

May 12, 2006: Costs and Management of Firearms Program are now under control: Auditor General's Report Expected to Confirm

In spite of the flurry of attention focused on the past problems of Canada's Firearms Program, the Auditor General's Report, to be released May 16, 2006, is expected to confirm that the problems are in the past and that the program is being well-managed. In spite of this, the new Conservative Government is expected to try to use the Auditor General's report to build support for its plans to dismantle gun control in Canada. The gun lobby has been actively pressuring the government to do so - the powerful National Rifle Association was in Canada during the last election. Leaks from Government officials regarding the Auditor General's report and plans for gun control along with information from the gun lobby indicate a well-orchestrated campaign is underway. The continued focus on the system's costs has obscured its benefits. *The money on the current system has been spent, and the system is working. Most gun owners are licensed and most guns have been registered. The ongoing costs are modest. Dismantling the system now, after all the money has been spent, makes no sense. It is not about safety. It is not even about money. It is just payback to the gun lobby.*

The Costs of Gun Control in Canada

"The registry" has become short for the entire firearms licensing and registration program in Canada and much confusion exists regarding its costs and operations. In 2005/6 the entire program cost less than \$83 million, most of it – \$62.8 million – spent on licensing gun owners. Only \$15.7 million has been budgeted for the registration of ALL guns, a fraction of that – about \$10 million - is spent on registering rifles and shotguns. Claims that huge savings will come from eliminating the registration of rifles and shotguns that can be reinvested in policing are not based on fact. Here are the costs of the current programme:

Resource Breakdown by Sub-Activity for 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 for the Centre Activity

Sub-Activities	Financial Resources*			Human Resources*		
	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Licensing	61.5	61.5	61.5	250	250	250
Registration	15.7	15.7	15.7	86	86	86
Justice System Support**	0.8	0.8	0.8	-	-	-
Border Control	1.7	1.7	1.7	2	2	2
International Initiatives	0.1	0.1	0.1	1	1	1
Public/Stakeholder Outreach	2.5	2.5	2.5	6	6	6
Total	\$82.3 M	\$82.3 M	\$82.3 M	345	345	345

FROM http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20052006/CFC-CAFC/CFC-CAFCr5602_e.asp#22

Controls on ALL guns are needed

- Rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands are just as deadly as handguns. Half 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. They are also often confiscated from gangs. Six inquests recommended licensing and registration because they are essential to preventing tragedies.
- All illegal guns begin as legal guns. While half the handguns recovered in crime originate in the US, the other half come from Canadians sources.

Canada is safer today than in 1991

- The police continue to support the law – they use the system 5000 times each day. It has been used to produce over 3000 affidavits to support criminal prosecutions.
 - 500 fewer people were killed with firearms in 2003 than in 1991. Homicides with firearms are down, suicides with firearms are down. Domestic violence with firearms has plummeted (although murders by other means have not). (see backgrounder: Gun Control Works) Just released data from Stats Canada show that firearms deaths in Canada were 792 in 2003, down from 1444 in 1991.
 - This law protects women. Since 1991, murders of women with firearms have gone down 62%. Meanwhile, the number of murders of women without firearms has gone down only 10%. 77% of spouses of firearms owners support the legislation.
 - 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.
 - Most industrialized countries license gun owners and register guns
- Our gun laws may not be perfect and there have been problems with costs and management, but the fundamental question is: should we make it easier or harder for criminals to get firearms?*

1) The “billion dollar registry” is a misnomer

From to 1995 to April 2005, net reported program costs for the Canadian Firearms Program have been **946.4 million** dollars. Average reported costs over this period have been **94.6 million** per year. These costs include additional enforcement measures (NWEST), costs to Correctional Services Canada for increased sentences under the Firearms Act, and contributions to the provinces to administer the system (Approximately \$180 million over 10 years). Two-thirds of the direct costs have been for the licensing of all firearms owners, and only one-third for the registration of all firearms. The Auditor General is expected to identify additional costs associated with the programme.

2) Screening and licensing gun owners is fundamental to any system of firearms control. In 1995 a comprehensive licensing system was introduced which required anyone who owned a gun to have a valid license, renewed every 5 years. Previously a firearms acquisition certificate (FAC) was required to ACQUIRE firearms not to possess them. As a result only 1/3 of gun owners had valid FACs. Most Canadian gun owners, almost 2 million, obtained their licenses in 2000 and the initial renewal cycle was extended over 4 years (2005-2009). Many gun owners now need to renew their licenses at a cost of \$60 for 5 years, regardless of the number of firearms they own. Rumoured plans to waive or refund renewal fees would cost \$120 million dollars.

3) Costs of registering rifles and shotguns is about \$10 million a year

Registration is one time only – 7 million rifles and shotguns have been registered. The only guns which need to be registered now are those being acquired or transferred, about 400,000 per year which is why the ongoing costs..

Expected Government Proposals

We do not know their plans but they have proposed making changes as without going to parliament by using special powers and regulations. Reported proposals include:

1. An “amnesty” for people who have not renewed their licenses or registered their firearms. This is intended to circumvent Parliament. Amnesty provisions are supposed to be used to build compliance not to undermine laws which have been made by Parliament. This measure will effectively make licensing and registration “optional”, creating a database that will shortly become unreliable. Six inquests recommended renewable licenses for gun owners and registration of all firearms. The renewal process screens for risk factors for violence, spousal homicide and suicide, and ensure information is up to date and accurate.
2. Refunding and waiving licensing fees. If costs to taxpayers were an important issue, why would they waive the license renewal fees for 2 million gun owners, forgoing \$120 million in revenues?
3. Plans to relax restrictions on handguns. In 1995 short barreled, highly concealable, handguns were prohibited but owners were allowed to keep them. In spite of Harper's claim that handguns are "virtually banned" there are 500,000 legal handguns in Canada. Half of the handguns recovered in crime come from Canadian sources. Gun theft is a major problem. Most Canadians want stronger controls on handguns not looser controls.
4. Aligning more closely with the United States and reversing Canada's strong stand on the need for international standards to control firearms at the United Nations. The review conference for the 2001 programme of action on the illicit trade in small arms takes place in July in New York.

Major Safety groups continue to support the programme

- Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
- Canadian Professional Police Association
- more than 40 women's organizations from across the country including major virtually every province
- Centre of Suicide Prevention
- Canadian Paediatric Society
- Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians
- Quebec Public Health Association

The opposition is well organized and well funded: the NRA was here during the election

- The opponents are not likely to ever vote Liberal. Courting them makes no political sense.

- There is a well-orchestrated campaign underway - the NRA was here in December, gun groups spent \$100,000 in one week alone during the election.
- It is important that MPs new to the issue know that groups such as the National Firearms Association, Professor Gary Mauser, CILA and LUFA go far beyond rational opposition to the law and actually promote arming for self protection. (See Backgrounder: The Gun Lobby at Work)