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Evidence of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Hearing on Bill C-391, Thursday, May 13, 2010

Mr. Brian Rahilly (Spokesperson, Dawson College Committee for Gun Control):

Thank you very much for the opportunity to come here and represent Dawson College on gun control. Our committee was formed a few days after the attack that took place at Dawson College on September 13, 2006.

Before I get into that, though, I would like to say something to the honourable member sitting beside Chief Bob Rich. I listened to his comments about the concerns he has as a representative of the indigenous people of the north, and I have a lot of sympathy for what he explained to everyone today. I will say, though, that I find what he said indicative of the sense of victimization the northern peoples and the hunters and farmers have.

I think if we take a good look at the sense of victimization, it's something that has been encouraged a lot by government spokesmen who have been repeating comments time and time again about the waste of money and the billions of dollars, yet the registry has been examined by the Auditor General and by other people.

Yes, there were extraordinary costs when the registry was put together. That's a problem we should leave to others, who can dig into the history and perhaps find out who to blame, but the system exists now. Perhaps the system has some faults in how it's been put together or in the financing, and it certainly doesn't have enough financing.

Chief Bob Rich says he can't support it if it can't be fixed. Certainly the system can be fixed. If we put together an incredible house but went way over budget, who in their right mind would say that since the house is not functioning properly--the plumbing is wrong, the electronics aren't very good, there's a leak in the roof--we should get rid of the house? Who would use that kind of logic?

I am very sad to hear this talk about victimization. If the registry is that difficult, then something has to be changed in the registry. I have a colleague who told me it took him months to get one of his rifles registered. That's a difficulty. I hope the government is not starving the registry of finances and personnel to the extent that people will continue to feel they are being victimized.

Now I will speak about Dawson College. Many of you know of this terrible incident that took place in 2006. I was there that day and I got to take a look at some of these faces you can see in this photograph. Dawson College has about 7,500 day students, faculty, and staff. Students fled the building, gunshots were heard, and police arrived. Guns were being waved everywhere. It is a terrible thing to see these looks on the faces of kids. This is something that should never happen.

It was a very tragic day. Nineteen people were injured, and unfortunately one of them died. I know the parents of the girl who's in this casket. If you could have met them and seen their faces, as I'm sure many of the professionals on this board have seen, these are faces you don't want to see. They're the faces that are beyond words. The despair and the anguish are a living nightmare, yet these people supported our committee, became members of our committee, were active, and came to Ottawa in November of 2006 to participate in a national press conference.

Why did they come? The registry did not prevent the death of their daughter, but their loss and the violence that ensued that day made them realize how important it is that Canadians have a reduced risk of being the victims of gun violence. This is what's important.

 (1615)

Three days after this incident the Prime Minister said on CBC radio that the gun registry didn't stop the attack at Dawson College. I'm sorry. It's a ridiculous statement to make. I cannot believe that the Prime Minister could have said such a thing.

After I heard him say it, I, with students and faculty, put together our committee. We looked into the problem of gun control in Canada. We listened to professionals who had something to say about it. I contacted the former head of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. I contacted chief firearms officers.

All of these people sitting here, who have some incredible amount of experience in this field, are not saying we should get rid of the registry. I think Chief Bob Rich is not saying we should get rid of the registry; he's saying fix it or get rid of it. It's overwhelming to think that a government would consider doing this. It's a regulation of eight million weapons in Canada that have paperwork, and we want to get rid of it?

We all know what has happened with deregulation in recent years. Remember the financial meltdown of the United States? That was deregulation. Remember the big oil spill in the gulf? That was deregulation. Now we're talking about deregulating firearms.

These are not garden tools. These are not a mechanic's tools. These are weapons designed to fire a projectile at a high speed at a target. Many of them are meant to kill people, such as this one. This is a picture of a Beretta Cx4 Storm. It is the firearm that was used to wreak havoc at Dawson College.

When Stockwell Day, then Minister of Public Safety, came to Dawson College, he told our committee that this gun has no business being in the hands of civilians. That was in 2006. We asked the minister about putting this gun on the prohibited list. He said he'd check it out. That was four years ago. It's not on the list. Neither is the Ruger Mini-14 that was used in the assassinations at École Polytechnique.

I think the government has shown a great deal of irresponsibility in dealing with gun control in Canada. One of the things that happened shortly after my meeting with Stockwell Day was that he sent me a letter, because I asked him for some information. In the very first paragraph he mentioned Gary Mauser. Gary Mauser is the grey eminence behind the Conservative move to scrap the registry.

This is a picture of Gary Mauser. Gary Mauser is a professor. He does a lot of research into guns. Stockwell Day sent me a lot of the research written by this man. This is not the man who should be deciding Conservative policy on the registry of long guns in Canada. This man wants Canadians to have the right to carry concealed weapons, just as they can in the United States. Is that what Canadians want? If we get rid of the registry, maybe that's next. Maybe that will be another Conservative policy. Maybe citizens who are qualified should be able to carry a concealed weapon on them.

I have a last picture here. Some people refer to this as a little bit of paradise. It's Honolulu, Hawaii. Why am I bringing this picture here? Curiously enough, it is one of the states in the United States that has a very admirable record on gun control. In all of the United States, they have a very low rate of gun violence and homicides in which a firearm is implicated. In Hawaii you have to register all guns, including rifles and shotguns. That's something.

But even Hawaii's record is not as good as Canada's. We have a pretty good system here. It's not too bad. The registry is not the best part of the system, and it's only a small part, but it's a small part that's necessary. Everything has to be included.

 (1620)

I encourage the government to let this thing go. It's just too much.