



Statement

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Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak today to Bill C-21. I am speaking steadfastly against Bill C-21, and further, against it moving forward to committee. This bill should not even be seeing the light of day.

Bill C-21, whose intention is to repeal the requirement to obtain and hold the registration certificate for a non-registered firearm, specifically rifles and shotguns, is a dangerous weapon in and of itself, created by the minority Conservative government. If it is passed, millions of people in possession of long guns will no longer be required to register their firearms.

This act means gutting the gun registry and seriously weakening gun control in our country. It means that the registrar of firearms will no longer issue or keep records of registration certificates for non-restricted firearms.

The Conservative minority government is seriously flawed and its wrong-headed objective to remove the long gun portion of the gun registry is patently wrong. Not only is this attempt by the government against the wishes of the majority of Canadians, as reflected in the Ipsos Reid poll with 67% of Canadians who said so, against the wishes of the majority of parliamentarians, against the wishes of the victims of the tragic recent Dawson College shootings and their families, as well as victims of other such tragedies and their families, it completely flies in the face of the vocally stated wishes of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the president of the Ontario police chiefs, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, the Centre for Suicide Prevention, and more than 40 national women's associations. All oppose strongly this attempt to cripple the gun registry and to weaken gun control in Canada, in turn diminishing the capacity of police to keep Canadians safe, to err on the side of caution, all for the sake of a flawed and ill-conceived election promise, even though it is clear that by including the long gun portion the gun registry works.

It is an important preventative tool. We cannot only look at the measures after a crime is committed. It is essential that we always strengthen prevention, not lessen it. This is inconceivable when we consider that on average more than 5,000-plus queries are made daily by police.

Approximately 15,965 firearm licences have been refused or revoked since the firearms act came into effect, and this was born of the tragedy of École Polytechnique in Montreal. Also, more than 500 affidavits have been provided by the Canadian firearms registry to support the prosecution of firearms-related crime in court proceedings across the country.

As is abundantly clear, the gun registry in its entirety continues to provide a vitally necessary tool used by both police and the courts, helping to safeguard and strengthen the safety of Canadians. The safety of Canadians is paramount. This is not something to be taken lightly or trifled with and that is precisely what the Conservative government did when it implemented an amnesty last year and recently extended it for one more year, which has already resulted in an increasingly outdated registry.

This action by the government is of particular concern and is another blatant example of its pattern of governing by stealth, totally disregarding Parliament, its duly elected representatives, and in effect, then, disregarding, disrespecting and bypassing the very Canadians that we as MPs are elected to represent. The removal of the important long gun portion of the registry will have significant far-reaching implications that will reverberate, adversely impact Canadians and compromise the safety of Canadians.

Also, a number of legal implications surrounding the untracked firearms will definitely lessen our ability to carry out searches for firearms and ensure effective enforcement of no firearms conditions on bail or prohibition orders. The fact is that all types of gun deaths, homicides, suicides and accidents, have declined since the registry was brought into force. This includes deaths involving handguns and long guns.

The Minister of Public Safety and National Security has repeatedly defended this decision by stating that Canadians will not be any less safe with these actions because owners will continue to be licensed even while long guns would no longer have to be registered. This is completely misleading, erroneous and disturbing. The fact is that we need both: licensing the individual and the registration of every firearm, including long guns. Without the critical requirement of registering each long gun, police will not

know how many long guns people possess when approaching a potentially dangerous offender or crime scene. There could be 5, 10, 20 or more.

This diminishes the capacity of our law enforcement personnel and puts our officers and others at higher risk because, in the words of the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Winnipeg Police Chief Jack Ewatski, who also opposes removal of the gun registry and the long gun portion, “information is the life blood of policing”. He says, “The more information we can give our front-line officers, the better position they are in to perform their duties”.

The Conservative minority government is demonstrating a smoke and mirrors approach on this issue at the expense of the safety of Canadians. It is time for the Conservatives to come clean, be honest with Canadians and tell them that licensing and registering are not one and the same, as both are equally essential to Canadians' safety. One cannot take the place of the other. This fact cannot be overstated.

Clearly, the Conservative government knows it is on very shaky ground and is not secure in this action. This is further reflected in its new firearms advisory committee, which the Conservatives have kept secret. As my hon. colleague from York West said, “They have turned the committee into a gun-loving secret society”. That is, until the muzzle slipped, she said, and the member for Yorkton—Melville boasted that the Conservative faction was stacked with pro-gun activists opposed to gun control.

Unusually, there was no routine announcement and there were no biographies released. This was kept under wraps and under the radar of accountability. As the member for York West continued, she said, “Why did the government change it from the firearms advisory committee to the firearms advocacy committee?”

As the member for London West continued, she said, “If the government really supports the police, why was the Canadian Police Association left off this list?” Why was there no representation, she wondered, asking, “Could it be because it dared to support the gun registry?” She asked, “Why does the advisory committee only hear the voices of the pro-gun lobby?” She asked where the balance is that we had before when we were in government.

The Conservative government has repeatedly put forward money as the primary rationale for these dramatic changes to the gun registry, as the rationale for taking out the long gun portion and weakening gun control. The fact is that since the government's amnesty was implemented, there have been virtually no savings. Total spending remains stable, this after the government crippled the gun registry and after the two year amnesty for long gun owners who are exempted from the existing law.

As the former vice-chair of Public Safety and National Security committee, I participated in the committee meetings on both the departmental estimates and the Auditor General's report. The Minister of Public Safety meanwhile implied that by cutting the long gun registry the government would be saving \$10 million this year, when in fact his own deputy minister expressly testified that the \$10 million in savings would happen no matter what, because they were administrative savings due to management. It had nothing to do with reducing the registration of long guns. This was erroneous again. This completely debunks the government's supposed rationale.

In addition, I state strongly on behalf of Thornhill residents and all Canadians that we must invest in the safety of Canadians. It is non-negotiable.

While on that committee, I vigorously supported a motion to keep the gun registry intact in its entirety, including the long gun portion. This motion was unanimously passed by all three opposition parties yet was ignored by the Conservative government. The government continually states that it supports the average Canadian, yet when it comes to gun control, and in fact all issues, it is completely out of touch with what Canadians want and displays a total disregard toward the wishes of the majority of Canadians, the wishes of the average Canadian.

o the contrary, the government turned its back on Canadians and used a backdoor, non-transparent method of weakening gun control, getting around what it clearly saw as a little nuisance: Parliament and therefore Canadians themselves.

The Conservative minority government's dogged determination to fulfill its ill-conceived election promise despite indisputable facts and the absolute responsibility of government to do everything in its power to ensure the

safety of its citizens is indefensible. Anything less than a fully intact gun registry is unconscionable.

Tonight we heard the Minister of Public Safety say that the government's intention with Bill C-21 is to dismiss the long gun portion of the gun registry. The truth is out. The Conservative government, through this bill, is dismissing the safety of Canadians. This is shameful.

We also heard the minister tonight call the registration of guns in Canada an unfortunate journey. This belittles and makes light of Canadians' safety and it is also a major slap in the face to those who have been victims of firearms. From day one the government has made it abundantly clear that it is ideologically committed to weakening gun control in our country. In fact, incredibly, tonight we heard from one of the hon. members who spoke that it probably would be good to abolish the entire gun registry.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Conservative government when it is clearly putting a misguided, deeply flawed election promise before the safety and well-being of Canadians? The government, through this bill, will fail to uphold the most important responsibility of any government: the safety of its citizens. I take this very seriously, as do Canadians.

I do not support Bill C-21 and I definitely do not support sending it back to committee. This bill should not even be on the table. To pass it would go against the very sensibility of the majority of Canadians, against what they know is right and what they know is in keeping with the needs in Canada today. What I do support is protecting Canadians and strengthening, not weakening, gun control in our country.