

Don't Be Fooled: Conservative Bill Introduced to Senate Eliminating Long Gun Registration a Risk to Public Safety

April 1, 2009, Toronto, ON: Public safety is no joke warns the Coalition for Gun Control, as Conservatives plans to introduce a Bill to the Senate were leaked today. The Bill, recycled from 2006, if passed, will eliminate the registration of unrestricted rifles and shotguns. Police, women's groups, gun violence victims' advocates and the Coalition for Gun Control are urging Senators not to weaken gun control and compromise public safety. The unusual approach by the Conservatives follows a series of missteps and controversies around a private member's bill, which also relaxed controls on handguns and fully automatic assault weapons.

“This is simply payback to the gun lobby. The system is working and police use it almost 10,000 times a day,” said Wendy Cukier, President of the Coalition for Gun Control. Currently police can query a person or location to see if guns are present, the number and type. When they recover a gun at the scene of a crime they can search online. “The proposed system rolls back the clock to the days when police recovered a gun and had to search store by store to see where it was sold, the days when no records were kept of secondary sales, the days when the numbers of murders with rifles and shotguns far exceeded murders with handguns.”

The Supreme Court of Canada emphasized that registration of all firearms is essential to enforcing the licensing provisions of the law. If a licensed individual can purchase firearms without them easily being traced back to them, there is little to prevent them from selling or giving the guns to unlicensed individuals. Registration is about accountability. Owning a gun is a big responsibility.

The Firearms Act and specifically the gun registry is a vital tool for Canadian police in maintaining public and police safety. A surprising number of rifles and shotguns are recovered in crime even in major cities. Plagued by an increase in gun violence, police in Surrey BC recently reported recovering over 200 long guns. “All guns are potentially dangerous, all gun owners need to be licensed, all guns need to be registered, and gun owners need to be accountable for their firearms, said Steven Chabot, President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) in a letter written to Prime Minister Harper and opposition leaders on behalf of the CACP urging them not to weaken gun control. Chabot also wrote, “..ending the registration of long guns such as rifles and shotguns (the weapons most often used in domestic homicides and suicides) would seriously compromise a system that is working to the betterment of personal, community and police officer safety.”

Police from across Canada use the firearms registry daily during investigations and to take preventative action. For example, a registered long gun found at the scene of a crime led to the manslaughter conviction of two accomplices in the murder of four RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta.

Priscilla deVilliers, well known victims' rights activist reminds us: “Six separate inquests

have recommended licensing and registration of guns, including the inquest into my daughter's death. It was too late for us but what we learned from our tragedies could save the lives of other Canadians. We fought all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to defend the law that was forged in death and misery. And there is strong evidence that it is working.” The victims of gun violence want more than sympathetic tears and condolence. They want action.

“Sensible gun control does not demonize gun owners any more than having a license to drive and registering a car demonizes car owners,” said Wendy Cukier, President and Founder of the Coalition for Gun Control. “Gun control does not prevent firearm owners from hunting, target shooting or even collecting guns, but it does ensure accountability. Illegal guns begin as legal guns. Without knowing who owns what guns there can be no effective control.”

Facts and Figures on Gun Control In Canada:

- Gun control works. In 1991, 1441 Canadians were killed with guns; it has now reduced by nearly 50 per cent to less than 800 firearm deaths.
- Murders of women with guns have plummeted from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004, in part because of gun control.
- Murders with rifles and shotguns have decreased dramatically, from 107 in 1991 to 32 in 2007, in part because of the stronger controls on firearms.
- The RCMP estimate, that if the registration of rifles and shotguns were discontinued, it would save only \$3 million per year. (RCMP Deputy Commissioner Peter Martin testimony to the Government Operations and Estimates Committee, November, 2006.)
- Gun registration is a one-time procedure and the current and future principal costs are for screening and licensing gun owners, NOT registering firearms.
- \$1 billion over 10 years (1995-2005) was spent licensing 2 million gun owners and registering 7 million guns, according to the Auditor General -- NOT \$2 billion.
- If the Conservatives stopped waiving gun registering and licensing fees, taxpayers would save an estimated \$20 million annually. (based on 2006 government refund figures).
- Since 1995, estimated annual costs are \$64 million annually (RPP Canada Firearms Centre, “Planned Spending 2007-2008”).
- According to the 2006 Small Arms Survey, the decrease in gun injuries and deaths since the gun registry’s inception are worth nearly \$1.4 billion annually.
- The powerful semi-automatic used in the murder of 14 young women at l’Ecole Polytechnique is still sold as an unrestricted “hunting” rifle.