



Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police *Leading Progressive change in policing*
Association canadienne des chefs de police *À l'avant-garde du progrès policier*

April 27, 2010

Statement from the President of CACP

Police in Canada are united on the absolute importance of retaining the Firearms Registry. There are a few police officers blind to the information that keeps them and their colleagues safe. There is a police chief or two who may not be well informed about the real value of the registry. They are very rare exceptions.

I'm the President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. We are a national organization. We represent every police chief, and police leaders from all across Canada, including the RCMP, the Sûreté du Québec and the Ontario Provincial Police. The CACP is united in support for the Firearms Registry, having intervened in a Supreme Court challenge to the legislation. It's a valuable tool, used thousands of times every day, to prevent crime, solve crime and keep our communities and police officers safe.

I've travelled across Canada and met with provincial chiefs associations. They support the registry.

I've met with the President and Executive of the Canadian Police Association, representing over 40,000 rank-and-file police officers all across Canada. They support the registry.

I've met with the presidents of numerous police unions, including my own. They support the registry.

I've met with the Executive of the Canadian Association of Police Boards. They support the registry.

In conversations with colleagues and communities about gun violence, its clear Canadians have been badly misinformed about the Firearms Registry.

They've been told its abolition will save a billion dollars. It now costs just \$4 million per year. It is very efficiently run by the RCMP, which took over its management in 2005.

Canadians have been told it is terribly inconvenient to register firearms. It takes a few minutes either online, or to fill out a form. It's normally done at the point of sale. The fastest I've seen it done is 37 seconds.

Canadians have been told it's very expensive to register a firearm. It's free.

...2

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-2-

Canadians have been told police criminalize those who don't register long guns. We don't. Last year, the Toronto Police Service seized over 1,500 unregistered long guns. We laid one charge. That was where the owner sawed off the barrel, making it a prohibited weapon.

Far more concerning, Canadians have been told police don't need or use the registry. This is not true. Canadian law enforcement query the Firearms Registry, on average, 11,500 times a day, over 4,100,000 times a year, for many reasons:

- it's used in criminal investigations to determine the origin of firearms used in crime and recovered from criminals
- it's used to identify and remove firearms from dangerous situations
- it's used to return recovered firearms to their rightful owners
- it's used to provide police officers with reliable information on who possesses firearms, the number of firearms and the kind and calibre of firearms one is likely to encounter
- it's used to create accountability for the sale and disposition of firearms. It creates a trail to determine the origin of crime guns
- it's used to encourage responsible gun ownership and the safe storage of firearms.
- it's used to keep cops safe.

Canadians have been told licensing of firearm owners is sufficient. This is nonsense. Police leaders say it is nonsense and the Supreme Court of Canada agrees. A licence tells us a person can have a gun. The registry tells us what guns he has. There is a huge difference.

If a woman reports her husband is threatening to kill her, police may believe it's necessary to remove all firearms from his possession. They can determine if he has a licence. The licence will not tell them how many guns he possesses. The licence will not tell them the type, calibre or serial numbers of the weapons he possesses. Without this information, available only from the registry, there is no way to ensure police have succeeded in defusing a potentially deadly situation. This is as valid in rural Canada as urban Canada. This is not a "what-if" scenario. It is something we deal with, every day, across Canada. The loss of the registry will mean we lose an invaluable tool to prevent domestic murder and suicide.

Canadians have been told police don't need a registry to alert us to the presence of firearms because "all real police officers" assume everyone has a gun. This is dangerous nonsense.

I've been a cop for 33 years. I've worked in the toughest neighbourhoods in Toronto, worked undercover, in the Hold Up Squad, set up our Organized Crime Units and our Gun and Gang Task Force. I have been the first guy through the door on hundreds of search warrants. I have had guns pointed at me.

...3

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-3-

I am responsible for the safety of 5,600 police officers in Toronto. They are all "real cops," not the anonymous and, most likely imaginary, "cop in the donut shop" others rely on for their policing insight.

Every "real cop" knows we don't approach every situation, and every citizen, with the assumption they're armed. Police officers rely on information. Accurate and complete information is the best protection I can give them. Knowing (not assuming) who has firearms is valuable. The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed. We are going to fight to make sure the information they need to be safe is available to them.

There is a great deal of accurate information about the registry that needs to be shared. I have great confidence in fair-minded Canadians. They will recognize the difference between the propaganda and misinformation spread by a well-funded gun lobby, and the legitimate and evidence-based facts provided by those who risk their lives to keep them safe every day.

We have worked hard to earn the public trust. We have earned that trust by dedicating ourselves to acting in the public interest, not for some political purpose. We will leave politics to the politicians. Our only motive is the public's safety and the safety of police officers. The registration of all firearms helps us keep our communities safe.

We ask all Canadians to step back from the partisan rhetoric. Examine the facts. We are confident that fully informed, sensible Canadians will understand the value of the Firearms Registry to their police services.

William Blair
Chief of Police
Toronto Police Service