully, there's much more work to be done.

Let us look at the Firearms Act of today.

First of all, under this legislation and even with all the amendments proposed today, all firearms owners are deemed criminals if they possess a firearm. Your licence is nothing more than a five-year permit that prevents you from being charged with the criminal offence you're committing. At the whim of government, it can be and will be revoked, and it can be made very difficult to obtain or renew it. Without a firearms licence, owners have no defence for the crime they are committing. Firearms licences must be made valid for life unless the individual has lost that right through a criminal act.

Secondly, the Firearms Act continues to use the Criminal Code in the wrong manner. The government keeps trying to address the criminal use of firearms through licensing provisions. Everyone is in favour of new laws to stop domestic and gang-related violence, but we must not do so at the expense of hundreds of thousands of legitimate firearms users in Canada. Criminal activity should be dealt with by severe penalties under existing Criminal Code provisions. Legitimate firearms owners are not the problem. Firearms licensing should not be in the Criminal Code.

As I speak to fellow Canadians today, I understand that there are serious disconnects between the legitimate firearms users and those for whom the very mention of the word “gun” strikes unwarranted fear into their hearts. Sadly, this is the reality, which is continuously fuelled by a politically motivated and sensationalist media agenda. Tabloid journalism is the order of the day—grab a headline by using the word “gun”. I challenge any and all of you to recall one media broadcast of a positive story concerning firearms use. What should be regulated through the rational application of facts is too often driven by fear and emotion. We are continually reminded that it is impossible to legislate against insanity.

The firearms community has a long tradition of responsible firearms use in Canada, not crime, and the Dominion of Canada owes its very roots to a rich and diverse cultural history built upon the hunting and trapping traditions of over 300 years. That is why legitimate firearms users will never compromise or agree to give up their basic right to own and use firearms. Legitimate firearms users are not the source of firearms crime in Canada. This is a statistical fact.

Today's measures do represent common-sense improvements, and for that I thank you. Legitimate firearms users are ready to get to work. We will help you foster the discussion and assist in creating a common-sense act that stops criminalizing the traditional lifestyle of legitimate firearms users in Canada.

Thank you for my time.

● (0900)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Illerbrun.

We now welcome Mr. Rodgers, from the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

Should you wish, you have up to 10 minutes for a presentation, sir. You now have the floor.

**Mr. Tony Rodgers (Executive Director, Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters):** Thank you very much.

First of all, I'd like to thank the taxpayers of Canada for financially helping me attend this meeting today. My federation isn't in a position to pay for that.

Secondly, on behalf of the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for the opportunity to make this presentation in support of Bill C-42.

It was just over 20 years ago that former minister Allan Rock began to make statements in the media stating that he was pushing for more gun control in Canada. At that time, statements were

attributed to him that the police and military should be the only people to possess guns in Canada, and that firearms should be removed from all cities and stored in armouries.

Although those statements have been withdrawn, they alerted the law-abiding firearms owners of Canada that more trouble was on the way. However, we must thank Mr. Rock for his wake-up call. Many of us believe that the existing legislation, Bill C-17, as bad as it was, was grudgingly accepted by the shooting community and would remain around for a while.

We did not expect for any interference of our legal firearms activities, especially after Bill C-17 was only in existence for a year and a half. What that wake-up call produced was a strong, united voice within the firearms community of Nova Scotia. We also learned later that in the whole of Canada a firearms community will never be reactive again, but rather a proactive group with strong communications across the country.

The responsible firearms owners of Nova Scotia organization represents 100,000 hunters in the province, as well as gun collectors, target shooters, and farmers. It is also supported by 32 hunting and fishing clubs, and 60 shooting clubs.

Over the past year, these people have demonstrated the resolve to fight any bad firearms legislation to the end, using whatever legal means available to them. The cancellation of the long-gun registry by Prime Minister Harper's government was a very good beginning, bringing back some respect to the firearms community.

For the past 20 years, we've been living under a dark cloud that shadowed us as criminals because of our hobbies. We strongly support the passage of Bill C-42, the common-sense firearms licensing act, and look forward to its implementation.

I would like to address a few specific amendments that change the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code.

The streamlining of the licensing system by eliminating the possession-only licence and converting all existing POLs to possession and acquisition licences will have a very positive effect on hunting in Canada. It will allow many hunters that held the old POL to purchase new firearms. They have not been able to purchase new firearms unless they took the training course. It always appeared silly to me that a person who was safe enough with using firearms and legally allowed to own them was not permitted to buy new firearms. Changes to the act will now allow them to purchase these new ones.

Hopefully, this change will also attract some of the people who left hunting to come back and once again contribute to the conservation of the country's wildlife by purchasing licences and giving back to their hunting heritage.

One of the main problems with the legislation, as it is today, is that it created many paper criminals, people who did not have the right pieces of paper for the right firearm under the old registration system, or who forgot to send in the licence renewal. Creating a six-month grace period at the end of the five-year licensing period to stop people from immediately becoming criminalized for paperwork delays around licence renewal is a very positive move and will be welcomed by the firearms community.

Safety has always been the hallmark of the Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and making classroom participation and firearm safety training mandatory for first-time licence applicants really is a no-brainer.

I can appreciate that not all areas of Canada, especially in the north, will have the ability to provide this service, but I believe that this will pay dividends to the rest of the country by having everyone from this point on classroom trained.

I have not been a person to support registries when it comes to firearms owned by law-abiding people, but a registry of people who are not allowed to possess firearms is fine with me. The amended Criminal Code to strengthen the provision relating to orders prohibiting possession of firearms where a person is convicted of an offence involving domestic violence is a step in the right direction. It would also be extended to list all people who are banned by the courts from the possession of firearms. I think that would have been an improvement.

• (0905)

Transporting a firearm to the shooting range or to a gunsmith would not require a separate piece of paper in my view. Ending this needless paperwork around authorization transportation by making them a condition of licence for certain routine and lawful activities is positive and will have the side effect of reducing costs within the firearms office.

I've heard stories from many of my colleagues from across the country of the abuse of power by some Canadian chief firearms officers who use their own interpretation of the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code to fit their personal likes and dislikes with respect to firearms and firearms owners. Therefore, changes to provide for the discretionary authority of the chief firearms officers to be subject and limited to regulation works for me from coast to coast. All CFOs will administer the act as it's written, no individual interpretations.

It is important to both Canada Border Services and the RCMP to share information on newly imported restricted and non-restricted firearms into Canada. So the change to authorize firearms importation information sharing when restricted and prohibited firearms are imported into Canada by Canadian businesses is good.

This last amendment was prompted by a reclassification of a firearm by the RCMP that made hundreds of Canadians criminals overnight. The Swiss Army green rifle had its status changed from restricted firearm to prohibited with a stroke of a pen. This decision was made after the importers had worked with the RCMP on the original classification. The change will allow government to have a final say on classification decisions following the receiving of independent expert advice.

Long gone are the days of boys playing cops and robbers, shooting pretend guns at each other. The likelihood nowadays is that a SWAT team will be bearing down on them. Our society has become paranoid about firearms because they have been led to believe that guns are in themselves evil, and people who want to use them are evil as well. I don't know if we will ever get around to a time when we can trust our neighbours. The good news is that these changes will go a long way in fostering a positive relationship among the firearms community, government, and police.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rodgers, and I thank all our witnesses for their respectful comments.

We will now go to our rounds of questioning. The first round is seven minutes, and we will start with Mr. Leef, please.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses.

I think for the benefit of Mr. Illerbrun who is on the phone right now I'll introduce myself. I'm Ryan Leef, member of Parliament for the Yukon. I'm going to ask each one of you one question because I don't want to be presumptuous. I'll just see where everybody's at and that might direct my continued line of questioning. I'll start with Ms. Cukier and then move to Mr. Rodgers and then finally to Mr. Illerbrun. Ms. Cukier, do you own a gun, or have you ever taken the Canadian firearms safety course or the hunter education and ethics development program?

• (0910)

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** I don't, but members of my family do, and I've lived with guns in my home for a number of years.

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** Yes, I have everything that's associated with it.

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** Yes, I've taken the course a couple of times because I've taken my kids to it.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you.

I've done the same thing, taken the course a couple of times and taken my son through it. The point of the question is, I think for the benefit of the Canadian public, we've heard from all witnesses about a law-abiding, safe, ethical, and I would argue, self-regulating firearms community. I think many of the course descriptions and the rules and regulations around firearms ownership and firearms safety training have come directly from the firearms community. They're not things that have been legislated upon us, but are driven by the firearms community to make sure the group maintains its high standards.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Rodgers, and then over to you, Mr. Illerbrun. I'm just wondering for the benefit of the committee if you can describe in a tight package what the Canadian firearms safety course looks like, additionally—and what we call it in the Yukon may be a different name but the same principle—what the hunter education and ethics development program looks like, which is ancillary to the CFS course if you want to have a hunting licence. Then maybe quickly could you describe what sorts of ethics, rules, and standards are set by the firearms and sports shooting community at a range itself?

In other words what are range rules that would identify and secure Canadian firearms owners, not only as law abiding but as a highly safe and ethical group of individuals?

**The Chair:** Mr. Rodgers, it will take you about 20 minutes to go through that. Perhaps you could give us an abbreviated response, if you would.

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** As you say, this could take a little while.

In Nova Scotia, to take the training required to hunt, a person has to take the registered Canadian firearms training course as well as a hunter education course. They're both separate components. In some provinces they're joined together.

The training required in the Canadian firearms training course takes a person through all of the needed material with respect to the ethics surrounding firearms and the proper handling of firearms. When you go through that process you'll learn the different types of actions, the different types of ammunition, what's prohibited, what's not prohibited, what we're allowed to use in Canada, what we're not allowed to use in Canada. Those are the main components and are built for understanding.

At that particular point, though, it only makes you safe to use the firearm itself. In order to get the licence you have to go through another chapter, and that is to apply to the RCMP, basically, for permission to get the Canadian firearms card so that you can buy guns and buy ammunition. That is a little bit more onerous in that the information, the questions, are about your mental health, your marital status, things of that nature. All the questions that are there must be answered properly or you'll get your application back pretty darned quick. We have to have a picture of ourselves sent along with that application. That, in turn, is placed on the card, if the card is granted to that particular person.

The hunter education portion in Nova Scotia is about a seven-hour course, and most of it surrounds ethics and safe hunting. There are some components of field stuff like map and compass, identifying animals and traps, and things of that nature. A lot of it is circled around the relationship between the hunter and the farmer, the landowner, the ethics surrounding it, the ethics surrounding your hunting partner, the ethics surrounding responsible taking of an animal in a fair chase, so yes, those components are looked into.

With respect to the range, I'm not much of a range shooter myself, but the basic guidelines will be seen, probably in every club, up on the wall as you walk through the door, such as no shooting unless there's a range officer around. There's ongoing training within an organization, a shooting club for different types of calibres to ensure that a person who buys a new firearm becomes familiar with it

before they actually get a chance to start shooting it. In most clubs, their regulations are over and above anything that would be required by the chief firearms officer. Most of them are pretty stringent. That's why one of the safest places to be is at a gun range, because their safety record is impeccable.

• (0915)

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you.

Mr. Illerbrun, without repeating anything, is there anything you would add to those remarks?

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** I think Mr. Rodgers did a very good job of covering most of it. I'll only add a couple of things.

We also have two courses here, one for hunting, and the Canadian firearms course, of course, is the same across Canada. Our hunter course, I think Tony led to that, but there's a respect for landowners, the game, the hunters, other hunters, and generally the use of firearms that's really pounded into the people who take that course.

There's also practical firearms handling, where they actually have deactivated firearms that you must go through and demonstrate your ability to handle those firearms, and prove it in tests and go through all of the procedures to do that—how to load it and unload it, and keeping the firearm pointed in a safe direction at all times when you do that.

Both courses have an 8.5 by 11 inch book, about a half inch thick, so it's not something you do on a whim. When I went and took my kids, we did it for six to eight weeks for one night a week, plus the practical test at the end.

Going to the range issue, Mr. Rodgers is right, there's a range officer who's always appointed when you get to the range. He has total control of the range. He calls when you can shoot and when you must stop shooting. If he thinks something's going to go wrong, he can call a stop to the shooting immediately, and everybody has to follow those rules. All clubs are very stringent about that. If you don't follow the rules you will lose your club membership.

Other than that, I think Mr. Rodgers pretty well covered everything very well.

**The Chair:** Fine. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We will now go to Madam Doré Lefebvre for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Illerbrun, Ms. Cukier and Mr. Rodgers, thank you very much for participating in today's meeting. It is always interesting to meet hunters from other provinces and learn about their point of view.

I am a Quebecker, and I come from a long line of hunters. I got my hunting licence and then I was hooked. I went hunting with my cousins and my father. The next year, I decided to follow a gun safety course. That made my parents very proud. In my corner of the world, we are part of this community. It is a long-standing tradition and I am very proud of it. What we are hearing today is very interesting.

To start, I will address my questions to Ms. Cukier.

I have a few questions about your presentation and different aspects of Bill C-42. The first point that you mentioned was the transportation of firearms, which I discussed with various police services in Quebec.

Bill C-42 includes a relatively important measure dealing with restricted and prohibited firearms. I've spoken a great deal with police officers in Quebec about provisions in the bill on the transportation of these weapons and the impact that they will have on police services. They told me that they have no idea how they are actually going to be able to apply these provisions in reality and how difficult it is going to be for them at work on a day-to-day basis.

I would like to hear your point of view, as well as that of the 300 organizations that you represent, with regard to these provisions in Bill C-42.

[English]

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** Thanks very much for the question.

I think it's fairly simple. The existing authorizations to transport regulations and the power in the legislation are aimed at restricting where restricted weapons can be possessed, and these regulations have been in place now for over 50 years. The intent is to say that handguns represent a threat to public safety because they can be misused by their owners and they can be stolen. In fact, about a third of the handguns recovered in crime in Canada are guns that were at one time legally owned and have been sold illegally or stolen. Therefore, while we are prepared to allow individuals to use handguns for target shooting, and in some cases to have them as part of their collections, we want to be very cautious about where and under what circumstances they can have these guns.

The argument is that as you expand the authorizations to transport to basically say that you can be transporting your handgun from your home to any gun club in the province—which from my perspective could mean anywhere in the province—it's going to be near impossible to establish that someone was not going from their home to the gun club where they are a member and have a legitimate reason to be. They could be travelling virtually anywhere and saying they're on route to a gun club.

It's a technical change that could have unintended consequences. We've seen enough cases where restricted and prohibited weapons have been stolen from locked vehicles and then misused in crime, for example, to be concerned about this. I think the enforceability also becomes an issue. If you're basically saying that an authorization to transport allows you to take your handgun virtually anywhere in the province, then what exactly is the purpose of the authorization to transport?

• (0920)

[Translation]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** That leads me to raise the issue of firearms classification. Currently, the Canadian Firearms Program is administered by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The classification is then approved by the Minister of Public Safety.

What is being proposed to us within the framework of Bill C-42 is an update of firearms classification. However, in reality, this is about playing politics with the debate on firearms classification by directly

granting a new power to cabinet, which is to nullify firearms classification definitions.

I find that interesting, but I get the impression that the classification system is being weakened.

I would like to hear your point of view about this. You mentioned that the debate was being politicized, but could you explain to us why, in your opinion, Bill C-42 will likely politicize firearms classification?

[English]

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** If we look at the regulation of potentially dangerous substances or objects, normally there is a reliance on expert opinion. The classification of prohibited weapons, and indeed, restricted weapons, is certainly the subject of much debate. Different countries have different approaches. The police have said repeatedly that since the initial list of prohibited weapons was set with Bill C-68, manufacturers have been skirting those prohibitions by changing some features or changing the name of the firearms.

Basically, industry will find its way around the regulations, so I would add that some countries have a permissive approach, which means that instead of saying, "These guns are prohibited", they say, "These guns are allowed." This is much more the approach that we have, for example, with the regulation of pharmaceuticals. If you want to bring a new drug into Canada and administer it, you have to demonstrate that it's not a risk to health or safety.

There are some fundamental challenges with the way the legislation is currently crafted, because it allows these loopholes for new guns coming in that would otherwise be prohibited. Our view is that if your intent is public safety you should look at the process and at ways to tighten the process. As unfortunate as the retroactive classification of the Swiss Arms firearm was, if that's the thing you're concerned about, you don't make a massive change to the system in order to address what is a relatively small issue. Perhaps you have one process that addresses the importation of new kinds of firearms, and in the event that the RCMP wants to retroactively change the classification of a gun, a different process kicks in. But—

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Cukier. We're well over the time. I'm very sorry about that.

We will now go to Mr. Breitzkreuz, please, for seven minutes.

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

I would first of all like to address my questions to you, Mr. Illerbrun. Thank you very much for being with us. Your experience as a police officer is always very helpful, as it is in the debate we're having here today.

I have questions in two areas.



The first area, Mr. Illerbrun, is to have you comment on the authorization to transport regulations that are contained in this bill. As you may be aware, there was a great variety in applications of this from province to province. Some provinces would allow you to have an authorization to transport for three years. Other provinces, such as Ontario, would require an ATT every time you decided to go to the range. I would like you to comment on how you see this requirement playing itself out in regard to whether it's going to change safety in the various provinces. You might want to include some of the indications that police officers weren't even aware when an ATT was given out for a certain transport of a firearm.

That's my first question. The second will be on the classification of firearms.

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** First of all, everybody needs to understand that in order to buy a restricted firearm, in this case a handgun, you have to have a reason to own it. You have two choices under the act. One, you can be a collector. You deem yourself a collector, and you are subject to home inspections of where you store your firearms. Most people deem themselves to be shooters. If you are going to be a shooter and that is the reason you are buying the gun, you have to be able to take your gun to the range to shoot it because you've said you are a shooter.

The only way you can get the gun to the range is to have an authorization to transport. The law says that now that you've said you are a shooter, you must go shooting. You must use it or lose it. The law says that you have to have an authorization to transport. This act, as I understand it, is not changing the authorization to transport. It is just saying that instead of having to go get one every time you go to the range, or have all these variations across the country, they are going to tie it to the licence.

Now, in order to buy a handgun, you have to have a restricted classification on your licence, so in order to be able to have a handgun, you have already passed all the tests and the screening that has been talked about earlier in this standing committee hearing. Now you need the authorization to transport. Your firearms licence is good for five years. If you buy a gun in the fourth year, you can get an authorization to transport only until your licence expires, so you get it only for one year. The authorization to transport is very specific. It says where you can go and what you can do with it. Mr. Breitzkreuz pointed to the fact that there are some variations across the country. Mine says that, right now, today, I can go to any range in Saskatchewan. They are not changing that. They are just tying it to the licence because it will simplify the process and save taxpayers money to do what has to be done legally.

Everybody needs to understand that there is nothing new here. We are just going to put it with the licence. It is a restricted licence, so you have handguns, and the government knows you have handguns. They are registered, and now you've said you are a shooter. When you renew your licence now, you need that authorization to transport to go to the range. They are going to issue the same authorization to transport that they are issuing today, but it is going to be tied to your licence. It will expire when your licence expires, and it will be renewed so that you can follow the law of the land that says you require this authorization to transport in order to go to the range and use your firearm.

I think that should cover that fairly well, unless you have something else you want to ask.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** Thank you, Mr. Illerbrun. Does it change how you can transport your firearm?

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** No, your firearm has to be transported locked twice. If you were going to the range with your car, you would have to have it in a locked case, probably with a trigger lock on it, and put it in the trunk of your car and lock it. You would also have to take the most direct route to and from the range. If you are veering off that, you are not following the rules of the authorization to transport, and you are subject to charges.

● (0930)

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** Thank you. You have heard some of the other commentary here on the classification of firearms. Would you mind giving us your view of this issue?

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** As I understand it, what they are proposing is an expert committee to go through and follow up to decide which classification all these new firearms that are coming in are going to go into. Instead of having a hodgepodge of rules across the land and CFOs deciding what the classification of firearms is going to be, there is going to be an expert committee that will do that. They will decide that once and for all, instead of this retroactive stuff.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** Thank you very much.

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation has a history of promoting the safe use of firearms. When they brought in their safety course many years ago, could you tell me how that affected the problems that may have been experienced with accidental use of firearms?

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** That is true. The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation was instrumental in bringing firearms safety courses to the province, probably some 40 or 50 years ago. As a direct result, incidents involving accidents around firearms use went almost to nil from what they used to be. It is through the training process that we started then and that is still going on today.

**Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz:** I would like to thank you very much for the presentation you have given us this morning and continue to work with you on this issue.

**Mr. Greg Illerbrun:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Breitzkreuz.

We will now go to Mr. Easter, please.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing.

Mr. Rodgers, in your presentation you said that you were basically in favour—I don't know if you were entirely in favour—of a registry for those who should not be able to attain, use, or own firearms. I don't see that proposal anywhere in the bill. How are you coming at that, or do I see it wrong?

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** In the bill there's a proposal to strengthen the provisions related to orders prohibiting the possession of firearms when a person is convicted of an offence involving domestic violence.

Maybe I misread that myself. I thought it was going to create a registry of the people....

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I don't think it is.

I guess it's something we can ask our researchers about later.

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** That's my error in interpretation.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Well, I could be wrong too, so....

But it is an interesting suggestion. I think you suggested an amendment around that, and that may be a possibility of a way to go.

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** It's an old idea. We proposed this many years ago when the registry first came up: let's register the people who are not allowed to have firearms so that the police will have definitive information on those people. I still support that. I think that would be a great registry to know exactly who is not allowed to have them.

I'm sorry for the confusion.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Well, no, that's why we have the committee hearings, so that we all—including us, and perhaps especially us—can learn something.

Madam Cukier, you went through a number of areas. What areas in the bill are you suggesting would really open up the possibility of the abuse of firearms? From where I sit, we see some good things in this bill and we see some worrisome things, but you've made a number of points. What areas in the bill do you think would open up the possibility for the misuse of firearms?

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** In our reading of the authorizations to transport, they go from saying that they will allow a prohibited or restricted firearm to be moved between two or more specified places for any good reason to saying that the specified places must include all shooting clubs and shooting ranges that are approved under section 29 and that are located in the province. Perhaps it's not the intention, but our reading of this is that the authorization to transport essentially allows you to take your handgun anywhere you like where there is a shooting club.

Similarly, there are concerns about extending the terms of the licence and integrating the PAL and the POL, for the reasons I explained. People who have a possession-only licence were not subject to the same level of screening.

With due respect to the previous speakers, training is very helpful in reducing firearms accidents. Training may be helpful in encouraging firearms owners to store their firearms properly. However, the evidence does not support the idea that training prevents either criminal misuse or suicide. In fact, if you look at many of the high-profile events that have plagued us in recent years, it wasn't that the gun owners did not know how to shoot straight. In a number of cases, members of gun clubs had risk factors that were not noted by their colleagues and went on to kill people. The screening processes extend far beyond training. The screening processes have to include not just criminal records checks but spousal notification and other measures. As I said, I think the program evaluation document that reviewed the RCMP Canadian firearms program has a number of very good proposals in it to strengthen the screening and the licensing.

Finally, under the current legislation, the chief provincial firearms officer can, if in his view there is a risk to an individual or anyone else, prevent the transfer of a firearm, refuse an authorization to transport, and so on. Because we know that police databases are

limited, making sure that chief provincial firearms officers have discretion and err on the side of public safety—recognizing that there are appeal processes for licensees—is absolutely fundamental.

I think whatever the intentions of this legislation may have been, there's very little evidence that it's tied to data on what works, what does not work, or even reviews conducted by this very government on what's needed to keep us safer.

• (0935)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, I'll go to the other two witnesses.

One of the things I see as a positive in this legislation is the combining of the two licences. I think the bill goes a step further in that it demands that there be additional training. I think that streamlines the system a fair bit. I believe Mr. Rodgers mentioned that it might bring others into being hunters and shooters, so being well trained would be a good thing.

Mr. Rodgers or Mr. Illerbrun, what's your view on that and the combining of the licence? Do you see any risks there? Do you agree with Madam Cukier?

**Mr. Tony Rodgers:** I don't see any risks there at all.

I think it's a great idea to do this combination. It's going to smooth out the system and get rid of the confusion that presently exists between the POL and the PAL owners. I don't see why they would have any difficulty in changing it over and allowing these folks who have been trusted with the firearms to buy ammunition or an additional or new firearm.

**The Chair:** Mr. Garrison, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

We have limited time to deal with the various parts of this bill. I think some things expressed here were incorrect, and I thank Mr. Easter for clearing up one of those. I think Ms. Cukier has cleared up another with regard to the authorization to transfer.

On the question of classification, I'm tempted to say I wonder whether the members on the opposite side would be as happy making this a political question if they thought that Madam Doré Lefebvre or I might be the minister and that the pressure we would come under might be different from the pressure people on the other side come under.

One of the things I don't see in the bill is a suggestion to have an expert committee. It's a cabinet decision, which makes it a purely political decision. The minister has been reluctant to admit that and has referred to somebody's pen in general when it was actually his pen on the reclassification.

I want to skip over those and go to something that is very important, which I think is in the written submission by the Coalition for Gun Control.

Ms. Cukier, I'd like you to comment a bit more about the gender analysis of the impacts of this bill and the failure to consult with those who deal with family violence in the preparation of this bill. Could you say something more about that? You raised that in your written submission and I think it's very important.

• (0940)

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** Thanks very much.

It comes back to what I said previously about the way that this is framed, and indeed the question that was posed. Do you own a firearm, and can you tell us about the training process and screening process? The assumption that gun ownership confers expertise in violence prevention is wrong-headed.

There's been a lot of research by public health experts, domestic violence experts, on the real risk factors associated with domestic violence, with suicide, and indeed with violence more generally. I don't think there's anything in the comments I've heard from my respected colleagues, nor indeed some of the members of this committee, that recognize the importance of evidence in making these decisions. The focus is on training when what we really need is better screening.

Again, the RCMP had signalled this loud and clear. Risks around domestic violence may be a matter of record in terms of the police databases, but they may not be. Issues with respect to mental health challenges, suicide, and so on, most certainly are not likely to be in police databases.

The rigorous screening processes that were applied to the possession and acquisition licences and not the possession-only licences, which included reference checks, spousal notification, and so on, are fundamentally important. If you go back and look at the testimony of those experts in public health, in domestic violence, and indeed police, the importance of the renewal process, and those screening processes as part of renewal, was viewed as absolutely fundamental, as a complement to the continuous eligibility screening.

I don't want to keep harping on it, but I think the so-called objective view of the legislation, which is contained in the government's evaluation of the bill, identified the importance of looking at training issues. It identified the importance of making sure that licence screening is improved, that more information is made available from more agencies in order to specifically address the risks of domestic violence, ensuring that the licensing processes for non-restricted licence applicants be held at a high standard and audits be introduced, and that the police and government work with health care as well as women's organizations and other community organizations to address the risk factors.

Thank you for your question.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** I have one short question.

One thing on which I do agree with some of our other presenters is that perhaps a failure to renew shouldn't result in an immediate criminal charge. However, it seems that the government has gone a long way in removing all penalties for that. Is that what you're referring to with the automatic renewal?

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** Absolutely.

We've seen this with amnesty after amnesty after amnesty. There has not been an effort to reach out, to educate people about why having a licence is important, why they must renew. That's another thing that this RCMP report suggests, you need resources to ensure compliance.

Sending the message that it doesn't really matter if you renew your licence is completely the wrong message.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now, for five minutes to close off the first round, Mr. Hayes.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Cukier, what is your position on creating a mandatory weapons prohibition for those convicted of serious domestic violence offences?

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** There already is prohibition for people convicted of a range of offences where there is considered to be a risk to public safety, so it was not clear to us how this was different from what already exists in the law. We know, based on recent Supreme Court decisions, that mandatory anything often presents legal challenges.

As we said in our brief, we don't understand how this is different from what already exists, because people convicted of serious offences are supposed to be prohibited from owning firearms.

• (0945)

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** I had a look at your website. On your website there was one bullet that states:

The Bill introduces supplementary sanctions that are meant to protect children and women who are victims of domestic violence, such as broadening the definition of "intimate partner" in the Criminal Code and adding to mandatory and discretionary prohibition orders. However, these elements are ex post facto and do nothing to protect the 70 percent of women who are unable or unwilling to report domestic violence or threats.

I'm really having trouble here. How do you amend this legislation to somehow think that we can influence those women who are unable or unwilling to report domestic violence threats? I don't understand that statement on your website.

**Ms. Wendy Cukier:** I apologize because I don't have what you're referring to in front of me. The intent is simply to say that mandatory prohibitions are not a panacea and will not solve the problem. Our focus is on screening and prevention.

Unfortunately, we have too many cases where.... In fact, we have cases where a prohibition order was issued in the court because someone was convicted of domestic violence. The firearms were not, however, confiscated and the man left court, got his gun, and killed his ex-wife. Our focus is on prevention and that's why the screening processes are so critically important.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, colleagues.

On behalf of the entire committee, I'd like to thank Ms. Cukier, Mr. Rodgers, and Mr. Illerbrun, not only for your time but for your commitment to present before this committee. It certainly gives us some thought, some considerations, that we all have to bear in mind regardless of where we sit around the table. I can assure you that your time spent here is important and valued. Thank you very much.

We will suspend now while we change witnesses.

● (0945)

(Pause)

● (0950)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we're back in session. We have three witnesses for this panel. We're still hooking up our video conference, so we'll go ahead with our other witnesses. We will then introduce them, and as we come on line, we will carry on.

For the second hour, on behalf of PolySeSouvient, we have Mr. Benoît Laganière, spokesperson, and also Ms. Heidi Rathjen.

Shortly, by way of video conference from Longueuil, we will have from the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs, Mr. Pierre Latraverse, president.

We will start off now with opening statements, up to 10 minutes per organization. We would appreciate it, as always, if you're able to make your remarks even more brief, as it gives us more opportunity to have a little Q and A with our witnesses.

We will start off with the representative from PolySeSouvient.

[Translation]

**Mr. Benoît Laganière (Spokesperson, PolySeSouvient):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, good morning.

For the survivors, the witnesses and the many families of the victims of the Polytechnique massacre in 1989, our main objective was and remains the avoidance of loss of life and the prevention of the enormous suffering caused by violence committed by firearms. The fight against violence requires interventions at all levels.

Since its election, the Conservative government has destroyed or weakened most of the measures that had been implemented at the request of victims of firearms, but also at the request of police officers, women's groups, suicide prevention workers and public health groups. In 2012, the government destroyed the long-gun registry. Since then, a long gun can no longer be traced to its owner. The Harper government also eliminated the requirement to check the validity of the permit of a potential purchaser, as well as the sales records of firearms merchants. Today, Bill C-42 will further weaken the controls that remain.

By definition, a firearm is designed to kill. It is a dangerous object that deserves the greatest attention and the greatest respect. Using a firearm is a privilege, not a right. This privilege should be governed by strong rules and should result in a series of responsibilities. Strict controls are the norm in most developed countries. However, the Harper government, always ready to please the firearms lobby, has made it so that Canada is today in a situation in which there are fewer controls than at the time of the Polytechnique tragedy, 25 years ago.

You know, when someone is attacked in such a violent way using a firearm, the only thing that they can cling to is hope and comfort. The hope that governments will take action and take all of the means possible to prevent this type of extreme violence, and comfort in the idea that the brutal death of our sisters was not in vain because other lives will be saved.

I had already come to testify as the witness to a massacre, but mainly as an ordinary citizen, before the parliamentary and Senate committees, about Bill C-19, which scrapped the long-gun registry.

Despite the plentiful testimony from many pro-control groups, not a single line or a single comma was changed in the wording of the bill. This morning, I have no hope that things will be different this time around, but we are here because it is important to highlight some of the effects of this bill and to express our opposition to it, especially in light of all of the misinformation being disseminated by this government.

Bill C-42 will put us in the awful situation that we observe daily south of the border. Its adoption will result in easier access to firearms and will increase the chances that they fall into the wrong hands. MPs who vote in favour of this bill will have to assume responsibility for this.

Our position is the outright rejection of Bill C-42.

● (0955)

[English]

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen (Spokesperson, PolySeSouvient):** Thank you.

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

Bill C-42 is a complex bill and includes many measures, and we won't be able to address them all. This morning I would like to address two specific ones.

The first one concerns the ability of the RCMP to classify certain types of weapons. As you know, about a year ago, the RCMP ruled that thousands of semi-automatic weapons that had entered the country as non-restricted long guns were in fact prohibited, given their ability to be converted to fully automatic firearms.

These weapons included the full range of Swiss Arms models and various versions of the CZ858 family, one of which was used in September 2012 during the election celebrations of the Parti Québécois. One man was killed and another one was injured, but the toll could have been much higher had the gun not jammed after the first shot. The shooter, Richard Bain, was a member of a gun club and was a legal owner of that weapon, amongst many others.

We would have hoped that the public safety implications of having thousands of prohibited weapons circulating across the country would be obvious to all, but that was not the case. As soon as the decision was rendered, public safety minister Steven Blaney echoed the complaints of the gun lobby, criticized the RCMP for their arbitrary decision, and announced a two-year amnesty for the owners of these weapons, accompanied by a public address specifically to gun owners stating, “Our Conservative Government is on your side” and that they will always defend the rights of honest gun owners, followed, of course, by an email directing supporters to a fundraising site.

Bill C-42 authorizes the Minister of Public Safety—a partisan political position—to override any and all classifications, even those clearly defined by law. The minister could literally reclassify as non-restricted any weapon, no matter how dangerous, at any time, for any reason, thus extracting it from any significant controls.

Bill C-42 was tabled only months after the murders of three RCMP officers in Moncton. Justin Bourque used an M305 semi-automatic Winchester rifle, which is a Chinese-made semi-automatic version of the American M14 service rifle, a favourite of military firearms collectors.

Only a few months before the tragedy, the RCMP, echoing other police organizations, had raised concerns with the minister regarding the inherent risks of the legal availability of such weapons. These include, for example, .50 calibre rifles that can pierce military aircraft and light armoured vehicles, not to mention bulletproof vests of police. This picture shows the Steyr Mannlicher, which is unrestricted. You can buy it over the Internet without the buyer being obligated to verify the validity of the possession permit.

Instead of properly classifying these types of weapons according to their risks, this government chose instead, with Bill C-42, to make that kind of political interference at the expense of public safety official and permanent.

The second issue is the discretionary powers of chief firearms officers, which are a core element of their work. Every day, chief firearms officers use their discretion while making decisions on whether or not to issue a variety of licences and authorizations. CFOs may further use their discretion to determine whether or not it is desirable in the interest of public safety to attach special conditions to authorizations or a licence.

For example, a CFO may decide to require a medical report stating that the previous mental illness of an applicant has been successfully treated as a condition of the issuance of a permit. A CFO may require that a business reconfigure its service counter to make sure that the display of the guns is far enough away from clients.

Some conditions can be more comprehensive. For example, Quebec does not allow prohibited weapons to be on the premises of gun clubs, even if they are grandfathered or subject to an amnesty. In Alberta, the CFO requires sellers in gun shows to have trigger locks on their guns, as opposed to putting plastic or wire tie wraps around the triggers.

It is this ability—attaching conditions to licences—that will be subject to new regulations under Bill C-42.

●(1000)

What these regulations will be is impossible to know; however, given that the government has presented this bill as a way to rein in broad and often discretionary authority of unelected bureaucrats, and that it follows from the gun lobby, we are pretty confident the regulations are meant to have detrimental effects on these kinds of public safety decisions.

We don't have to look very far for similar, recent examples of this type of interference. For example, sales records in gun stores had existed in the law since 1978 and were never controversial. The firearms registry rendered them not necessary, because it took up that role. But following the abolition of the gun registry, chief firearms officers required gun businesses to keep inventories and sales ledgers. However, following complaints from the gun lobby regarding this, this government tabled regulations prohibiting chief firearms officers from requiring such a rule even though they said that this could facilitate illegal diversion of guns by gun businesses to the black market.

Another example concerns gun shows. Up until 2012 all sales at these events were first cleared by the registrar, since it automatically verified the licence of each buyer before issuing a new registration certificate. Since the elimination of the registry, there is no way to ensure that sales that take place in these huge gun shows are legal. In order to compensate for the loss of this oversight, every chief firearms office in the country said it was necessary for the government to enact existing gun show regulations, which would allow them to act in an enforcement capacity and ensure minimum safety standards at these shows. According to the firearms investigative and enforcement services directorate, which is tasked to combat illegal smuggling, without proper controls gun shows may become a focal point for the purchase and subsequent stockpiling of non-restricted firearms for criminal use.

As you know, in the United States about one-third to 40% of guns sold at gun shows are sold illegally to people who otherwise wouldn't pass a background check. This was a totally reasonable request by the chief firearms officers, aimed at ensuring the safety of gun shows and preventing illegal sales. But the gun lobby complained, and of course, the government axed the regulations.

In conclusion, discretion regarding the classification of guns and certain parts of the implementation of the Firearms Act should be left in the hands of the RCMP and the chief firearms officers, who are objective, knowledgeable, and mandated to protect the public. It should not be overruled by political interests. Subjecting discretionary powers of public safety officials to political interference places partisan politics over good governance, ideology over expertise, and gun interests over public safety.

Bill C-42 should be opposed and rejected.

Thank you.

•(1005)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now hear from Mr. Pierre Latraverse who is the president of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs.

[English]

You have the floor, sir.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Latraverse (President, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs):** Good morning to all committee members.

I will now give a presentation on behalf of the federation and its branches.

The Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs is a not-for-profit organization that was created in 1946. Its mandate is to contribute to the management, development and continuation of hunting and fishing as traditional, heritage and sporting activities, while respecting wildlife in their habitat.

Its objectives are to represent the interests of hunters and anglers; defend and protect the practice of hunting and fishing activities, and promote them in order to ensure the sustainability of the sport; promote the adoption of responsible behaviour by hunters and anglers; cooperate with public authorities to establish conservation and wildlife habitat development programs; cooperate with public authorities to establish wildlife management plans which help governments reach their biological, social and economic objectives.

The federation today comprises some 200 associations which themselves comprise over 125,000 members spread out across all regions of Quebec. It counts on the support of its two foundations, Héritage faune and Sécurité nature, to reach its objectives.

Héritage faune is the official foundation of the federation. It was established in 1980. Its mandate is to offer various sources of funding that allow for the completion of wildlife, aquatic and land development projects, renewal programs and wildlife scholarships for university graduates. It is involved in many projects with organizations in the wildlife and environmental sectors in Quebec.

Sécurité nature was created in 1995. It is the architect of the federation in terms of education. It ensures the delivery of our education program courses on safety and wildlife coordination, and also the coordination of 450 volunteer monitors responsible for giving courses in all regions of Quebec. It also develops education programs on nature interpretation, protection and the enhancement of wildlife and its habitat, in addition to the safety of individuals practising outdoor activities. It also edits educational materials on the knowledge, conservation, and enhancement of fauna and habitat development, and outdoor leisure activities.

According to statistics from Sécurité nature, the training course Initiation to Hunting with a Firearm is becoming more popular in Quebec. The number of individuals trained by this course was 5,703 in 1994, 10,750 in 1999, 14,000 in 2006 and 20,000 in 2014. According to statistics from Sécurité nature, registrations for the Canadian Firearms Safety Course is also on the rise in Quebec. The

number of individuals trained was 10,681 in 1994, 11,968 in 1999, 15,088 in 2006 and 23,910 in 2014.

Concerning Bill C-42, an Act to amend the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code and to make a related amendment and a consequential amendment to other acts, the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs is very pleased about this initiative. This bill very much targets the needs of Quebec hunters because it simplifies the procedures for awarding a permit for users who follow the law, while strengthening safety and education.

Some aspects of the bill, such as the fusion of the possession only licence and the possession and acquisition licence, and the establishment of a six-month grace period for the renewal of this permit, will allow hunters to avoid criminal charges due to simple administrative errors. These components will make the lives of hunters easier.

The Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs has always been a proponent of education and safety in terms of firearms use.

•(1010)

Removing the obligation to take the Firearms Safety Course is excellent news. In Quebec, a person already has to take and pass the course if he or she wants to obtain a hunting certificate.

Since 2013, the cost of the Canadian Firearms Safety Course exam was increased following a request by the Chief Firearms Officer, and it then cost the same as the Firearms Safety Course, to encourage people to take the training. So in 2014, 33 people took the Firearms Safety Course, as compared to over 200 in 2012.

The federation supports prohibiting firearms ownership by people who have been found guilty of domestic violence. The changes made to the legislation will make it easier for hunters to carry on their activities in Quebec, while strengthening security, which is essential for the federation.

Thank you for listening, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Latraverse.

[English]

We will now go to the first round of questions for seven minutes.

Mr. Leef, please.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Do you consider yourself and the members of your federation to be the gun lobby?

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Latraverse:** We are not a gun lobby. First, our federation promotes hunting and fishing activities, and ensures that these activities respect nature, the animals and users.

Firearms are only part of our activities. Our activities involve hunting animals while respecting them. We are not a gun lobby. We also use bows and crossbows, which are projectile weapons. They are not firearms. We also look at those things to ensure that hunting is done well and is good for all of society.

Quebec benefits to the tune of \$1.6 billion through hunting activities on its territory.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** You've listed 125,000 members of your association and there are hundreds of thousands of Canadians who belong to fish and wildlife federations and groups across Canada. Part of hunting of course involves the lawful, ethical use of firearms and of course the courses that come with that, be it the Canadian firearms safety course or provincial hunter education training programs.

From your experience, as I'm sure you've worked with all those groups and associations across Canada, do you and your colleagues in those associations believe it is reasonable that, the moment a firearms licence expires, Canadian citizens would be subject to firearms seizures and immediate criminal sanctions?

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Latraverse:** I did not quite understand the question. The voice of the interpreter was a little weak.

In Quebec, you have to take the Firearms Safety Course to get a hunting certificate, which then allows you to purchase a permit. It's a very basic course to ensure that people know how to safely handle firearms. You already have to take two courses to hunt with a firearm in Quebec.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** Thank you.

[*English*]

There's interpretation but that was well said anyway.

Maybe I'll pose that question to you, Ms. Rathjen.

Currently, present day, when a licence expires and when a person has taken the Canadian firearms safety course, many of whom are federation members who take additional courses for hunter education and ethics development programs, immediately they're subject to criminal sanctions and the seizure of their firearms.

Do you believe it to be reasonable that a Canadian would face criminal sanctions the moment a licence expires?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** I think it's important to ask that question in a larger context. This is not just about hunters and their licences expiring. First, there's police discretion in laying charges or not in various cases.

Second, the reason we have licences is to make sure, as this government has said many times, that those who own guns are authorized, are able, and are safe to own guns. This is important in initial screening, but it's also important on an ongoing basis, especially if you look at specific cases of...

This government has often said, as an argument supporting the abolition of the registry, that you don't need to know exactly what guns are on the premises when you're called for a domestic violence incident or something like that. You just check and see if the people who live in the house own guns and that should be enough for them to take preventive actions. To know if an owner or person in a home owns a gun, the licence has to be up to date. That's the only thing

now that can tell police if this is a gun owner, because if you own guns you at least need to have a licence.

**Mr. Ryan Leef:** I'm sorry, I have limited time.

I was wondering specifically if you thought it was reasonable that a Canadian would face criminal sanctions.

Maybe I could help you a little. I did like the line you said, that we need to focus on ideology over...or you suggested that our government is focusing on ideology over expertise. Of course I have longitudinal, peer-reviewed studies that clearly show that licensed Canadian firearms are less likely to be used to commit murder, if we're talking about the most extreme end of violence.

But I couldn't help but miss.... I'm coming at this from the perspective of a former Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer, a former conservation officer, who on a daily basis dealt with law-abiding Canadian firearms owners. I never had access to that registry. I never had access to that information you're talking about. I wouldn't have had access to any of the ATT information that's being highlighted in this bill, so I think you're overemphasizing some of the information that you believe police and conservation officers or any other law enforcement officer in this country would have had. That just simply wasn't available and that's not about to change under this piece of legislation.

The one piece I do find a little disconcerting is that I think it's important we have a logical, rational discussion on this, because I haven't missed some of the sensationalization of the firearms that you've presented. When you focused on the .50 calibre that could pierce bulletproof vests, this may seem like semantics to you but this helps us lead to a rational discussion on this. There's no such thing as a bulletproof vest; there are only bullet-resistant vests and they're designed for law enforcement officers to protect themselves from the firearms they carry on their own hip, not against any others. There isn't a hunting rifle that can't pierce a bullet-resistant vest on a police officer.

You build these things in to sensationalize something, to make Canadians fear that a .50 calibre is out there and suggest that's going to create a risk for law enforcement officers. I can tell you as a law enforcement officer that's not the case.

• (1020)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Your time has expired.

We will now go to Madam Doré Lefebvre.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the three witnesses who are appearing at our meeting, namely Mr. Latraverse via video conference, Ms. Rathjen and Mr. Laganière, on the important subject of Bill C-42. Allow me to first address the members of PolyRemembers and ask them a few questions.

Just before you spoke, we heard from the Coalition for Gun Control. Representatives for that group said that there had been a lack of consultation about the provisions contained in Bill C-42 with regard to violence against women.

I know that you represent an organization which plainly highlights all the acts of gun violence committed against women. If possible, I would like you to speak more to that aspect.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** I would like to specify that we are not a women's group specialized in preventing domestic violence. We are simple citizens who represent witnesses to and victims of gun violence.

The issue of domestic violence is absolutely critical. Firearms are often an important factor in domestic violence. I believe that the changes made under Bill C-42 are not significant in that regard. As far as I know, no women's group has been consulted and no group fighting domestic violence have asked for these types of changes.

The coalition clearly explained that an indefinite prohibition order, as opposed to one limited to 10 years, will change nothing. In fact, it won't change very much. This was added to the bill so that the government can claim that the bill will strengthen gun control, when all other significant measures will be watered down. Controls at every level will be weakened, except for one provision on imports.

All of the measures we are discussing today, and which have been debated by the media and in the House of Commons, will weaken gun control. These measures were not introduced in the interest of public safety, but rather to respond to the complaints of groups representing gun owners and the gun lobby.

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** You have led me to where I wanted to go with my second question, which has to do with the classification of firearms.

The power to classify firearms will lie with cabinet instead of with groups of experts, such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The RCMP has experts who understand what is happening on the market, and who classify firearms within a reasonable timeframe, among other things.

What do you think of the changes being made to the current system and to the weakening of the classification system?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** It's extremely worrying. We want assault weapons to be prohibited, or at the very least, restricted, because they are extremely dangerous. They are designed to kill human beings in war situations. There are different models of firearms. They have to be assessed and experts need to be able to review the criteria and the different military features of weapons in order to classify them.

The current government has done nothing to classify new models entering the market. These models are often labelled as being unrestricted, and so they are not subject to any kind of control. It's only later on that the RCMP is able to find the models which clearly have been misclassified under the law. The criteria still have not been updated. The list of prohibited models has not been updated, but at least the police is trying to apply certain criteria in reclassifying misclassified firearms. The reaction of the current government is to reverse these decisions, to complain and to declare amnesties.

Last summer, regulations were very quietly adopted. Under these regulations, the RCMP cannot reclassify a firearm for one year after the date the firearm was initially classified. This was done for the benefit of companies with commercial interests. Bill C-42 builds on

those regulations to subject the law to future regulations which we know nothing of yet. That way, it will be possible to completely overturn this decisions made at the discretion of the RCMP.

We know very well that this government really doesn't care about who owns this type of firearm. None of the three investigations which followed the shooting of three police officers in Moncton asked how someone like Justin Bourque could have obtained assault weapons, nor why that was allowed to happen. On the contrary, the investigations tried to determine how to better arm police officers, instead of preventing people from owning assault weapons.

Everything indicates that these new regulations will go against public safety and will make it easier for firearm owners to access weapons designed for military purposes which, in our view, should never end up in the hands of ordinary citizens.

• (1025)

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Several police forces across the country have expressed their concerns with regard to the transportation of firearms and the changes being made to provisions which will allow prohibited or restricted weapons to be transported. In their view, it will be extremely difficult to enforce this and they are very concerned.

Do you share the concerns voiced by the various police forces regarding these types of weapons and the changes which will be made to provisions governing the transportation of prohibited firearms?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** I have not been made aware of their concerns. But one thing is sure, by loosening the safeguards around restricted firearms—and the current government has admitted that these are dangerous weapons—we are increasing the risk of their falling into the wrong hands, and the risk that they could be used impulsively.

In the United States, road rage often ends with shots being fired rather than punches being exchanged. By allowing the transportation of restricted weapons between thousands of places—shooting clubs, firing ranges and police stations, amongst other places—there is no doubt that, regardless of where you are with your handgun, you might be between your home and one of these other places.

Lastly, under Bill C-42, handgun owners, who have them for very specific purposes, for instance to go to a shooting club, to a firing range or to a gunsmith to get them fixed, will be able to transport them anywhere.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Rathjen. We're well over time. I'm very sorry.

Mr. Falk, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witnesses for coming to committee this morning and for testifying to this common-sense firearms legislation that's before us in the form of Bill C-42.



Some of the testimony provided by Ms. Rathjen and Mr. Laganière seem to be very extreme. You talk about United States statistics at gun shows. You talk about road rage, yet you don't talk about the issue at hand, which is Bill C-42. That's really what we're here to discuss.

Mr. Laganière, you made a comment in your testimony that said this legislation will make it easier to access firearms. What in the legislation do you see will make it easier to access firearms?

[Translation]

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Would you like me to answer?

**Mr. Benoît Laganière:** Yes, go ahead.

[English]

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** It's by weakening controls on a number of levels.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** Actually, I put the question to Mr. Laganière.

He made the comment that it was—

[Translation]

**Mr. Benoît Laganière:** The comment I made was a joint one. I am a simple citizen who witnessed a massacre.

Given the speed at which Conservatives table bills that change existing laws, it's difficult to...

•(1030)

[English]

**Mr. Ted Falk:** Could you please answer the question? What in this legislation do you see will make it easier to access firearms?

It's a very simple question.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Do you want me to answer?

**Mr. Ted Falk:** I don't think there is an answer because there is nothing in this legislation that will make it easier.

**The Chair:** On a point of order, we have Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, the two witnesses are before us as a group. They should be able to decide who answers the question rather than be berated by members of Parliament for not having done so.

**The Chair:** The question is asked of a witness and the questioner has an opportunity to listen. If there's no response, the questioner can go on to another question.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** I'll go on to a different question.

Mr. Latraverse, part of this legislation, Bill C-42, merges a possession-only licence together with the possession and acquisition licence.

Can you speak to how you see that as being a positive or a negative?

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Latraverse:** It's a very positive measure, given that there will only be a single licence under these conditions. This is much more representative of what owning a firearm is like. Currently, there are two licences: a possession licence and a possession and acquisition licence. If you only have a possession

licence, you cannot purchase firearms. You have to go back through the system to buy a possession and acquisition licence.

With the merger, a hunter won't have to go through the whole administrative process again to purchase another firearm. You absolutely need a possession licence before you can buy a gun. To us, the merger of these two licences is critical. It greatly simplifies gun ownership. Say you decided years ago to own a single gun, but since then you've developed a passion for another type of hunting that requires a different firearm, then you have to go through the whole process again to purchase a firearm, even though you were a model citizen.

[English]

**Mr. Ted Falk:** I appreciate that clarification. I think there's another aspect.

In the first hour of testimony today at committee, we heard Ms. Cukier, who represented the gun control group, state that the possession-only licence didn't require the same amount of rigour and screening as a possession and acquisition licence, and that merging those two licences will actually make sure that going forward, anybody who wants to get a firearms licence undertakes the full rigour, the full screening, that is currently in the possession and acquisition licensing.

Would that be accurate?

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Latraverse:** As pertains to the merger of the two licences, the RCMP will do the screening, which remains the same. The process will be the same as for a new gun owner. You'll have to take the new Canadian Firearms Safety Course. Once you complete that course and pass the introductory course on hunting with a firearm, you can apply for a gun licence. New gun owners will have to do all that.

In our view, this is a valid way to licence. The RCMP undertakes a thorough investigation of the individual's record. He or she must answer a bunch of very personal questions. Once the information is registered, sent to the RCMP and analyzed, the individual receives a licence that allows him or her to purchase a firearm to practice their favourite sport. In our case, it will involve wildlife and hunting activities. The courses, along with all the thorough questions, are very important to us. We are in favour of the gun licence and the merger of these two licences. Indeed, it would simplify the life of those who wish to practice a healthy activity that benefits all of society.

However, the same does not apply to restricted firearms, an issue I won't dive into here. Restricted firearms are the jurisdiction of gun ranges and shooting federations, not of hunting and fishing associations. Our interest is in hunting and wildlife activities. You should properly apply for a licence after having followed courses. Those who practice these activities are responsible citizens.

•(1035)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Falk. We have completed now.

Mr. Easter, please.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thank you to the witnesses.

Just coming off Mr. Falk's question, Mr. Chair, can any of the witnesses answer? On the combining of the licence and where a person currently has a possession-only licence, Mr. Latraverse indicated the word "new". People coming in to get a licence would have to go through the screening, etc.

What about the ones who already have a possession-only licence? Are they grandfathered in? Do they have to take the screening? Is there a police check on those, because this is going to give them new authorization to buy ammunition, buy new guns, etc.? Are they grandfathered in, or do they have to meet the additional requirements that regular licences require? Does anybody know?

**The Chair:** First, Ms. Rathjen.

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Well, I think the whole point of merging the possession-only licences with the possession and acquisition licences is to exempt the half a million gun owners who have not gone through screening to get an acquisition licence. It allows them to acquire new guns without going through that process; otherwise, they would just go through the process and get an acquisition licence because that's what you have to do as a gun owner if you want to buy guns.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, I do think there are a couple of interpretations on that, and maybe we can ask our researchers if they could check that one out. I honestly don't know the answer.

I was going to raise a point of order earlier, Mr. Chair, but I'll take it out of my own time because it's really a question to the clerk. Does the clerk know if there are any police associations coming forward? I know we've asked three and they've all declined.

Given the concern around both the transportation and the reclassification of guns, it's absolutely essential that we hear from some police associations. Does the clerk know if there are any on the list as of yet?

**The Clerk:** There has been correspondence today that I haven't had a chance to review because I'm here with the members in committee, but I'll be sure to update all members on this information as soon as possible after today's meeting.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We have one space open, but every police association we've asked to date has declined, and that concerns me because I do think we need to hear from them, especially relative to transportation and reclassification. I would hope we don't have to subpoena someone from a police association to come.

I want to come back to you, Ms. Rathjen. I certainly do respect your right, while we're discussing Bill C-42, to lay out your arguments on the cumulative effect of changes to gun laws by previous legislative changes, and in fact, changes to regulations. My question goes to regulations because you have indicated a couple that seem to increase the risk to public safety as it relates to gun shows.

Do you have a list of those regulatory changes that have been made over the past two or three years that you can provide to the committee?

● (1040)

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** I don't have a list. I think that's one of the reasons it would be important to have police and some representative of the chief firearms officers here to testify. As I've said, we are not experts.

The examples that I named are examples I found just doing my own research, based on media stories, and also complaints from the gun lobby. They complain about these regulations. I'm sure there is a whole list of them that I don't know about, that our group doesn't know about, that would be very relevant for this committee to hear about.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We've certainly made note of the ones you do have.

I want to come back to Ms. Doré Lefebvre's point on classification. Could you expand on the reclassification?

Basically we have a situation now where experts—the RCMP—make the decision. The minister has ways and means of changing that decision if he or she wants to, but this legislation completely turns it on its head and it becomes strictly a political decision. I personally, having been a minister, don't know why any minister would ever want to put themselves in that position where you get the lobby coming in to say to you that they want this changed. I think it's wrong-headed.

But do you have anything further to add to that and the dangers that may pose to society by giving the minister the final say, based on political pressure?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Well, we live in a democracy. I know that we don't agree with all the laws that are passed, but we do have on the books criteria and laws regarding assault weapons that have been reinforced by the Supreme Court. That's why semi-automatic weapons that can be converted to automatic are deemed to be automatic weapons and prohibited.

It is the police, the RCMP, who have pointed out, I have to say, the dangers of these weapons, including .50 calibre weapons and other weapons with military characteristics. The police use the law as a tool to protect the public as best it can. What this law would do is that it would take away the ability of the police basically to do their job, to protect the public safety with the laws we have. It gives the minister, who has a political position, the ability to overrule any of the decisions of the RCMP regarding the proper classification of dangerous weapons with public safety in mind.

As we've seen up until now, political interests are not the same as public safety interests. They go against what the RCMP has deemed as being necessary to protect the public. For that reason, we do not agree with—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry; we're over time again, Ms. Rathjen, but thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Easter. Your time has expired.

We have a couple of minutes left for Mr. Rousseau.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Rathjen and Mr. Laganière, you are here because you are part of the prevention group, and prevention is nowhere mentioned in Bill C-42. You weren't even consulted. That's why you're here today, in fact.

According to you, what should be done in terms of screening and the mental health of people who wish to purchase a licence? You said that it was possible to buy firearms online. What are the repercussions of such a market? Bill C-42 says nothing about putting a stop to this kind of market. What are your thoughts?

**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:** Obviously, mental health is a key factor in screening certain people. In the screening process, there is an opportunity to check if someone has had mental health problems, and it occurs when the licence is about to be granted. This is extremely important. The possession licence granting process has been severely weakened. Bill C-19 had an enormous loophole whereby an online vendor, no matter where they were located, no longer had to check if the buyer had a valid licence. Everything is done in the dark and there is no compulsory check for a valid possession licence. It's all voluntary.

This loophole is extremely dangerous when you think of the economic incentive to sell a gun or the incentive for a dishonest individual who wishes to purchase a gun without being allowed to. We currently have assault rifles classified as unrestricted firearms

that go unregistered and can be sold online without the vendor checking whether the buyer has a valid possession licence. That's where we find ourselves today.

• (1045)

**Mr. Jean Rousseau:** Do I still have some time?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** No, your time is up.

To our witnesses Ms. Rathjen, Mr. Laganière, and Mr. Latraverse, thank you very much for your preparation and for your time here today.

Just before we adjourn, colleagues, I would like a motion to approve the budget for the meeting here. It's \$16,700. Do I have concurrence to propose?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**The Chair:** All in favour?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We are adjourned.

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