

COALITION

for Gun Control / pour le contrôle des armes

www.guncontrol.ca

Response to Bill C-21's second reading

The debate on Bill C-21 (legislation to eliminate the registration of rifles and shotguns) will likely be held today, Tuesday June 19, at 3pm in the House of Commons. You may remember that the Dawson College tragedy has previously postponed the debate supposed to be held last fall.

Bill C-21 was first introduced in June 2006 and proposes eliminating the registration of unrestricted rifles and shotguns

- The current system allows information on the sale and transfer of guns to be submitted electronically to a central database. The Conservatives propose scrapping this and returning to a paper based system. Police will need to go store to store to trace guns as they did prior to the implementation of the current system.
- Eliminating the registration of rifles and shotguns will mean that unrestricted firearms will be sold without any record except in the store and that police will no longer have access to information about who owns what guns, the means to remove guns from dangerous people or to support investigations.
- In spite of claims about the costs of the system, the RCMP testified at a recent hearing of the Government Operations and Estimates Committee that scrapping the registration of rifles and shotguns would save **AT MOST \$3 million a year**.
- A recent Globe and Mail article (June 13) confirmed that: "The Conservative government is spending just as much on the controversial gun registry as the Liberals did the year before they left office, even though rifle and shotgun owners are no longer forced to register those weapons."

Registration of all guns is essential because:

- There are 7 million unrestricted rifles and shotguns in circulation, including powerful semi automatics like the Ruger Mini 14 used in the Montreal massacre.
- Rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands are just as deadly as handguns. Most of the police officers killed in recent years have been killed with rifles and shotguns. They are the weapons of choice in domestic violence and suicide, and are also frequently sawed-off and used by gangs.
- All illegal guns begin as legal guns. Fighting the illegal gun trade means we need to be able to trace all guns back to their source.
- Even in Toronto, rifles and shotguns account for almost half the guns recovered in crime. In a recent seizure of guns being sold illegally on the Internet, all the guns were rifles and shotguns.
- The Supreme Court of Canada *unanimously* ruled that registration and licensing are linked and that it is not reasonable to have one without the other. The ruling emphasised that without registration you cannot enforce the licensing provisions. If police are unable to trace guns back to their source, there is no way to hold gun owners accountable for the guns they own or to prevent them from giving or selling those guns to people without licenses.
- As the Attorney Generals' of Quebec and Ontario along with chiefs of police, violence prevention and public health experts have noted, the proposed changes will put public safety at risk and make it easier for criminals, cop killers and violent spouses to get guns.
- This law protects women. Since 1995, murders of women with firearms have gone down 33%. Seventy-seven per cent of people living with firearms owners support the legislation.
- With the exception of the US, most industrialized countries license gun owners and register guns.
- The Minister of Public Safety and Security has claimed only 2 registered rifles and shotguns were used in murders in 2003. He deliberately used old statistics before the system was fully implemented. Remember not all homicide weapons are recovered after murders. More recent data from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics shows that in 2004 only 65 of 172 homicide guns were recovered and traced. This included 26 handguns, 29 rifles and shotguns and 8 other guns. Of those recovered, 19 were registered including 14 rifles and shotguns, 4 handguns and 1 sawed off rifle/shotgun.

Other changes by the Conservatives to gun control measures:

- Shortly after becoming Minister of Public Security, Stockwell Day formed an Advisory Committee on Firearms that consists entirely of gun owners who are on the record opposing the existing law and advocating American style arming for self protection. Several have worked closely with the American National Rifle Association and participated in its info-mercials. Since the Firearms Advisory Committee was first formed by Conservative Justice Minister Kim Campbell in 1990, there has been some effort to include crime and injury prevention experts along with gun enthusiasts to ensure sound public policy. For this government the "experts" on gun laws are all gun enthusiasts.

- The “amnesty” recently renewed for those who fail to renew their licenses or register their firearms will create an optional database that will shortly become unreliable, and goes against the recommendations of six inquests which pointed to the need for regular license renewals and screening of gun owners.
- Minister Day has mentioned in the media that the Conservatives are considering introducing a one-time license meaning that gun owners will no longer be regularly screened for risk factors for violence and suicide that are NOT currently in police databases. The screening process has prevented 9,000 potentially dangerous people from owning guns.
- Refunding and waiving licensing fees – the government has eliminated the renewal fee and offered to refund those that have paid potentially costing taxpayers \$120 millions. They have cut \$10 million per year from the screening, licensing and registration program (then added back \$7 million), in spite of the evidence that more screening not less is required. These costs are then passed on to Canadian taxpayers. Users pay for passports, drivers licenses, and dog licenses. Why not gun licenses? The Auditor General specifically noted that decisions to waive or reduce fees had been a major factor in the cost overruns as projected revenues did not materialize.
- Canada has also softened its strong position at the United on the need for international standards to control firearms.

Although Not Fully implemented, there is Evidence that the Law is Working:

- More than 2 million gun owners (90%) are now licensed and over 7 million firearms (90%) are registered
- The rate of firearm deaths is the lowest in 30 years: 500 fewer people are killed per year than in 1991!
- The firearm homicide rate is down by 29% even though homicide rate without guns are down only 23%.
- The rate of homicides with rifles and shotguns and the rate of women murdered with guns have plummeted. Both the 1991 and 1995 focused on strengthening controls on rifles and shotguns.
- Homicides with handguns remain relatively constant (largely owing to the problem of smuggled handguns)

Canada's Gun Deaths and Crime Statistics

Year	1991	1995	Latest	Change
Total firearm deaths			2003	
Number	1444	1125	792	-45%
Rate per 100,000	5.2	3.8	2.5	-51%
Homicides with firearms			2005	
Number	271	176	222	-18%
Rate per 100,000	0.97	0.6	0.69	-29%
Homicides with rifles and shotguns				
Number	103	61	55	-35%
Rate per 100,000	0.37	0.21	0.16	-56%
Homicides with other guns (handguns etc.)				
Number	168	115	146	-13%
Rate per 100,000	0.6	0.39	0.44	-26%
Homicides without guns				
Number	485	412	436	-10%
Rate per 100,000	1.73	1.39	1.32	-23%
Homicides of women with firearms			2004	
Number	85	43	32	-62%
Rate per 100,000	0.6	0.29	0.2	-67%
Homicides of women without firearms				
Number	185	152	166	-10%
Rate per 100,000	1.3	1.02	1.04	-20%
Robberies with firearms			2005	
Number	8995	6692	3505	-61%
Rate per 100,000	32	23	10	-68%

-The system is an important tool for preventing and investigating crime:

- Since 1998, 19,600 firearm licenses have been refused or revoked
- 26,000 calls have been made to the firearms line concerning applicants for licences (many of these are as a result of the spousal notification process).
- The online registration database has been used an average of 5,800 times each day by police across the country. More than 10,000 affidavits have been prepared from the system to support court cases.

All Major Safety Groups Continue to Support the Program

- Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Canadian Police Association, plus its Quebec equivalent
- Over 40 women's organizations, in all provinces
- Canadian Public Health Association, Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians
