

MP hedges vote on gun registry

Posted By RON GRECH, SUN MEDIA

North Bay nugget

October 28, 2009

Despite mounting local pressure for MP Charlie Angus to support a private member's bill to abolish the controversial gun registry, he says he will vote neither for nor against it.

Angus, the New Democrat MP for Timmins-James Bay, said if it gets to a vote in the house, he will recommend that it be sent to committee for further evaluation.

If it goes to committee, presumably the Justice Committee, witnesses would be brought forward and we would hear from sportsmen, hunters, aboriginal groups, the police, all the various groups that have a concern about this," said Angus. People say it cost \$1 billion that could have been better spent. I agree. But the money has been spent. What is it costing us to maintain? I want to hear from police agencies and find out if they use it regularly.

If we're going to have this debate, then let's get this testimony that will allow us to determine what is the best thing we should be doing."

The matter is scheduled to come to a vote Nov. 4 on private member's bill C-391 to repeal the registry.

Timmins Police Staff Sgt. Randall Trebilcock said the city's police service accesses information from the gun registry on a regular basis.

While opponents to the law argue the registry has never been used to solve a crime, Trebilcock said the registry provides valuable information that could potentially save the life of an officer or a victim of domestic violence.

It provides intelligence to the police and the police across the province and Canada are big on intelligence," he said. With that registry gone, that takes away an avenue of information for us and that could lead us to some very precarious situations, walking into a house, not knowing if there are firearms in the house."

Trebilcock said that information is also used in bail hearings of violent offenders. If it's known through the registry an accused owns a hunting rifle or shotgun, the police through the Crown may request that firearm be seized.

Hunters and sportsmen argue that criminals are not likely to register and the only ones being penalized are law-abiding gun owners.

I have no objection to the registration of restricted weapons," said Bill Russell, a 73-year-old Timmins resident who has been hunting and trapping since he was 12. But I oppose the bill as it stands. It's a waste of taxpayers' money and it makes crooks out of honest people."

Andy Chartrand, president of the Timmins Fur Council, agreed, said most of the weapons used in crime are illegal firearms that are coming in through the black market."

Chartrand said if the government wants to stop gun-related crime, put in stricter laws, punish these people to the max. Maybe that will help put a stop to it."

He believes the MP for Timmins-James Bay should vote based on the views of his constituents and support the private member's bill.

I think the majority of his constituents don't agree with" the gun registry, Chartrand said.