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Chair

Mr. Daryl Kramp

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● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)): Okay, colleagues, welcome to meeting number 67 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today we are dealing clause by clause with Bill C-42. We have with us today witnesses to answer any questions, should that be necessary. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Lyndon Murdock, the director of firearms and operational policing policy. Thank you, sir. We also have Robert Abramowitz, counsel for legal services. Thank you. From the Department of Justice, we have Julie Besner, the acting senior counsel from the criminal law policy section.

Welcome to all of our assistants here today. Certainly we will be calling on you, should your expertise be needed.

Colleagues, I would just maybe mention one small point for your consideration. Going forward with any potential legislation that comes before this committee—of course, there are bills right now at second reading—the chair certainly is not going to be presumptuous and suggest that we're to deal with any particular one. However, should we deal with one, I would just ask all of our colleagues at committee to be mindful of any potential witness lists they might prepare and/or be prepared to put to the clerk, so that the clerk is not left hanging at the very end trying to look for a witness. I just bring this to your attention. It is certainly only an observation by the chair and not a request at this particular point. That'll be up to each individual member of this committee.

Yes, Mr. Easter?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): On witnesses, Mr. Chair, I don't know whether we'll face it in other legislation, but we have faced it with this one, Bill C-42, and that's the procedure for subpoenaing witnesses. What it is? I guess I could find out from the clerk.

It's absolutely astounding that we're dealing with a bill, the common sense firearms act, and the RCMP, who are in charge of that, refused to come. The larger police forces in the country refused to come. That's a serious matter because we're dealing with a bill now without having had the experience of a number of police forces on the ground. I don't know what the reason is for their not coming here; it would be not right for me to speculate.

What is the process for subpoenaing witnesses? Because if we need them, we need them.

The Chair: The chair would certainly confer with the clerk just for a second, but my first thought on this as chair would be to suggest that, of course, that's at the will of the committee. If the committee decides that is the way they wish to proceed, then, of course, the committee has that authority and that right to do so. That would have to be a decision of the committee to do so.

I would ask the clerk for further clarification, if it's necessary.

The chair has been advised that that really is the process we would use, Mr. Easter, if at some particular point a motion were to come before the floor to that effect and the committee committee supported going down that road. Traditionally that has not happened, but the chair has seen a couple of occasions in the years he's been here where that has taken place.

Colleagues, we will now go to clause by clause on Bill C-42. We are going to deal with the short title, of course. It'll be postponed until after we finish the bill, should there be any changes to that. Right now we'll go to clause 2.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

(Clause 3 agreed to on division)

(On clause 4)

The Chair: Now we have an NDP amendment, I do believe.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

While we have great overall concerns about the overall impact of this bill, one thing that we heard from witnesses at committee, and increasingly from residents from rural and remote areas, is the concern that this bill will eliminate the ability to challenge the firearms test.

While we do support the firearm safety course and believe that everyone should take that course, it's simply not a practical reality for many in the far north or in rural areas to do so. In some places, the course is only offered either very irregularly during the year or it requires someone to travel two, three, or four hours, and stay overnight to take the course. It involves great inconvenience and cost to those people.

What we're proposing in this amendment is restoring the ability to challenge the firearms licencing test. We're really just restoring the existing wording in the law, by deleting the changes that were proposed to paragraph 7(1)(b) of the existing act.

It's a fairly simple amendment. It restores the existing situation, where it is possible to challenge the test. By no means are we arguing that the safety tests are of no value; we're just trying to accommodate those who live in rural and remote parts of Canada.

The Chair: For those who were trying to follow along here, if you have the amendment, we are talking about clause 4, on page 2, and we're talking about deleting lines 8 to 24.

Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you.

I won't be supporting NDP-1.

The intent of this bill was two-fold. One was to reduce red tape for law-abiding firearms owners. The other was ensuring greater capacity for public safety.

A number of things within the bill were directly related to that. This one here that you're proposing would actually remove the requirement for someone to take that course. We believe it is in the interest of public safety and, therefore, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I think Randall brings up an interesting point. Could the witnesses here explain what process the bill proposes, and what happens to an individual who can't take the safety training course? In some cases, in remote areas, it would be a long time. Could someone answer that?

Is there any avenue available to individuals who live in remote areas for them to meet these conditions? Maybe they have to travel, but could witnesses expand on what's proposed in the bill?

● (0855)

The Chair: Mr. Murdock.

Mr. Lyndon Murdock (Director, Firearms and Operational Policing Policy, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): With respect to what is proposed in the legislation, as has been noted, individuals will be required to take the course and successfully pass the test. The only exception that would be available would be for aboriginals. There is a carve out for members of the aboriginal community to challenge the test directly.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that clarification.

I see no further comment.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Is it only the aboriginal community that can challenge the test?

Mr. Lyndon Murdock: With the scheme that is proposed in Bill C-42, that would be the case, yes.

Hon. Wayne Easter: So, would some people in remote areas be in a different situation than those in the aboriginal community?

Mr. Lyndon Murdock: Correct.

The Chair: On NDP-1, all in favour? Opposed?

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 4 agreed to on division)

(Clause 5 agreed to on division)

(On clause 6)

The Chair: We will now go to PV-1. If this motion were to be adopted, then we could no proceed with the Liberal amendment coming up, as it amends the same lines.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Bill C-42 does provide automatic authorization to transport weapons as part of the licensing, and for that reason we will be voting against the bill. We think that is wrong in principle.

What Ms. May has proposed here tries to deal with that piece by piece through the bill. We do support the concept she's raised, so we will be voting in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Fine. Thank you very much.

Yes, Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can't support this amendment. The intent of this bill is to eliminate a lot of the red tape. Once you have a firearms, it's automatically the case that you can transport it to a sporting goods store for repairs, or to a range. I think this is appropriate in the bill.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Yes, Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: Just as one other comment, we heard from a number of the witnesses on this. In fact, someone actually brought a couple of examples where they actually had an ATT that was valid for multiple years. It wasn't just for a specific trip.

Again, the intent of this bill is to reduce red tape, as well as to bring an increased public safety factor into the community, so I will not be supporting this amendment either.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Yes, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: One of the things Mr. Easter raised earlier was the fact that we had not heard from the law enforcement community on this. One of the concerns we have with the whole automatic authorization to transport is that it makes it very difficult for law enforcement to enforce the provisions against the illegal transport of guns.

When it comes to public safety, we think this provision does not in fact enhance public safety. Again, that's one of the chief reasons we'll be voting against the bill as a whole but are supporting this amendment, because it does raise that issue.

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

Yes, Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne: We've heard from witnesses that in fact the CFO just wrote out this thing, stuck it in a drawer, and the police never knew at any point in time when a firearm was being transported. To me, that has no bearing at all on this case. Once you have that licence, it gives you the authorization. As we've heard from previous witnesses and as Ms. James said, in fact you can transport over longer periods of time, not just for the year.

Thank you.

● (0900)

The Chair: All in favour of the amendment by the Green Party?

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We will now go to LIB-1.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, our amendment is to add proposed paragraph 19(2.1)(f) to the bill, as follows:

> (f) to a port of exit in another province in order to take them outside Canada, and from a port of entry in another province, if there is no port of exit or port of entry in the individual's province of residence.

The amendment basically attempts to clarify the situation with respect to P.E.I,. Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador so that the firearms owners in those provinces would enjoy the same rights as those in provinces with land ports of entry and exit.

I guess, to put it this way, it's to bring better balance and equality to all the provinces, including those that may not have a point of entry or exit.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Easter.

Yes, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: We will be supporting Mr. Easter's amendment. We think it's a common sense amendment, as the government likes to say. The number of times those who need to transport to an exit would be small, but it would be individuals who would do so on a regular basis. That could easily be accommodated under the existing system.

The Chair: Mr. Garrison, did I hear you endorsing the government's common sense?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randall Garrison: No, the concept of common sense, which the government likes to cite.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Leef, you have the floor.

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

I appreciate what Mr. Easter is proposing, but on the one hand they're opposing a bill based on what they continue to purport to Canadians is free and clear access of firearms in the country. We've heard over and over again from our witnesses about how some of the questions they've put are completely misleading.

This isn't about provincial fairness in any respect. The constituents in Yukon who want to transport their firearms out of Yukon to anywhere other than Alaska need to get the appropriate licences to enter British Columbia and then take it to a point of entry in British Columbia. If they want to exit the country through a point of entry in Alberta, they would need one from the Province of B.C. and then the Province of Alberta in order to get it out of the country and into the United States that way.

There is no owned advantage by any province in this bill. It's not putting any other province at a disadvantage by having to get licences to do interprovincial transport, save for the piece where you happen to be living on a particular point of entry with a particular state in the United States. So in that vein I could argue that Yukoners don't have the same access to the United States or the same rights as Ontarians, because they can enter different states in the U.S.

I think if we start using that line of argument for interprovincial transport for equal and unfettered access to all points of entry in the United States, what we would run into is a lot of cross-country mobility and some very confusing amendments and additions to firearms paperwork that would only increase the burden and the red tape that we're trying to avoid in the first place.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Leef actually said some of the things I wanted to say. The chief firearms officer is responsible for the province, so basically this amendment proposes that an individual could carry firearms across provincial jurisdictions without the chief firearms officer of the province he's crossing into even being made aware of it.

The intent of this bill is to reduce red tape for law-abiding firearms owners within the provincial jurisdiction in which they reside.

Of course, it's all over the Internet that the Liberals are trying to fundraise by saying that this bill allows firearms owners to carry their guns absolutely anywhere, to grocery stores and anywhere else. This amendment is actually proposing to go beyond that and take it into other provincial jurisdictions.

I don't know which way he wants this bill to go, but for all of those reasons, I will not be supporting this.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: It wouldn't be on topic, Mr. Chair, but if we want to get into the history of fundraising and firearms, the real reason—

The Chair: Mr. Easter, no, let's not go there.

Mr. Wayne Easter: Well—

The Chair: No, Mr. Easter. We're dealing with this bill and that's how we will proceed. I would also caution the parliamentary secretary to follow the same line of questioning.

Let's just proceed with the bill, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, Mr. Chair, whether we agree with certain sections of the bill as a party or not, and we do have some concerns over the open transportation, we think there should be.... We're always willing to improve a bill. We don't get caught in an ideological stance like the government does, and we want to see some equality across the provinces. That's why this amendment is there.

We know that this bill is being brought forward, Mr. Chair, simply put, so that they can get into fundraising again in the gun community. That's why it's here. Those are the facts.

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

Are there any further speakers?

(Amendment negatived)

(Clause 6 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Colleagues, we have an opportunity here, should the committee wish, for the chair to call clauses 7 to 9. Are we comfortable with that?

(Clauses 7 to 9 inclusive agreed to on division)

(On clause 10)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have amendment G-1.

Yes, Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: This is a small technical amendment. It's basically replacing line 6, which currently says "following before section 43", with "following in numerical order". It has to do with correcting a numbering error that came as a result of the Statutes Repeal Act this year. It's a technical amendment that doesn't change the intent of or anything in the bill.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 10 as amended agreed to on division)

(Clause 11 agreed to on division)

(On clause 12)

The Chair: We have an amendment suggested by the Green Party, amendment PV-2:

That Bill C-42, in Clause 12, be amended by deleting lines 28 to 33 on page 6.

Yes, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: There's no one here from the Green Party. Does someone have to move this before we talk about it?

The Chair: It is deemed moved, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay.

Then to the witnesses, what is the net impact of deleting lines 28 to 33? I have some concerns about the ability of the federal government to impose its will on the chief firearms officers in the provinces, especially in the Province of Quebec, actually, more so than my own. If we were to support the deletion of lines 28 to 33, does that not take more authority away from the chief firearms officers in the province? Or am I reading that wrong? It says "exceptions". Could the witnesses expand on what would be the impact of this amendment?

● (0910)

Mr. Robert Abramowitz (Counsel, Legal Services, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): The impact of this amendment would be to remove a clause, making it clear that chief firearms officers' discretion to attach conditions to licences or authorizations is subject to the regulations. That is what the clause is aimed at doing.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay. So the net impact would be to take away the ability of the federal minister to order a chief firearms officer around in a province by regulation. Would that be a direct way of putting it?

Mr. Robert Abramowitz: The way I would answer that is to say that the clause is aimed at making it clearer. It would not take away the ability for the government to make regulations.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'd like to ask another question, Mr. Chair, because we are getting into the federal government, whatever political stripe happens to be in power, through the minister, imposing its will on chief firearms officers in the provinces. Is there any ability for a chief firearms officer or a province to argue against those federal regulations that make certain impositions on chief firearms officers within the province?

Mr. Lyndon Murdock: Again, as Mr. Abramowitz has just mentioned, the amendment before us would essentially remove the ability of the government to bring forward regulations. These regulations are really all about ensuring that the federal government has an ability to ensure there is consistency in how this federal program is administered. It does still provide CFOs the flexibility to introduce measures to address the realities of their own jurisdictions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Still, my question hasn't been answered. As the federal government brings in a regulation for "consistency", as we could call it, is there consultation with the provinces or the chief firearms officers within the provinces when they bring in those additional regulations, or is it just that this is the way it will be, and that's it?

Mr. Lyndon Murdock: With respect to bringing forward the regulations, there is the consultation through the *Canada Gazette*. Regulations are generally pre-published, and organizations have opportunity to provide comments. There is consultation through that process.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay, so it would be under the regular process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for the clarification.

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 12 agreed to on division)

(On clause 13)

The Chair: We have an amendment proposed by the Green Party, amendment PV-3, which calls for deleting lines 8 to 12 on page 7. You can turn to page 7 of the bill.

Mr. Garrison.

● (0915)

Mr. Randall Garrison: In the absence of Ms. May, we'd just like to say that this again deals with the automatic authorization to transport weapons, which we believe does raise public safety concerns, so we will be supporting her amendment.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 13 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Colleagues, we have the opportunity to go from clause 14 to clause 17. We can group them if it is the will of the committee.

(Clauses 14 to 17 inclusive agreed to on division)

(On clause 18)

The Chair: We have an amendment proposed by the NDP.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I believe these are in the process of being circulated to committee members.

This amendment would eliminate the ability of cabinet to make exemptions to the classifications of firearms that have been established in law. We think that not only is this wrong in practice, it's probably also wrong in law, because the purpose of regulations or cabinet activities is normally to implement laws passed by Parliament, not to create exceptions to laws passed by Parliament.

In addition to the political question it raises about politicization of firearms, we think it creates a very negative precedent with regard to protecting the right of Parliament to make the basic decisions, and it is not for cabinet to create exemptions to existing pieces of law.

It goes back to one of our fundamental concerns about this bill, which is the politicization of the issue of classification of firearms.

The Chair: Fine. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, just for your reference, this amendment is suggesting that lines 26 and 27 on page 8 be deleted. Mr. Garrison has had the conversation in his introduction.

Is there any further comment? I'll give you a second to peruse that.

Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: I don't think it's any surprise that I'm not going to be supporting that amendment. It goes against part of the purpose of this bill. I don't really need to say anything further on that.

The Chair: Thank you very kindly.

All in favour of NDP-2? All opposed?

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 18 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Colleagues, we have the opportunity to group clauses 19 to 33 should you wish.

(Clauses 19 to 33 inclusive agreed to on division)

(On clause 34)

The Chair: We have a proposed Liberal amendment number 2, and the chair has a ruling on that.

Mr. Easter, would you like to move that first before the chair makes a ruling?

● (0920)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, I will move it, Mr. Chair, because it makes so much sense that experts be in charge rather than just the Governor in Council.

The Chair: Thank you. The chair will read the ruling on this based on the advice and counsel of our staff.

The amendment envisions a role for the commissioner of firearms in the regulation-making process, thus introducing a new concept into the bill.

As stated on page 766 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition:

> An amendment to a bill that was referred to committee *after* second reading is out of order if it is beyond the scope and principle of the bill.

In the opinion of the chair, this amendment does go beyond the scope of the bill, therefore the chair rules that the amendment is inadmissible.

The Chair: We will now go to the vote on clause 34.

(Clause 34 agreed to)

(Clauses 35 to 38 inclusive agreed to on division)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are now dealing with the short title. Shall clause 1 carry?

(Clause 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Yes, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We are in the situation where we have another bill that has been rushed through Parliament using time allocation and rushed through committee. We have not heard from the full spectrum of witnesses we should have heard from with regard to a bill that's so important to public safety. We have not had any proposals to change any provisions in the bill from the government, so the bill stands as it was introduced.

We remain concerned about two things in this.

One, on which we presented an amendment today, is that non-aboriginal Canadians in rural or remote areas are losing the ability to challenge the firearms test. For a government that argues it's reducing red tape and unnecessary paperwork for gun owners, we think this is an example where they are in fact doing the opposite.

The second and probably larger objection deals with firearms classification. We've had this single example of the Swiss Arms classic green rifle, which was reclassified and seems to have caused the government to consider changing the whole classification system and introducing a political element that we do not believe should be there.

The current legislation allows the minister to exempt weapons that have a legitimate hunting or sporting use from the classification established in the law, and we think that's sufficient. This opens it up wide, and as I said in our discussion of the various clauses of the bill, it really politicizes the process of gun classification rather than leaving it up to experts. I always raise the prospect that the Conservatives service may not always be in government and may not be as happy with political decisions made on gun classification by other parties as they would be with ones made by themselves. I think that illustrates the problem. We don't believe any political party or politician should be making those basic decisions.

The final objection I wish to call attention to is the automatic authorization to transport. I have personally heard from many in the law enforcement community that this is not about the law-abiding citizen who has the authorization to transport; it's about their ability as law enforcement to enforce the law against the illegal transportation of goods, and those who don't have authorizations to transport.

What the scheme here creates is what one law enforcement official said to me, which was five automatic excuses for having a weapon in your car. And having not heard from law enforcement, I remain convinced that this is a significant public safety issue in this bill.

So at this point we will not be supporting the bill.

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

I see Mr. Breitkreuz wants to make a point. However, he's not subbed in. There would have to be the consent of the committee for him to speak.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's fine. You have the consent, Mr. Breitkreuz. Do you have a brief comment?

● (0925)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you very much, and thank you to the committee for allowing me to make a comment here. It's difficult for me to sit back and simply observe what's happening without making a comment on what Mr. Garrison has just said.

The CZ was alright to own for more than 10 years, and it appeared as if there were an arbitrary decision made at some point to suddenly criminalize a large number of people. In fact, it's not even known how many people would be caught by this reclassification.

There appeared to be no point for it, and I think for the people who are responsible for the classification to suddenly change their mind on something that was legally owned and had not been a problem for 10 years indicates why we have put this legislation in place to prevent this kind of thing.

The other impression that is often left in regard to the authorization to transport is that somehow suddenly you will be able to carry firearms wherever you wish. I'd like to point out to the committee that this does not change any of the restrictions that normally would apply in transporting firearms. You can still only transport your firearm where the licence allows you to, meaning to the shooting range, or basically a gunsmith, or that kind of thing.

To give the impression that suddenly guns will be carried all over our provinces is completely false. It does not change anything. I may not have a chance in the House to point this out, but I'd like to point it out to this committee.

I thank the committee for allowing me to make those comments.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said in the House, we do have some problems with this bill, Mr. Chair. There are also some areas in the bill that favour, but because of our concerns, especially about the turning over to the minister of the issues of classification, we'll be voting against the bill.

We certainly favour the combining of licences; I think that does make a lot of sense. The six-month grace period in terms of the licence makes sense. And the additional training we would agree to. But much like Randall said on the ability of the minister to classify guns from non-restricted to restricted, etc., that is a huge concern. Quite honestly, I don't know why any minister would want that authority, because it's going to put a lot of political pressure on the minister from some certain interest groups.

As for what Mr. Breitkreuz mentioned a minute ago on the classic green rifle, I'll not get into it, but I do have a memo to the previous minister, Vic Toews, in which it seemed to be recommended, and there was no problem then. All of a sudden there's a problem.

I think the government and the minister are making a big issue that could have been addressed another way. As a result, now turning over so much of the authority to the minister himself, who is subject to political pressure from interest groups, is a problem. I think it would have been better to have left it with the expert committee, in addition to the RCMP.

In any event, we won't be supporting the bill, but we do recognize that there are four areas in the bill that are quite useful and helpful to law-abiding gun owners.

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

Hon. Wayne Easter: There's one last point I want to make as well, because we had witnesses the other day from the gun community and I think we all should recognize the hunters and anglers. That is a huge industry and a huge recreational industry in many provinces across the country that brings a lot to the economy of Canada that we all benefit from. So we should recognize them as well. We're not only talking about guns here, but also about an important segment of the economy.

Thank you.

● (0930)

The Chair: Mr. Leef.

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

Thank you, Mr. Easter, for recognizing that the gun community involves hunting and angling. It was obviously a little disheartening for all of us to watch in the House members on your side chastise and criticize our government for entertaining a study on the value of hunting and conservation in the environment committee.

Outside of that point, I think we continue to put on the public record here things that simply aren't true. It needs to be clarified that when we're looking at what the minister can do now in terms of classification, the minister and cabinet can always move a classification of firearms in one direction, and what we heard in clear testimony was that they couldn't do it in any other way.

We talk about special interest groups and their influence. There are special interest groups that want to ban guns in this country. When you can classify a firearm in one direction and not another, that would leave any government, present or future, in the sights of one particular special interest group interested in banning firearms in this country.

Outside of that, we did hear clearly from the Canadian Shooting Sports Association and other witnesses that those decisions ultimately would be made on the basis of technical advice, not by a group of politicians sitting in a room and making their best guess at the specs of any given firearms that we're looking at classifying.

With that, I have the confidence that any minister, present or future, will make decisions based on expert and technical advice provided. It only makes sense that if they can do something in one direction, they can do something in both directions, which is the situation now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Seeing no further comments, shall the bill carry as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall I report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very kindly, colleagues.

Yes, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'll move my motion so everyone knows what it is. It's not on the agenda; it is with the clerk.

I move—

The Chair: Just give us one second, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: —the following:

> That the standing committee on Public Safety invite on an urgent basis the Auditor General of Canada to discuss Report 6 Preparing Male Offenders for Release - Correctional Service Canada.

I'll wait until people get the amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

The Chair now has a copy, but we'll have copies made and distributed to the committee in a couple of seconds.

We will suspend briefly.

Mr. Easter, could we ask, for the consideration of our witnesses, that they be dismissed at this time?

Hon. Wayne Easter: It's not a problem.

The Chair: Are we comfortable as a committee dismissing our witnesses at this point?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Fine, thank you very much.

On behalf of the entire committee, thank you very kindly for coming in today. Certainly, you may take your leave while we have a couple of discussions here.

Thank you very kindly.

● (0930)

(Pause)

● (0935)

The Chair: Okay, colleagues, we are back in session.

Mr. Easter, you have the floor, sir.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The reason I put forward this motion is that we did have the Auditor General's report come down. It's “Report 6—Preparing Male Offenders for Release—Correctional Service Canada”. It raises quite a number of concerns, and my motion really is that the committee invite, on an urgent basis, the Auditor General of Canada to appear before this committee. I think there are several reasons for doing so.

At some point in time when we're not held up by legislation, we will be continuing our study on CORCAN and educational programs within the Correctional Service of Canada to give inmates the employable skills they need when they leave the prison system. Although I have very strong reservations about the government having closed the prison farm system, the Auditor General makes clear that low-risk offenders are spending longer periods incarcerated without training. That's serious, because with low-risk offenders being in prison longer, I believe these places are becoming universities for crime rather than rehabilitation centres.

Also, part of the reason these individuals are not taking programs is that the very incentives that were paid to individuals to take training, or programming, was taken away from them by the Government of Canada. That's a Catch-22. There may be a financial saving for the Government of Canada. It may go well with their punishment regime, but the reality is that these individuals are coming out on the street. When they come out and hit the streets, if they have skills and training they have a better opportunity of getting a job, of contributing to Canada's economy, and not ending up back within the prison system.

Having the Auditor General here would be important for furthering our CORCAN study that we already have on the go.

The other area that I think is extremely important for the committee to hear about is this. We are the public safety committee, and the Auditor General was very critical of the slow decline in the effectiveness of the preparation for release program. In fact, I believe at one point he said that close to 1,500 people who ended up on the street in the 2013-14 fiscal year did not complete the programs before they were eligible for release. That's a number of programs, Mr. Chair. So we have a law and order government that, in fact, with their Correctional Service of Canada programming and their emphasis on punishment versus rehabilitation, now have people coming out on the street less rehabilitated, making our streets less safe. That's a huge problem.

In fact, in his report the Auditor General said, “Most of these offenders entered the community directly from medium and maximum-security penitentiaries, limiting their ability to benefit from gradual and supervised release that supports safe reintegration.”

I'll read one other quote and end there, Mr. Chair. The quote from the Auditor General sums up the issue.

● (0940)

> ...many offenders—about 65 percent in the 2013 to 2014 fiscal year—still did not complete their programs before they were first eligible for release. We also found that many low-risk offenders were not referred to correctional programs while in custody despite having identified risks to reoffend. CSC has not delivered tools to objectively assess the benefits of other correctional interventions—such as employment and education programs, and interactions with institutional parole officers—in preparing offenders for release.

The bottom line and why we must have the Auditor General here is the programming or lack of programming that's now done as a result of this government's policies. The net impact, I think, is very evident from the Auditor General's report in that our streets are actually less safe and will be increasingly so as we go down the road.

We are the public safety committee and the Auditor General's report is giving us a wake-up call. Therefore, I think we should have him before the committee to question him on the issues in the report, and we as a committee probably should reevaluate some of the programming and policies that the current Government of Canada is doing. The net impact is making our streets less safe. That's not what any of us want to see.

Therefore, I'm moving that we invite the Auditor General to appear before this committee to give us the details of this report so he can be questioned accordingly, and then we as a committee can make some recommendations.

Thank you very much.

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

Yes, Mr. Hayes, followed by Ms. James.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which is the oversight committee of Parliament, I feel a little wounded because the role of the Auditor General is to come before the public accounts committee, and the spring report has been tabled.

I think Mr. Valeriote—your colleague, Mr. Easter—set the precedent when on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs he moved a similar motion to what you're moving now, that the Auditor General appear before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs specific to veterans' mental health. When I explained to Mr. Valeriote that he should actually request that his colleague on the public accounts committee study the report there, that he should be a witness before that committee and question not only the Auditor General but also the officials, Mr. Valeriote graciously accepted. The public accounts committee studied that report and Mr. Valeriote was a very capable witness.

I believe that should remain within the purview of the public accounts committee, and I encourage you to speak with your colleague on that committee and have her bring that report forward to study.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Yes, Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: I was just going to say that I think we have a couple of committee members on the public accounts committee who can speak to the Auditor General coming to that committee.

Thank you, Mr. Hayes, for clarifying that. I thought that was the case and I appreciate your input.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Of course, we did not have notice that this motion was coming from Mr. Easter today, but I do fully support everything he had to say about it.

I guess I'm disappointed to see what seems to be a bit like a game of dodge ball on the government's side saying, we'll either have him appear here or here or here. And what we have in front of us is the motion that would actually guarantee that the issue of public safety is addressed in the committee that is responsible for it.

I fully support Mr. Easter's motion and I'd be very disappointed if the government chooses to try to deflect this by implying that he could appear somewhere else. This is in fact the appropriate committee for that report and I would look forward to having him before us so we can discuss his conclusions.

The Chair: Mr. Falk.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): I too am a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and the Auditor General just released the spring report like he typically does, and he has eight chapters.

As a government we get to choose two chapters, the NDP gets to choose a chapter, and the Liberal Party gets to choose a chapter, and that's the committee that studies reports that the Auditor General produces. I would encourage Mr. Easter to encourage his colleague on that committee to maybe request to study this report as their allotment of reports.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, as a last point, I expect, before we go to a vote, this is clearly and absolutely the committee that should deal with the Auditor General's report as it relates to Correctional Services of Canada. How many people, I wonder, on the public accounts committee have been dealing with these correctional issues as we have with the committee? How many inmates have they talked to? Have they been within any prison systems? Do they understand the scenarios within those prison systems, the rehabilitation programs, the parole boards, as we have gained experience doing as public safety committee members?

Clearly, the only committee that can really raise the hard questions with the Auditor General that need to be raised are the members of this committee. There may be some on public accounts, but that's why the Auditor General breaks his report into several sections. He just doesn't give a report overall on government business. He gives a report in the areas of jurisdiction that he's looking in to find specific programs.

I would suggest to government members on this committee that if they vote against bringing the Auditor General before this committee when it is a report dealing with this committee's issues, then they are being irresponsible in terms of their responsibility to Canadians on the issue of public safety.

That's where I stand. I would hope that the members of the government...because some hard questions need to be asked. I don't agree with everything the Auditor General says in here, by the way. We do need to ask some hard questions in terms of the analysis. But the end result of the report is really worrisome in that Canadians' public safety is being put at risk because of this government's strategy on how it handles the correctional service system of Canada. It's very important that we hear the Auditor General at this committee.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Easter.

Yes, Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: I have just a couple of points.

First of all, thank you to my colleague, Mr. Falk, for his comments on the purpose of the public accounts committee with respect to the Auditor General and the sections of that report. I think Mr. Easter knows full well that any member can substitute in at any committee they so choose, providing that their own committee members give them that opportunity.

I'm sure your colleague on public accounts would provide you with that opportunity if that were the section you chose to study.

Further, with regard to this motion, this Thursday we actually have the minister coming here as well as Don Head from Correctional Service of Canada. Some of those questions that Mr. Easter is concerned about could certainly be directed at that particular committee meeting. After that we potentially have legislation coming before this committee.

On the suggestion made by my two colleagues, that the actual public accounts committee study that section, I think that is the appropriate place for it to be directed.

Thank you.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Seeing no further debate, I will call the vote on the motion by Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'd like a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, the chair will ask for your indulgence for just a couple of seconds. Obviously we have the estimates on Thursday.

The chair is also seeking counsel from the committee to take a look at committee business. We need to know where we're going forward after that. We have potential legislation coming as well. The chair would suggest at this time maybe taking a few minutes at the end of the meeting on Thursday to put committee business on the agenda for whatever time the committee feels is appropriate.

Would 10 minutes, as an example, be a fair suggestion at this point? All in favour?

Fine. Thank you very much.

We are adjourned.