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Presentation To House Of Commons – 3

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL
SECURITY

(C)

**BILL C- 19 - An Act to amend the Criminal Code and
the Firearms Act**

Remarks By:

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

Chief Mario Harel – Vice-President, CACP

Chief Matt Torigian – CACP, President of the OACP

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300 Terry Fox Drive, Suite 100/ 300, promenade Terry Fox, suite 100, Kanata, Ontario K2K 0E3
Tel: (613) 595-1101 • Fax/Télécopieur: (613) 383-0372 • E-mail/Courriel: cacp@cacp.ca

David H. Hill, C.M./Q.C., Lynda A. Bordeleau General Counsel/Conseillers juridiques
Perley-Robertson, Hill and McDougall LLP Barristers & Solicitors/Avocats et Procureurs



Directeur Mario Harel (Vice-President, Chief of Police, Gatineau Police Service, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police):

Good morning. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has stated its support for the long-gun registry from the beginning. Let me briefly reiterate our reasons why.

First, we view this as a public safety issue based on our ongoing responsibility to ensure the safety of our communities, our officers and the most vulnerable among us.

Second, it provides preventative and investigational value to law enforcement and the communities we serve.

Third, notwithstanding the initial set-up costs, today, it operates in a very cost-effective and efficient manner as detailed in an internal audit of the RCMP.

Fourth, we believe it promotes further responsibility and accountability by firearm owners.

Finally, it provides a reasonable balance between the exercise of an individual privilege and the broader right of society to be safe.

Only a year ago, the RCMP's Canadian Firearms Program reported that law enforcement officials make 11,000 queries per day into the registry. Today, this number has climbed to 17,000. There is truth to the fact that a number of these are what has been referred to as "auto-queries". However these cases are rare, which we believe is an endorsement of the fact that law enforcement views this information as a valuable tool, a bit of information that, when combined with other information, assists in assessing a situation an officer may face.

We are concerned that with the dismantling of the long gun registry, we can ask ourselves what controls there are to prevent individuals from stockpiling firearms or access by criminal organizations when we don't have the information.

We are concerned that there will be no record-keeping during transfers of long guns. And we note that between 2006 and 2009,

1.85 million long guns changed hands.

We are concerned that it inhibits our ability to enforce prohibition orders. It will add significant costs to our investigations, costs which will be downloaded to police services and lead to crucial delays in gaining investigative information.

And those are just some of our concerns. There will no longer be a required record to indicate what firearms were sold to whom or how many. Many ask the question, has the long-gun registry saved lives? Like our drunk driving laws or even our Criminal Code, the impacts will never be known with qualified numbers, but we know that the registry saves lives.

The fact is that homicide rates by long guns have come down significantly. Statistics Canada confirms firearm suicides have dropped 48% since the act became law in 1995. We can only hope that this continues. Prior to the implementation of the long-gun registry, there was a formal requirement for firearms vendors to record sales. Now, they will not even have to register their sales. Imagine the extraordinary and costly efforts which will be required to trace a firearm for investigative purposes. Our passion on this issue runs deep.

Chief Matthew Torigian (Chief of Police, Waterloo Regional Police Service, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police):

Merci.

We know that nothing we say here today will change the fact that this bill will move forward and be passed by this government. We also acknowledge that on the issue of repealing the long-gun registry this government has been very transparent with Canadians in stating their intention to introduce this legislation.

In our parliamentary system, in our great democracy, we must and we do respect the desires of Canadians who elected this government and their stated objectives.

We, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, have supported many of the approaches of this government on crime. In fact, just

last month, four CACP representatives were called upon to support the government's Safe Streets and Communities Act. In providing overall endorsement of the bill, Chief Dale McFee, president of the Canadian Association of Chief of Police, stated, "The CACP continues to support legislative amendments which assist in making Canada's communities safe...". The difference here is that the long-gun registry, we believe, provides preventative value, not just a focus on toughening penalties.

But throughout the debate on the long-gun registry, there has been a disturbing attempt to discredit the view of law enforcement and chiefs of police and an attempt to create divisions. One MP issued a press release referencing a very non-scientific poll and stating that "the vast majority of police are calling for the end of the long-gun registry" and making this statement regarding the CACP: "It begs the question, exactly who are they speaking for?"

You cannot accept our opinion when it serves your purposes and then dismiss it when it does not. We ask that you respect our opinion or, at the very least, respectfully disagree. Especially when it comes to this issue, the latter has not occurred. Please know that this is not a message targeted just to this government; it is a message to all elected members of Parliament, whether it be on this issue or other issues affecting law enforcement.

In respect of our desire to maintain the long-gun registry, police leaders from across this country--federal, provincial, and municipal--have shown unprecedented support. CACP positions are adopted based on a majority of our membership's views. Individual positions are respected, and members are free to speak. In fact, at our 2010 annual general meeting, we had unanimous support to maintain this very effective tool. A few within this government would rather give voice to the exceptions and claim that they are actually the real voice of policing.

Almost unbelievably when it comes to the issue of the long-gun registry, there has been no consultation with law enforcement and the chiefs of police. In May, the CACP national firearms committee

provided this government a letter recognizing the government's intention to dismantle the long-gun registry. We offered to be a part of the solution going forward and provided suggestions as to how to mitigate the impact on law enforcement and public safety. Despite numerous attempts to follow up, we were not provided a single opportunity to discuss this with them.

In that letter, the CACP proposed options related to maintaining the existing data; records of sales by firearm business vendors; the transfer of weapons between individuals; and including the law enforcement representatives on the government's firearms advisory committee.

In conclusion, we wish to be respectful of the concerns of responsible gun owners and respect their rights. We know that both sides want safe communities; therefore, we must all learn from our polarized positions going forward.

The public, the citizens we serve, expect the government and police to provide leadership when it comes to public safety. When our views are different, it should suggest that we need to sit down together to find some commonality moving forward.

We are allowed to disagree, but we should always be respectful in doing so. We are hopeful that this will become the preferred way of doing business by all parties moving forward. We can all do better. Canadians deserve better.