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Key gun-registry report was delayed

By [The Canadian Press](#)

Red Deer Advocate

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OTTAWA — A positive report on Canada's long-gun registry was kept secret from members of Parliament until after a crucial vote in the House of Commons, newly disclosed documents show.

The report, which said police were using the controversial registry more than ever, was required by law to be tabled in Parliament by last Oct. 22, says an internal memo. That was well before a private-member's bill to scrap the registry went to a dramatic vote in the House of Commons on Nov. 4.

Bill C-391 carried with the support of 12 New Democrats and eight Liberals.

The public safety minister at the time, Peter Van Loan, tabled the report two days after the vote, disparaging the findings and saying it contributed nothing new to the debate.

The minister's office has claimed Van Loan received the document, the 2008 annual report of the commissioner of firearms, on Oct. 9. The Firearms Act requires the minister to table the report in Parliament within 15 sitting days, which would have made Nov. 6 the legal deadline.

But a series of internal documents obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act contradicts that.

The documents include a Sept. 16 letter from William Elliott, the Tories' hand-picked head of the RCMP, addressed directly to Van Loan. Elliott also serves as Canada's commissioner of firearms.

The letter says the 2008 annual report is enclosed and advises the minister of the 15-day rule for tabling. Van Loan also received an Oct. 8 memo from his deputy minister, Suzanne Hurtubise, confirming that the RCMP had submitted the report to the minister on Sept. 17 — starting the clock ticking for parliamentary tabling.

"It is recommended that you table the 2008 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Firearms on or before the statutory deadline of Oct. 22, 2009," Hurtubise advised.

Her memo noted that the number of police queries of the registry rose by almost 900,000 in 2008, to a record high of 3.4 million.

Van Loan was also given a preview of the report in a June 29 briefing note. And a more detailed briefing note, for use by the minister in question period in the Commons, is dated Sept. 29, outlining a broad range of statistics drawn from the report.

Van Loan has since moved to the trade portfolio, and his press aide there referred all questions about the timing of the release to the new public safety minister, Vic Toews.

Toews' communications chief said only that the report had been received by the minister's office on Oct. 9, without resolving the apparent contradictions in the released documents.

"The report was in fact received in the minister's office on October 9th," Christine Csversko said in an email response to questions. "It was tabled according to the rules, that is within 15 sitting days of the minister of public safety receiving the report."

Csversko then dismissed Elliott's report outright: "Canadians don't need another report to know that the long-gun registry is very efficient at harassing law-abiding farmers and outdoors enthusiasts, while wasting billions of taxpayer dollars."

MPs opposed to the long-gun registry were at the time highly suspicious of the release of the report two days after the crucial vote. Among them was Liberal MP Michelle Simson, who later submitted written questions to Van Loan about exactly when he received the original report.

But Simson's formal Nov. 19 "inquiry of ministry," which must be answered in full under rules of Parliament, died without response in December when Prime Minister Stephen Harper prorogued Parliament to "recalibrate" his government's agenda.

"I was annoyed and frustrated," Simson said in an interview from Hastings, Ont. "I was very unhappy with the way the whole thing rolled out. The report was tabled two days after the vote — and I just don't believe in that type of coincidence. ...

"It could have affected the outcome of the vote."

Simson, who calls freedom of information a human right, is the first federal politician to post her office expenses online.

The rookie member for Scarborough Southwest is also a passionate defender of the gun registry, partly because she was the victim of a 1976 armed holdup as a bank employee in Toronto.

The robber waved a sawed-off shotgun in her face. "When you have someone telling you to get down on your knees and put your hands behind your head or they're going to blow your effin' head off, it changes you."

Unlike Simson's official "inquiry of ministry" about the timing of the release of the registry report, Bill C-391 — introduced by Tory MP Candice Hooppner — survived prorogation and has been sent to a Commons committee for study.

Committee witnesses opposed to the dismantling of the long-gun registry include Ontario's attorney general and groups representing police officers and health workers, many of whom have cited statistics from 2008 Commissioner of Firearms report.

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has ordered his MPs to vote against the bill when it comes up for third reading.