

Police association is 'being right' on long-gun registry

21/05/2010 1:00 AM

DEAR EDITOR: Re: *Flogging the dead horse, again* (May 19).

Like Jack Tinsley, I have been following the media coverage and have submitted our testimony to the committee conducting hearings on bill C-391, an act to repeal the long-gun registry. I can only conclude that an overwhelming desire to claim to "being right" has distorted his views

I agree with Mr. Tinsley that it is difficult to condone the amount of money spent to develop what is now the Canadian Firearms Program. But let's be clear, the long-gun registry consumed only a portion of this overall amount. The program put in place a universal licensing system, safety certification and screening, in addition to a registration system applying to all firearms.

By repealing the long-gun registry, taxpayers will save \$4 million per year, an amount that Mr. Tinsley stretches into a \$2 billion argument.

The Canadian Police Association represents 41,000 police officers with divergent opinions on all issues. The CPA has never claimed that "all" police officers in Canada favour the registry. To say that the CPA has made this claim makes me wonder who is truly creating rhetoric.

What the CPA did present in its submission was a 2007 RCMP survey of 408 "front-line" police officers in 56 police services across Canada.

It found 73 per cent use the registry in responding to calls for service; 69 per cent reported that it influences how they respond to calls for service; and 74 per cent indicated use of the registry aids their investigations.

In 2009, there were four million Canadian Firearms Registry online queries and, yes, 45 per cent were "auto-linked" into policing systems. The other 55 per cent are specific requests, often related to domestic incidents, from officers.

Because rifles and shotguns are the firearms most often in people's homes, they are the firearms police most often face when they are called to investigate domestic violence and disturbances.

In fiscal year 2007/08, Statistics Canada produced geographic data of the number of "firearm related incidents" across Canada per 100,000 persons.

Interestingly, Saskatchewan (135) and Manitoba (110) led all provinces, with Ontario (62) and Quebec (69) falling below the national average of (78).

Toronto itself was at 109 whereas the Churchill and Northern Manitoba region was at 654 -- the highest rate of firearm related incidents in Canada. Nunavut at 434 was the highest among the three territories.

"The registry does not prevent gun crime and does not save lives" states Mr. Tinsley. Does the Criminal Code? Do criminals register their DNA? Will sex offenders register themselves? Yet these are important tools, among many, used by law enforcement to improve community safety.

Is it worth it today? That really depends on your philosophy regarding the overall question of gun control. The CPA, and other national law enforcement associations, view the long-gun registry as an important tool to promote community and officer safety. We see it as having significant preventative and investigational value. We also view gun ownership as a privilege and that the registry is one component of promoting overall ownership responsibility.

There are 6.5-million registered long-guns in Canada.

Should we just throw away this information or should we build on it?

Do we want to make criminals out of law-abiding citizens who do not register? Absolutely not -- more rhetoric.

The CPA has worked very positively with the current government, providing input and support on such legislation as mandatory minimum sentencing, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, protection of children from on-line sexual exploitation, organized drug crime, and the list goes on. But when it comes to the long-gun registry, we respectfully agree to disagree.

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Republished from the Winnipeg Free Press print edition May 21, 2010 A15

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