

## **THE COSTS OF GUN CONTROL VS. THE COSTS OF GUN VIOLENCE**

There has been a lot of deliberate misinformation about the firearms program fuelled by its opponents. First and foremost, the “registry” has become short form for Canada’s entire system of licensing gun owners and registering firearms. Close to a billion dollars was spent – over a 10 year period – most of the money was spent on screening and licensing gun owners NOT on registering firearms. Currently the costs of the system are about \$80 million dollars a year. 2 million gun owners have been licensed and their licenses must be renewed – this is an ongoing cost. But firearms only have to be registered once, unless they are sold or traded. To date 7 million guns have been registered – this is a sunk cost. The ongoing costs of registration are the costs of registering new guns entering the system or guns that are traded – about 400,000 guns per year. Consequently the costs going forward for registration are minimal. If the government stops registering rifles and shotguns it might save \$10-15 million a year. But it will also destroy the system we have for tracking these guns back to their owners. A system which the Supreme Court of Canada said was essential to enforcing the licensing of gun owners. This does not make an easy sound bite. But scrapping the registry will be a huge threat to public safety. Remember – rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands kill just as dead as handguns. And the costs of gun violence are enormous.

### **“Scrapping the registry” means dismantling gun control in Canada.**

The opponents of the law have tended to deliberately confuse matters by referring to “the registry”. Many think that Canada spent a billion dollars registering guns. In fact, “the registry” has become short form for Canada's entire system of licensing gun owners and registering guns. Most of the money that has been spent to date was for licensing gun owners not registering guns.

- The licensing process includes checking police records and ensuring training has been completed. *But key to preventing violence (particularly domestic violence) and suicides is the screening process, designed to identify risk factors not contained in police databases.* Risk factors for violence and suicide include: marital breakdown, history of mental illness, substance abuse etc.
- Screening for these threats was first introduced by Kim Campbell’s legislation in 1991.
- Two referees must sign the application form to confirm the accuracy of the information and that they know of no reason why the applicant should not have a gun.
- Also critical to the protection of families is the spousal notification process. Current and former spouses (within two years) are notified of the license application to give them an opportunity to express concern if safety is an issue. These measures respond to several inquests into firearms tragedies.
- Licenses are renewed every five years to maintain current address information and review the suitability of applicants. (Passports are also renewed every five years; drivers' licenses every two years; dog licenses annually.) Safety experts wanted a shorter renewal period: five years is already a compromise.
- Currently, guns are registered only once and only need to be re-registered when transferred.

### **Costs of “the Registry” were mostly related to screening and licensing gun owners not registering guns**

- From 1995 to April 2005, net program costs for the Canadian Firearms Program have been 946.4 million dollars. Average costs over this period have been 94.6 million per year. These costs include additional enforcement measures (NWEST), costs to Correctional Services Canada for increased sentences under the Firearms Act, and contributions to the provinces to administer the system (Approximately \$180 million over 10 years).
- Two-thirds of the direct costs have been for the licensing of all firearms owners, and only one-third for the registration of all firearms.

- In May 2004, the Government announced a package of improvements to the Firearms Program which included the elimination of fees for the registration and transfer of firearms, and control of program costs by establishing an annual \$25 million cap on firearm registration activities beginning in 2005–2006.
- Projected future funding requirements for the Canada Firearms Centre would be approximately \$85 million annually, starting in 2005-2006.

### **Putting the Costs in Perspective**

Gun death and injury in Canada were estimated to cost \$6.6 billion per year in 1995.

References to ‘the billion dollar registry’ have been without context or explanation.

- The money was spent over 10 years. Going forward the costs will be \$70 million per year. The old, flawed system cost \$30 million per year.
- Costs are high in part because the government has refused to make users pay. It has waived fees as an incentive for gun owners to comply.
- The annual cost of a license to own as many guns as one wishes is \$12 per year (\$60 renewed every 5 years). This is half the annual cost paid in Toronto or Montreal for a license to own a single dog or cat.
- No one even knows how much we spend to keep highways safe. In New Brunswick, the federal Government is investing \$400 million to widen a stretch of highway where 43 lives were lost over 5 years. In the same period, guns killed 5,000 people.
- We spend over \$120 million a year on the passport office. No one complains. Users cover the costs.
- Prevention is not cheap, it is an investment in our future, for example, the meningitis inoculation program initiated in Quebec last fall, which came in response to 85 cases reported in 2001, and cost the province \$125 million.
- As the Government of Ontario learned from the Walkerton tragedy, inappropriately cutting costs of water testing proved very expensive. The former Ontario Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Richard Schabas, has warned the federal government not to make the same mistake by cutting the gun control program.
- Lots of government programs are much more costly: for example, snow removal in Montreal costs \$130 million each year.

### **Savings from “Scrapping Registration of Rifles and Shotguns”**

- Registration is one time only and we have already registered 7 million firearms. The only guns to be registered in the future are those which are bought, sold or traded – about 400,000 per year. Consequently if the registration of rifles and shotguns were discontinued savings would be in the order of \$10-15 million. Licensing and continuous eligibility are the bulk of the costs.