

For immediate release:
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GOVT BURIES HEAD OF LONG-GUN REGISTRY PROGRAM

Removing the head of the Canadian Firearms Program weeks before a House of Commons vote on scrapping the long-gun registry is a blatant effort to stifle debate, states the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights.

RCMP Chief Superintendent Martin Cheliak, Director of the Canadian Firearms Program, was taken off regular duties in August and sent on extended language training. Wednesday, the RCMP confirmed that Cheliak will be replaced.

The House of Commons resumes September 20. On September 22 it votes on a motion that could kill Candice Hoepfner's Bill C-391 to repeal the long-gun registry. That motion is based on a report from the Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU). In a May 2010 presentation to SECU, RCMP Chief Superintendent Cheliak provided compelling evidence that the long-gun registry must stay, citing public safety concerns, reduced registry costs, increased registry effectiveness, and rapidly increasing usage by police.

In his year as Director of the Canadian Firearms Program, Cheliak is credited with fashioning the long-gun registry into an efficient and useful database while shrinking annual costs to \$4.1 million. Cheliak has also worked to unite Canadian police forces in support of the registry. The news that he is being replaced comes days before Cheliak was expected to present a major report on the effectiveness of the long-gun registry to a meeting of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

"It is strange indeed to see a law-and-order government not only ignore, but suppress information from Canada's national police force," said Ad Hoc Coalition member, Mary Scott, President of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC). "This government is burying the head of the long-gun registry program weeks before a crucial vote on C-391, just as they buried the annual report from the Canadian Firearms Program before the Commons' vote last November. The report Cheliak was to make to the Chiefs of Police must be public information before any vote is taken in Parliament."

Police consult the registry on average over 14,000 times a day – before, after and during crimes. Gun deaths have dropped by a third since the registry was implemented. Long-gun deaths, especially domestic homicides of women, have dropped much more sharply. If Bill C-391 becomes law, seven million long-gun firearm records will be destroyed.

Women have the most to lose if the long-gun registry is abandoned. During domestic violence calls, police use the registry to check if a long-gun is on site. Statistics from the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee found firearms to be present in 47% of

domestic homicides in 2007. A woman is 12 times more likely to be murdered if a gun is involved in domestic violence, and the guns most commonly used in domestic violence are long guns, not handguns,

“The gun registry is essential if we are to prevent the deaths of women at the hands of their abusers. If the long-gun registry is abandoned, rates of domestic homicide will rise back to the levels of the 1990s. A long-gun registry prevents delays in police investigations before, after and during crime,” said Ad Hoc Coalition member, Paulette Senior, CEO, YWCA Canada.

“Public safety, and women’s safety, must come before politics,” said Claire Tremblay, Coordinator of the Ad Hoc Coalition. “Political point scoring to win over a tiny constituency at the expense of safety is simply unacceptable.”

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The Ad Hoc Coalition for Women’s Equality and Human Rights is a national umbrella group speaking out on behalf of 37 Canadian organizations concerned about women’s rights. For more information about the Ad Hoc Coalition, please visit www.womensequality.ca or www.egalitedesfemmes.ca

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