

# RCMP official defends gun registry

Winnipeg Free Press  
Wednesday, May 5, 2010

OTTAWA — The RCMP officer in charge of the national gun registry says it is a misconception that only people who do not register guns ever use them for deadly purposes.

Speaking to a parliamentary public safety committee hearing tasked with examining the bill that seeks to nix the long-gun registry, RCMP Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak said Tuesday many of the guns recovered by police at crime scenes are, in fact, traced to an owner through the gun-registry databank.

"No legislation or regulation will ever prevent all crimes," said Cheliak, director general of the Canadian Firearms Program. "However the . . . program does serve a very real purpose and contributes to police officer safety and the safety of all Canadians."

According to Cheliak, 40 per cent of the guns police traced back to an owner in 2009 were registered, non-restricted long guns — or 1,600 of the 4,000 recovered that year. Those guns would no longer need to be registered if Bill C-391 were to pass.

The hearing was the first of several scheduled for the private member's bill, which was introduced by Conservative backbencher MP Candice Hoepfner.

The Tories came to power vowing to eliminate the Liberal-initiated registry, which they call wasteful and ineffective, but have been stymied by their inability to muster majority support in Parliament.

Like the gun debate to this point, much of the meeting Tuesday was laden with emotion and confrontation; it got off to a rough start with more ongoing battles about how the committee will operate.

Hoepfner was given 10 minutes to present her case, plus 16 minutes of questioning from committee members. By comparison, she expected to have 30 minutes to present — as she thought she was allotted last week — and an hour for questions she said is normally given to MPs presenting private members' bills at committee.

The shortened schedule had Hoepfner and her caucus mate, fellow Manitoba MP Shelly Glover, crying sexism.

"I would suggest that if the tables were turned and if a Liberal, Bloc or NDP woman had introduced a private members' bill that had garnered the attention of the nation (as much) as this one has done — and she was silenced by Conservatives the way I have been silenced by the opposition — the outcry would be deafening," said Hoepfner. For her part, Glover accused Liberal MP Mark Holland and the NDP's Joe Comartin of "bullying" Hoepfner — bringing Liberal MP Marlene Jennings to her colleague's defence as she dismissed the charges as ridiculous and unparliamentary.

Jennings said Holland had actually tried to get the committee to hear from more women's groups — but was denied. She said the accusation "demonstrates the attitude of the government towards anyone who dares to oppose it."

During her presentation, Hoepfner told the committee that although she doesn't own guns, she grew up in a "peaceful home where there were long guns present," adding she was raised to respect — not fear — the weapons.

She said she saw the danger of guns in the same way she respects that "the sharpness of a knife, the heat from an oven or the speed of a car can cause harm or even death if not respected or treated accordingly."

Hoepfner said gun crimes are controlled not by registering every weapon, but by preventing guns from getting into the hands of criminals, which she said is done through a strengthened gun-licensing system.

Hoepfner also said cops waste time trying to enforce the gun registry for law-abiding gun owners, instead of focusing on real crimes such as gang and drug wars.

Holland pushed Hoepfner to explain why so few police officers have come forward to support her bill — and why so many have instead spoken out in favour of the gun registry. Holland also listed more than a dozen groups and people that have spoken out in favour of keeping the bill, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Police Boards, the deputy RCMP commissioner, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime and the YWCA.

"I'm sorry if I side with all those organizations," said Holland.

Calgary police Chief Rick Hanson is a notable exception to the police speaking in favour of the bill. He appeared at the committee Tuesday and said the gun registry has done little to help his force.

Hanson admitted registering weapons is a useful tool, but suggested it should be done at the provincial level, and without the associated criminal charge for not registering.

<http://www.chbcnews.ca/world/RCMP+official+defends+registry/2988428/story.html>