

Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Issue 16 - Evidence for March 28, 2012

OTTAWA, Wednesday, March 28, 2012

The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, to which was referred Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, met this day at 2:34 p.m. to give consideration to the bill.

Senator John D. Wallace (*Chair*) in the chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Good afternoon, and welcome Senate colleagues, invited guests and members of the general public who are viewing today's proceedings on the CPAC television network. I am John Wallace, a senator from New Brunswick and chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Before introducing the subject that brings us here today, I would like to take a moment and ask each of our committee members, if they would, to introduce themselves.

I will begin with your deputy chair, Senator Fraser.

Senator Fraser: Thank you very much. My name is Joan Fraser, and I am a senator from Quebec.

Senator Baker: George Baker from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Senator Chaput: Maria Chaput, I am from Manitoba.

Senator Jaffer: Mobina Jaffer from British Columbia.

Senator Watt: Charlie Watt from Nunavik.

Senator Lang: Senator Dan Lang, Yukon.

Senator Frum: Linda Frum, Ontario.

Senator Dagenais: Jean-Guy Dagenais from Quebec.

Senator Boisvenu: Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu from Quebec.

Senator White: Vern White, Ontario.

Senator Runciman: Bob Runciman, Ontario, Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

Today, as you know, we are continuing our consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act. This bill, which is entitled "Ending the Long-gun Registry Act," was introduced in the House of Commons by the Minister of Public Safety on October 25, 2011.

The bill amends the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act to remove the requirement to register firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted and, in particular, non-restricted long guns. The bill also provides for the destruction of existing records held in the Canadian firearms registry and under the control of firearms officers which relate to the registration of such firearms.

Bill C-19 was referred to this committee by the Senate on March 8, 2012 for further examination and study. This is the committee's third meeting on Bill C-19. Our hearings, as you know, are open to the public and are also available live via webcast on the parl.gc.ca website. Additional information on the scheduling of witnesses can be found on the parl.gc.ca website, under the heading of "Senate Committees."

Colleagues, I am pleased to welcome, as part of our first panel today, from the Calgary Police Service, Chief Rick Hanson.

Chief Hanson joined the Calgary Police Service in February of 1975. From October 2005 to October 2007 he was a member of the RCMP in the K division before returning to the Calgary Police Service as chief in 2007.

Welcome, Chief Hanson. I believe you have an opening statement. We would be most interested to hear it.

Rick Hanson, Chief, Calgary Police Service: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Bill C-19. There has been a lot said about this bill and the abolition of the long-gun registry. I have listened to the discussions that have raged across Canada and have been amazed at the emotion around the debate and the lack of understanding as to the law itself — not only a misunderstanding of the law as it will be after Bill C-19, but a misunderstanding of the law as it was prior to the implementation of this bill.

First, let me introduce myself. I have been a police officer for over 37 years. I am currently the chief of police of the third largest municipal police service in Canada. Having been born and raised in Alberta I make no apologies for the fact that I think society is best protected when the most dangerous among us, the predators, pedophiles and enterprise criminals, are sent to prison for significant periods of time. I also firmly believe that the police are an arm of the community and not an arm of the state. We represent the safety and security needs of the citizens we serve. As such, we need to listen to them, reflect their beliefs and address their concerns.

That is why I firmly believe that those suffering from addictions and mental illness should be treated as a health issue and not a justice issue. There should be treatment facilities, not prisons. In other words, let us not criminalize those who are not criminals.

I am not one of those who believes that good police work is cross-referencing the morning obituaries with the firearms data base and then racing over to the home of the deceased to seize the expensive firearms collection from the grieving widow because she did not have a possession and acquisition licence. Unfortunately, that actually happens.

I believe that the long-gun registry gave the uninformed and misinformed a false sense of security. Too often the gun registry was presented as the panacea for all of society's firearms problems. The reality is it did little to protect society from the gun violence being perpetrated by armed thugs

and criminals on the street, none of whom have possession of acquisition licences and none of whom registered the weapon in a national database. The real magic is in keeping the guns out of the hands of dangerous people and criminals, and herein lie my recommendations.

First, strengthen the law around possession and acquisition licences. Keeping guns out of the hands of the mentally unstable, the dangerous and the criminals is key. Without a possession and acquisition licence you cannot have access to legal guns. The proposed section 23 in the bill before us today should be far clearer. If a person is selling a firearm to another, the wording must be that the transferee must present a valid possession and acquisition licence and the transferor must check with the registrar to ensure that the licence is valid.

To have the threshold stand, Bill C-19 says:

(b) the transferor has no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized to acquire and possess that kind of firearm.

That is woefully inadequate. In other words, for the purchasing or selling of firearms we have to be firm in proving that the recipient or buyer of the firearm is properly licensed.

Second, we must reinstate point of sale recording. This existed prior to the gun registry and was useful for two reasons. The first is that it allowed for proper auditing of gun stores to ensure that they are complying with the law requiring them to sell only to those with proper licences. That is a starting point should that gun be identified as being used in a criminal offence.

Third, restricted and prohibited guns should be registered individually to the vendor at the point of entry into Canada. This is a ridiculous gap in the law. As it stands now, you could have 1,000 handguns come into this country and be delivered to a gun store without being registered. They are only registered at point of sale. We found this out because an individual at a gun store was selling handguns under the table to criminals on the street. We found and seized these guns and found that there was no record of them coming into Canada. It was only through an informant that we learned that one of the employees of the gun store was selling some of these guns out the back door, with no record.

If gun registration is so important, which I believe it is in this country, especially for restricted and prohibited weapons, those guns should be registered to the vendor the minute they come into the country. They should not be delivered in a big box to a wholesaler or retailer with no expectation of any accountability.

Fourth, any police officer should be authorized, without warrant, to enter a gun store and reconcile these records to lawful sales.

Fifth, another of my pet peeves, search and seizure laws as related to firearms have to be strengthened. Right now we are having a bit of a respite from the gun battles that were occurring on the major streets in all of our cities. Those guns are illegally in the country and primarily unregistered. No one is licensed to have them. Criminals do not register their guns. Yet I could tell you story after story of courts ruling that seizures of handguns made in vehicles searches or from drug dealers were unlawful. If we truly want to get the dangerous guns that are killing people off the street, we have to modify the search and seizure laws so that our officers have the authority to take the guns out of the hands of the killers. It is as simple as that.

It should be worded to say that if a person is convicted of a weapons offence, a violent crime or drug trafficking, the police have the authority to search a vehicle or a person if there is a reasonable belief that he may be in possession of a weapon, and this belief may include having association to a street gang or other violent criminals.

Sixth is training. As I mentioned earlier, I have listened carefully to the impassioned and emotional debate across the country on the gun registry. I recently heard a senior ranking police officer of one of the major police organizations dramatically state that blood will flow in the streets if the long-gun registry is terminated. He referenced the thousands of times a day that Canadian police officers access the long-gun registry. This same officer was unaware that licensing requirements continue to exist. In other words, you cannot own a firearm, registered or otherwise, if you do not have a licence. He was unaware that if you were concerned about whether a person at a particular address owned guns you could cross-reference the licensing data base, which would tell you whether the occupant was likely to be in possession of a firearm.

You have heard the argument that it is making the streets safer for police officers because when they go to a hot call they will not know if the person owns guns if the registry is not in place. The reality is that the licensing regimen is still in place. If that is important to you, it is still there for every call you go on. I am one of those who believe that you should treat every call as a dangerous one if you do not know what is going on in the residence.

Similarly, officers are unaware that this new law does not change the fact that a person must produce his possession licence on demand if he is in possession of a firearm. Without a licence, the gun can be seized. Officers are also unaware that there is a process in place to revoke an existing possession and acquisition licence and seize firearms from the owner if there is a conviction for violence or a weapons offence or a substantive change in the person's status from the time he received his licence.

The scary part is that these beliefs are being passed on to the officers on the street as fact. Too many officers are now unaware of the law as it relates to the licensing and possession of firearms and the still significant powers that they have. The federal government must develop a mandatory training package for all police officers and police services across this country so that they understand that under the law they can seize firearms from those who have become a danger to others.

Eighth, and finally, there should be public safety announcements that explain the laws around firearms. It should be made clear that licensing is still a requirement and that strict criteria are still rigidly enforced. The law that applies to the selling of firearms should be clearly explained. The real danger around Bill C-19 is not the elimination of the registration provision around long guns but the immense misunderstanding that is being perpetrated by those who do not understand the powers that still exist and the lack of recognition of the need to give additional authority to the police to more effectively deal with the serious bad guys who continue to use unregistered, restricted and prohibited weapons that are unlawfully in the country and used purely for criminal purposes.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to voice that today.

The Chair: Thank you very much for those comments, Chief Hanson.

Before turning to questions from committee members, I want to remind senators that due to the number of witnesses that we have to hear today, we must keep to the schedule. Please keep that in mind with the length of your questions. I again remind you that we are here to listen more to the witnesses and less to each other. Our time with Chief Hanson will end at 3:25 p.m. If you could keep that in mind, I would appreciate it.

Senator Fraser: Thank you very much, Chief Hanson. You packed an awful lot into what I know is the limited time you were given. I would like to come back to your recommendation about the point of sale requirements for registry. Could you elaborate on how that would work? You said 37 years. I do not know whether you would have been around for the old version. Tell us how you think it should work.

Mr. Hanson: It is amazing to me that a gun store, a legitimate gun store — I will back the bus up further. We have been registering handguns, restricted weapons, in this country since 1935. What is amazing to me is that the onus is put so far downstream on the purchase. In my opinion, if there is a gun order, if there are one thousand handguns or one thousand 9 mm or .45 calibre Glocks coming into this country to be sold at a gun store, I can think of no reason in this day and age why every single one of those guns should not have the serial number, make and model registered to that gun store before that owner can pick it up at whatever brokerage he picks it up from. There should be that in place prior to him selling it.

What we are finding on the streets is so many unregistered handguns. For the longest time, we could not figure that out, until we found out, through a couple of investigations — one was a good investigation out of British Columbia by the RCMP, and there is one out of Calgary — that if you pilfer those guns before they make the front counter and the point of sale, you can sell those out the back door and there is no registration of them ever coming into Canada. There is no record of it coming into Canada. That is unacceptable.

Senator Fraser: You are not proposing that it just be a requirement for the gun seller to keep a record as of the point of sale: "I sold this gun with this record number to this person with this licence number." You think it should be from the beginning. It would include, once the guns are finally sold, if I understand the way it used to be, the serial number of the gun and identifying material for the person who buys the gun.

Mr. Hanson: In the case of the handgun, there must still be the registration certificates and the permit, but there should be a paper trail from the time that order crosses the border.

Furthermore, I do not see why you could not do it as well for long guns and re-implement what they used to have years ago, which my learned friend Senator White called the green sheets or blue book or green book. There was a book that was a registration —

Senator Fraser: I have seen reference to the green book.

Mr. Hanson: It was a point of sale registration to the owner of the long gun. No one had problems with that, and it makes good sense. What is frustrating is that so many of the weapons that we are dealing with on the street are killing people and there are so little controls when they come across the border, and that is a place where it could be enhanced significantly.

Senator Fraser: You are the first one to raise that point before us. I want to be clear that, in the end, what this would do in terms of long guns is remove the onus for recordkeeping, so to speak, from the ultimate gun owner back to the vendor.

Mr. Hanson: Even with long guns, there should be a point of sale record to indicate what happened to that gun.

Senator Fraser: Thank you very much.

Senator Lang: I appreciate the witness before us here today. I know you have a lot of expertise in this particular area.

I would like to focus at the beginning on the question of the registry itself and the fact that what we are debating here really is whether or not the registry in place has worked or has not worked. We have had evidence and testimony before this committee, and in the other place, for that matter, where it has been explained over and over again that the registry that is in place has 40 per cent errors, maybe 90 per cent errors, depending on where it is. The fact is that, for example, someone abused the system. They registered a glue gun, the make as Mastercraft and the serial number, and it was registered. Perhaps you could elaborate further on the present

registry and perhaps what it is not doing, because I think there is a false impression out there that this registry is in place and is working.

Mr. Hanson: Again, it is the largest repository of honest people that exists in this country. There is no doubt about it. The only people who choose to register their long guns are meticulously honest people who are not involved in criminal activity. It is as simple as that. What I have always taken great exception to is if a person has an unregistered long rifle, a .22 that is sitting in the garage or a shotgun, he may have even the possession and acquisition licence, but he can still be charged criminally for having an unregistered gun, whereas if you have an unregistered car, that is an offence as well, but it is a provincial statute. You are criminalizing people who, to a large degree, are not criminals. The story I told about going through the obituaries and cross referencing with the gun registry and then going and seizing the guns from a grieving widow is a true story. The people that generally register those guns are law-abiding people, to a large degree, who have never had a problem with the law.

What really frustrated me as the chief about three years ago, when we were literally in the midst of downtown gun battles, is when we were fighting for laws that would be impactful as related to targeting organized crime and the killing going on, people were still talking about how the gun registry was somehow the panacea. It was sold to people, and it is a placebo. It gave people a false sense of security that something was being done. The reality is that it did precious little. Most of the guns we seized off the street were unregistered and had never been registered. People did not have licences to have them. Those are the people that were causing us the most grief as police officers. I realize that some people think that somehow you are doing a good job.

This is a true story again. In a province like Alberta, where you have a lot of outdoor activity, there was an outfitter who had two guys from the States who paid big bucks to go duck hunting. They were out shooting, and all of a sudden two police officers show up and seize the guns in spite of the fact that the guide had the proper permits and everything. He asked, "Why are you seizing the guns? This is legitimate." The officer said, "We got a complaint of gunshots." The guy said, "Well, duh. It is duck season. You are going to hear gunshots."

There was a lack of understanding of what the gun registry was supposed to do and who it targeted and the resources it took away from focusing on

the real criminals causing havoc in society. Yet people assumed that the time police officers spent looking for unregistered .22s in a farmhouse somehow contributed to additional safety. If you look back at incidents that occurred where people have said that, "You know what? The gun registry could have prevented this," and you go back, and there are instances where people have had their possession licences revoked and they still have access to illegal guns.

The key is to target criminals. The key is to take away possession and acquisition licences when there is a substantive change in the status of someone who possesses one. In other words, if someone who is a criminal or gets into domestic situations and has a possession and acquisition licence and there is something to suggest they are a risk, then suspend their possession and acquisition licence and seize their guns, because they are no longer legally obtained. The idea that somehow registering these provided some sense of security over and above anything else just created a false sense of security that was inaccurate and false.

Senator Lang: Perhaps for us, in view of your experience, could you walk us through exactly what the law requires of an individual applying for a long gun firearm licence? I think it is important that people realize, even at this stage, that it is pretty good scrutiny and test prior to that.

Mr. Hanson: You have to confirm identification, which is one thing. Second, there is a full and complete criminal records check that is done to determine if there is a record. There are also phone calls made to your spouse to determine if the spouse has any concerns about you acquiring a gun.

Senator Lang: Before you can take the test.

Mr. Hanson: Yes, there is the requirement that came with the act of the test that you have to pass for the acquisition and retention of the gun.

Senator Jaffer: Chief, I have learned a lot from you today. One of my concerns is proposed section 23. You mentioned that at the beginning: the acquisition and possession of a licence. If you look at 23(b), my concern is that I would have liked more of a responsibility on the seller rather than just the belief. I would like you to comment on that.

Mr. Hanson: I could not agree more. That is why I mentioned it, too. The threshold is way too low:

. . . the transferor has no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized to acquire and possess that kind of firearm.

I can tell you that criminals and killers are really nice people. You can sit and talk to them and you will never know they are a killer. It is just that they do things differently from us: They kill people and it does not bother them. No one can make the determination that this is a good guy and he probably has his licence.

I see no reason why it would not be an absolute that requires a person to present his PAL — possession and acquisition licence — and also require the person selling the gun to make a quick phone call to ask if it is legitimate.

Senator Jaffer: Thank you for sharing my concern. I am really concerned about that proposed section.

When you were responding to my colleague Senator Lang, you spoke about the spouse or, I imagine, a common-law partner being called before a licence is issued. I am aware that it does happen.

I wanted you to elaborate more on that. What kinds of records are kept? Before the licence is issued, does there have to be a tick confirming that the spouse or common-law partner has been called?

Mr. Hanson: I do not know how they actually keep the records because that is not a policing issue, from our perspective.

I can tell you that one of our greatest concerns is obviously domestic violence. We realize that there is only one way to manage domestic violence, and that is to have experts in the field who do everything they can to mitigate against a violent response.

When you look at domestic violence and deaths in Calgary and in Alberta, the reality is that to suggest it is only guns that kill them is just wrong.

As domestic situations escalate, there is generally an ability to track that, to keep good records, and it is incumbent upon police services to share that

information. We are getting better and better at sharing information across jurisdictions so that can be considered before a licence is even given.

If a person does not get the licence they do not get the gun. If they do not get a gun, that eliminates the concern but not the risk.

Senator Jaffer: The third area that I have concerns about is people with mental challenges. When you were explaining to Senator Lang about the different stages, do you have anything to help you assess the person? It is hard; I know it is not easy. I am asking for miracles, but is there anything in your system that helps you assess that?

Mr. Hanson: I think with police officers, and with the information systems that we do have, we all recognize — and I think Senator White was a leader in Ottawa in regard to that — that mental illness is a significant issue with people on the street. We are doing a far better job of tracking that. When somebody accesses our information systems, we are careful about what we use that information for because we recognize it is a health issue. It is not necessarily a criminal issue but there are considerations and facts that should be considered when looking to licensing. I think it is just a matter of ensuring that those records are adequately accessed and properly shared to reduce the risk when issuing possession and acquisition licences.

The Chair: On the issue of domestic violence, if it is a matter that has gone before the courts, am I correct that the courts would be able to order, if there were guns in the house, the removal of the guns and revocation of the licence?

Mr. Hanson: There is a process for having that. If police officers believe that a person who should not be in possession of guns has a possession and acquisition licence, a process can be implemented to access the courts to get an appropriate court order to seize the guns and take back the possession licence.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Senator White: Thank you for coming out from Calgary to meet with us today.

We heard commentary that the registry is accessed up to 17,000 times a day. You made reference to it briefly. Can you explain to the people here what really happens when it comes to 17,000 accesses a day?

Mr. Hanson: There are automatic record searches that can happen that our systems can be set up to do, address checks. There are so many information systems that you can do an automatic check on virtually every address.

Many systems are set up so if there is a dispatch call it will check that address against existing databases and can identify the fact that this is a person who has registered handguns. The call may not be one where it is even an issue. The person could be calling because their car was stolen or their house was broken into and entered, or it could be that somebody broke into their garage and took a lawn mower. It would be an automatic check against that database. It does not mean that police officers are checking because there are 17,000 calls a day that are so high risk that they have to check to see if that person has a handgun. A far greater indicator of risk is checking your own database to see what kind of information you have on the occupant of that house.

Second, if the call is related to some kind of a violence call, then there are ways to access and find out whether the person has a possession or acquisition licence, in which case it would not matter if he has any guns registered or not. It means he is licensed to have guns.

Third, if it is a high-risk call, our officers at least — I think most — are trained to approach that situation as being one where there could be firearms. Whether it is firearms or knives or whatever, if it is a high-risk situation the risk exists no matter what, whether there is a record of guns in the house or not.

Automatic checks are done on a number of police services now that are linked to the database, and that includes the firearms database.

Senator White: Would it be fair to say the vast majority of times when that information is gathered it is not shared with the police officer, regardless? Someone going for a break and enter, for example.

Mr. Hanson: It is irrelevant to most calls. I will speak to the Calgary Police Service. If we get a call, a violent call at a house, a weapons complaint, a

disturbance call, or a situation where we are not sure what we are getting into, we will check the database, and that will include the database around firearms, and we can relate that to the officers for sure.

In most cases, it is irrelevant to the call and does not get imparted to the officers.

Senator Baker: Thank you for a very comprehensive brief. I cannot say that I followed everything that you were advocating, but I am sure it is all legitimate and based upon fact.

The one thing that I wanted to question you on is your reference, which was considerable, to the finding of guns in cars or vehicles. You said that this is sometimes done during searches for drugs, and then you proffered that the judge would not allow you to lay charges for the gun offences because of some other reason.

What are you advocating? Are you advocating that the police be allowed to search any vehicle without a search warrant?

Mr. Hanson: No, not any vehicle.

Senator Baker: What are you advocating?

Mr. Hanson: I will explain with a story. Toronto police officers were patrolling a high-risk area of the city where the community had said that they had had it with drug trafficking and wanted a higher profile police presence. The patrolling officers observed a person who they believed was trafficking drugs, and you can pick that out pretty easily.

Senator Baker: Is this the shoe box case?

Mr. Hanson: No, I do not think so.

When they approached the transaction, the man turned to walk away and the officers made the arrest. They found drugs and a .45 calibre handgun. The gun was inadmissible as evidence as it was viewed to have been obtained in an unlawful search.

That story and others like it occur right across this country. On the one hand, we want safer streets and tighter gun laws, and on the other hand,

every police service has stories very similar to that because our search and seizure laws have become so restrictive that it is extremely difficult to get seized items into court.

We know who the gang members are. We know who the criminals are. We know that they are generally driving around wearing body armour and probably have guns in secret compartments in their vehicles. We know that some of them have been convicted of serious offences. Yet, if we stop and search their vehicle and seize a handgun from it, we know that we will not be successful in court and will be chastised for conducting an unlawful search.

Senator Baker: Under the law in Canada, for which there is a basis, you cannot go around searching vehicles. That is contrary to the law unless you have a judicial authorization, reasonable grounds, to do it. There is a reasonable expectation of privacy in a vehicle.

To my recollection, the case that you just outlined was one in which the search was purported to be incidental to an arrest. If the arrest is not lawful, then of course the search is thereby not lawful. The person was not given back the gun at the end of the day. If something is judged by the court to be an unlawful search, it is an unlawful search.

Are you seriously advocating that because of somebody's history there be an automatic right to search? Section 495 of the Criminal Code is very clear. A warrantless arrest can only be made on certain grounds; in the commission of an offence that is taking place or if an indictable offence is about to take place. That is clearly written in section 495 of the Criminal Code.

Mr. Hanson: If it makes you feel any better, I am very familiar with the law. You are not saying anything I have not heard.

Senator Baker: I know you are. I have looked you up and you are cited in many cases as being an excellent police officer.

I get your point. You are suggesting that we change 495 of the Criminal Code to allow an officer to search a vehicle based upon what?

Mr. Hanson: I am familiar with that. It is ironic that you are talking like that because you have just made the argument for all the officers who think it is

much easier to get a conviction if they seize a .22 from a farmer than if they seize a gun from the guys who are killing people on the streets and driving around with impunity because the law protects them so well. It is too much work to get a conviction for them, so let us wait until they kill somebody, even though we know that they are associated with gangs, they have a record for violence and they are wearing body armour. If that is acceptable to you, which it obviously is —

Senator Baker: No, no.

Mr. Hanson: No, no. I am just answering your question. That may be acceptable to you because you are upholding the rule of law, which clearly takes precedence. Well, that was not always the law.

The law has evolved and it can evolve again. The question is whether people are serious about reducing carnage on the street and the damage done by real guns or are intent upon upholding the rights of proven criminals who disregard the law and kill people. If that is what is more important, that will take precedence, and I respect that. However, if you want to put a stop to killing and hurting people, step back and recognize that the evolution of law to this point has taken a turn that was not expected. I remember those debates around the Charter in 1981-82, and it was never expected to go this far.

It is a choice that has to be made. That is why police officers pick off the low-hanging fruit and that is why the gun registry was abused more than it was used. It is much easier to get stats when you take a shotgun from a duck hunter than when you go after the bad guys.

Senator Frum: Mr. Hanson, you made many excellent points. One was about how most of the gun crime in Canada is committed with handguns. However, in the extremely tragic occurrence at Dawson College the violence was committed with registered guns. You talk about emotion and say that there is a disconnect from reality, but I have trouble understanding how in that case a registered gun prevented violence. When criminals have registered guns, the registry does not prevent them from committing crimes if that is what they want to do.

Mr. Hanson: That is true. There is nothing to say that a person who is lawfully in possession of a gun cannot use it for an illegal purpose. That does happen.

The issue around violence, especially domestic violence, which is a concern when it comes to this, is something that the police are dealing with better now. We are probably not doing as well as we could be, but we are evolving.

In answer to that specific question, it did not make any difference at that point.

Senator Frum: To me that points to the need for the focus on licensing as opposed to the registry. You want to ensure that people who should not have guns do not get guns versus writing down the serial numbers of the guns that they have. That will not prevent anything.

Mr. Hanson: There is no single solution to this issue. No one part of the law can solve all the problems. About 100 little pieces need to be fixed to have the maximum impact for the protection of society, but each one does its part in making society a little safer.

Senator Frum: The registry will not prevent someone who is in possession of a registered gun from committing a heinous act such as what happened at Dawson College.

[Translation]

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Welcome, Mr. Hanson. I would like to know who issues the licence, how it is issued and what the standards are. Does everyone around this table who wants to learn to use a rifle, that is to say a long gun, have to take a course and obtain a course certificate? Who investigates good behaviour and whether the person presents a danger to anyone, apart from his wife?

In the case of Concordia, I will simply say that, in Quebec, Concordia University could have objected to Mr. Fabrikant's having a weapon, and his wife as well, but his wife was terrorized and therefore did not oppose it.

All that to say, in response to my colleague, that legally obtained weapons do not mean that the individual had no psychiatric problems and ultimately was not reported.

Who is responsible for reporting a person who has behavioural disorders?
How do we know, when a licence is issued, whether that person has
behavioural problems?

[English]

Mr. Hanson: That is a good question. I know that when somebody applies for either renewal or for a new possession licence for any kind of firearm —

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Where do we go?

Mr. Hanson: It is a federal government-administered process. The person responsible for doing the background check also makes a phone call to the spouse, and I know that what they will frequently ask is, "Are you available to talk to me right now?" Domestic violence is insidious. I can tell you that there are many people who are reluctant or scared to say what is really going on in their house, and we get that. We understand that. It is a complicated issue.

When somebody is doing the background check, you would hope that there is a record that the police have maintained if there has been a response to domestics at that location that they can access. Absent that record, it would be incumbent on the spouse to alert the registration investigation, the people phoning in regard to the application, to acknowledge that there is a domestic situation, and that would be sufficient for the person who is issuing the possession licence to make a determination that there should be more investigation into this or whether the PAL should be issued.

The Chair: I am sorry, senator. I have to move on.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: How do you know it is the spouse that you are talking to?

Mr. Hanson: That is a good question.

The Chair: Thank you, senator.

Senator Runciman: I have a question flowing from Senator Baker's query. With respect to search and seizure, you were talking about the Charter, but you also had a proposal with respect to a legislative way that that could be

addressed and meet the Charter issues. Was that what you were suggesting?

Mr. Hanson: I do not think anything would meet the Charter issues. I think that what has evolved is just what the discussion basically talked about. It is virtually impossible without a warrant to remove weapons that are dangerous unless you have a significant amount of grounds, and yet you know when you see these people together that they are known criminals, there is a record and you have intelligence that they belong to a gang. It would require the creation of a new law that would have to be tested through the courts to see if it could be upheld in light of the charter. Right now, it does not exist. The authorities are not there.

Senator Runciman: We know it would be tested.

We will have witnesses from the chief's association. You talked about a high-ranking official and blood on the streets. I am not sure if it was a policing official or not.

Mr. Hanson: It was.

Senator Runciman: You talked about the lack of understanding in the policing community. I am impressed with your testimony today. I know we have had a few folks in the urban areas — like yourself, Senator White, and Julian Fantino at one point as well — who have taken the same position.

If you look at the association that represents chiefs across Canada, I wonder if you would comment and assist us when they do appear before us as to why they have taken that position, if you can, and if you have any observations with respect to that, and it is a position they have taken for a number of years now. There is no question about it.

Mr. Hanson: One thing I have learned in 37 years of policing is that you guys have a tough job because you have to create laws that appeal to a diverse population right across this country, where there are regional differences and there is no agreement. I can sit down with Senator White, and we will have agreement on probably 90 per cent of the things we talk about in policing, but we will disagree on 10 per cent of them

I come from a province where it is very rural, where outdoor activities like hunting and fishing and farming and ranching and that kind of stuff is

prevalent. Do we respect and appreciate there has to be regulations around guns? Yes, but that differs from other people's experience where they have been primarily raised in a city, where guns are just viewed as just bad, period. There is no way I will convince him or her of my point of view any more than they will convince me of their point of view.

The CACP consists of those chiefs of police with a variety of different views. Like with any organization, if the majority which is 51 per cent says that this is the position they want to hold, then that is the position. It does not mean that they are necessarily wrong or that the position I am taking is wrong. It is just that we are different. I understand the difficulty behind the legislation.

The Chair: We will have to move along senator.

[Translation]

Senator Chaput: Mr. Hanson, you said, in response to a question from one of my colleagues, that the registry does not prevent crime or murder. I say that the registry is one tool among many for preventing crime. Since you say it does not prevent crime, is there a tool that, in itself, does prevent crime, or does that require a series of tools? Can you name one tool that prevents crime?

[English]

Mr. Hanson: There is not one single tool at all that prevents crime.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: You said in your presentation that the registry gave a false sense of security. Did you mean a false sense of security for police officers or for the general public?

[English]

Mr. Hanson: I think for both. I think that too many people, the way the bill that the registry was presented, thought that it was literally the panacea for gun control, and they did not realize it was not the total answer.

The mere fact that some officers actually believed that knowing if a person has registered guns in that house or that house comes up as not having registered guns somehow makes their approach any different boggles my mind. If it created that sense that you are somehow safer, then they did so at their own peril.

Too many regular citizens who are on the margins and paying a little bit of attention assumed that the gun registry would solve all these gun crimes. If I had a buck for every time I went to a community group, when we were getting shot up in Calgary, and they asked why the gun registry is not fixing all this, it was clear they did not understand it. It was presented as something that was far more comprehensive than it was. As a result, you have other issues, some of which you heard some discussion about today, that go virtually ignored because the panacea was here, and we ignored all the other stuff that was going on that contributed to it, like the unlawful entry of thousands of handguns into this country where we have no record of it because of the loose registration at the border.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: Correct me if I am wrong. I heard you say that some police officers did not understand the firearms registry as such. Am I wrong?

[English]

Mr. Hanson: A lot of officers do not understand the entire regimen around gun control, gun registration and possession and acquisition licenses. There are a lot of officers that think that this bill eliminates the need to be licensed. There are officers that truly believe that, "There you go. Anybody can walk around the street carrying a long rifle, and there is nothing I can do about it."

They do not realize that the registry is different from the whole licensing regimen. Many officers do not even know that if somebody is lawfully in possession of a licence and legal long rifles and guns is convicted of serious criminal offences, then we have the authority to revoke that possession and acquisition licence and seize the legally registered guns prior to Bill C-19.

There is a lot of misunderstanding around the act, and there needs to be a lot of training. Once Bill C-19 goes through or does not, depending on what you do, there has to be a concerted effort to educate officers.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: Mr. Chair, we were obviously talking about the long portion of the firearms registry, not the registry as such, but rather the long portion.

[English]

The Chair: Colleagues, that concludes our time with Chief Hanson.

Thank you so much. That was an excellent presentation; you were to the point and your thoughts were clearly laid out for us. That was helpful and we appreciate it.

For our second panel, we are pleased to have with us, representing the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Chief Mario Harel, Director of Police Services for the City of Gatineau. We also have Sergeant Murray Grismer from the Saskatoon Police Force. Welcome.

I would point out to our committee members and viewers that Senator Joyal has now joined us. He is a regular member of our committee and we are pleased that he is with us today.

Mr. Harel, I understand that you have an opening statement.

Senator Joyal: Mr. Chair, pursuant to section 2 of the Conflict of Interest Code for Senators, which provides that any senator should avoid finding himself or herself in a position whereby a conflict of interest might exist or arise, I declare that I am in such a situation. I will withdraw from the sitting of this committee and from any debates at report stage or third reading in the Senate in relation to Bill C-19.

The Chair: Thank you for bringing that to our attention. We fully understand.

Senator Joyal: I hope that will be mentioned in the minutes of this committee report.

The Chair: We will ensure that it is.

Senator Joyal: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Harel, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mario Harel, Vice-President, Chief, Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police: Mr. Chair, thank you for having the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police present to you today with regard to Bill C-19.

My name is Director Mario Harel of the Gatineau Police Service and I am a Vice-President of the CACP. I recently read an article which I believe captures where we are today on this issue. It stated that police officers seemed to be taking the bill's passage in stride, despite the fact most police organizations across the country supported the registry.

"I will be sorry to see an end to the long-gun registry," said Shelburne Police Chief Kent Moore. "However, we as police officers will continue to work within the current framework. As always, my focus is on the safety of our community.

"I would also hope that the data collected to date will not be destroyed without lengthy discussions taking place." The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has stated its long-held support for the long-gun registry. Let me briefly reiterate our reasons why. 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. The registry provides preventive and investigational value to law enforcement and the communities we serve. 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.

Finally, we believe it promotes further responsibility and accountability by firearm owners. The long-gun registry presents flags for law enforcement which, along with other tools, help us assess a situation we might face or assist during investigations where firearms are involved. We respect the debate that has occurred and the opposition of our views by those who simply want to hunt and engage in the sport of shooting.

Like many laws, the provisions on the long-gun registry required that the vast majority of citizens, who are law-abiding, balance their individual privilege with the broader right of society to be safe. We value that many of those citizens have accepted this premise and registered more than 7 million long guns.

We also recognize that for those who have not, the threat of criminalization is not a proper response. We acknowledge, on the issue of repealing the long-gun registry, that the government has been transparent with the Canadian people regarding their intent to pass this legislation. In our parliamentary system, we must respect the desires of Canadians who elected this government with the ability to do so. Nothing now is gained by providing further opposition to this bill.

We therefore ask this committee to help assist law enforcement regarding three areas of concern when this bill is passed. First, ensure controls are there to prevent individuals from stockpiling firearms or access by criminal organizations; ensure the reinstatement of record-keeping by firearm vendors which existed prior to the implementation of the long-gun registry, the green book.

Ensure that there is clear responsibility of gun owners who transfer their long guns to other individuals. Note that, between 2006 and 2009, 1.85 million long guns changed hands.

These concerns stem from the fact that there will no longer be a required record to indicate what firearms were sold to whom or how many. It is time to heal divisions.

We share concerns, as mentioned by Chief Hanson, with regard to the wider issue of gun problems in our communities, those relating to gangs, organized crime and cross-border smuggling of firearms. These are areas requiring greater focus.

It is also important to the CACP that we acknowledge the selfless support of those individuals and organizations that have come before these committees to identify their concerns. These people bring forward the concerns of the most vulnerable in our society and include victims of domestic abuse, women's groups, students and graduates of Polytechnique and Dawson College.

As law enforcement, our duty is, to the best of our ability, to ensure your safety. We want you to know that we are always committed to doing so.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Harel.

Sergeant Grismer, I believe you have an opening statement.

Murray Grismer, as an individual: It is an honour and privilege to appear before you today regarding Bill C-19. I am a patrol sergeant with the Saskatoon Police Service with 23 years of service policing Saskatchewan's largest city and responsible for the manpower, deployment and call response in Saskatoon's second-largest geographic area.

The courts of Saskatchewan have accredited me as an expert witness able to give opinion evidence on firearms. I am also a master instructor for both Canadian firearm safety courses and an approved firearm verifier.

Please understand that my comments here today are mine and mine alone. They do not reflect the opinion or opinions of my employer, the chief of police or the police service. That said, I am the current spokesman for the Saskatoon Police Association on the Firearms Act.

The police community is divided on support for the registry; front-line officers versus chiefs of police. When the Canadian Police Association supported the registry, they adopted their position without polling front-line officers. The Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers did poll their members and found the Saskatoon Police Association was 99.46 per cent in opposition to the long-gun registry while other locals were as high as 100 per cent against it.

There are some who may choose to consider the opinions of those who oppose the registry as uninformed or uneducated. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, we recognize that the true cornerstone of public safety is training, screening and licensing of firearms owners — not the registration of non-restricted firearms.

The registry misses the target of the criminal use of firearms. Instead, it targets millions of lawful, legitimate firearms owners in the name of crime control. The fact is that the registry can do nothing to prevent criminals from

obtaining or using firearms. École Polytechnique, Mayerthorpe, Spiritwood and Dawson College are names synonymous with tragic events involving firearms. However, the registry could not, would not and did not stop these tragic events. Retention of the registry or records would do nothing to prevent any such further occurrence.

It is egregious that the registry that cost over \$2 billion and a decade of wasted effort cannot be shown to have prevented even one death.

The CACP and others will attempt to convince you that the retention of the registry is an officer safety issue. Further, they will advocate for the retention of records accessible on a database to police investigators if the registry is abolished. To the layperson this may appear reasonable. However, once one knows and understands the failings of the registry, the issue of officer safety takes on a far more sinister meaning. For officers using the registry, trusting in the inaccurate, unverified information contained therein, tragedy looms at the next door.

The argument to retain the registry for investigative purposes is disingenuous or specious at best. Once the registry is abolished, the information contained therein is immediately stale dated. The limited evidentiary value of such erroneous information deteriorates by the minute as firearms across Canada are acquired, sold, altered or destroyed.

Knowing what I do about the registry, I cannot use the information contained therein to swear out a search warrant. To do so would be a criminal act. Projections from the Canadian Firearms Centre privately state that it will take 70 years of attrition to eliminate all the errors and have all the firearms in Canada registered. This level of inaccuracy is unacceptable for any industry, let alone law enforcement. Police officers deserve better. The public and courts demand better.

If the National DNA Data Bank or Automated Fingerprint Identification System had the same potential for error, the public and courts would be outraged, and with just cause. Every entry in these data bases is empirical, a level of accuracy the registry has not attained.

Honourable senators, please approve Bill C-19, as it eliminates a registry that represents the most contentious waste of taxpayer dollars in decades, a registry that is riddled with inaccurate data, a registry that front-line officers do not trust, use or support and, most important, a registry that

represents an unacceptable risk to the safety of front-line police officers across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Sergeant Grismer. We will now turn to questions.

I would ask witnesses and senators to express themselves as concisely as possible.

Senator Fraser: Mr. Grismer, I believe you are a member of the minister's Firearms Advisory Committee.

Mr. Grismer: I am.

Senator Fraser: As a member of that committee, how do you see your responsibility? Is it simply to advocate for the abolition of the long-gun registry, or do you see it as part of your responsibility to address other issues like those raised by Chief Hanson and Mr. Harel; for example the border controls registry of imports of guns or obliging merchants to keep a record of the guns they have sold and to whom? Are you focused only on the long-gun registry or do you look at these other issues as well?

Mr. Grismer: No, Senator Fraser, we are not focused on one single issue. We look at a broader spectrum of issues and provide advice to the minister on those issues.

Senator Fraser: Would that include the matter of whether merchants should keep green books?

Mr. Grismer: Without going into huge detail, it includes things like how firearm sales are transacted. There is much concern about where the merchants will go from here.

Years ago, before I became a police officer, I worked in retail sales in a sporting goods shop. I am very familiar with the ledgers that were kept then. That kind of a system was not onerous then and I do not think the dealers of today would consider it onerous now.

[Translation]

Senator Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Harel. I see that you support a number of points raised by Mr. Hanson. I would not want to go back over

that, but I would like you to give us a few more details. When you say there is a need to ensure controls are there to prevent individuals from stockpiling firearms, what do you mean?

Mr. Harel: That is because there will be no more registry, in either paper or computerized form, in a centralized location, where firearms — we are still talking about long guns — are registered. There is no way to determine whether individuals — we know this is not illegal; it is perfectly legal to buy firearms; there are collectors, but there may be malicious individuals who can buy large quantities of firearms illegally, and we have no way of tracing that. That is the concern that we have about malicious people who might buy large quantities of firearms illegally, without us having any way of monitoring that.

Senator Fraser: Would you like a limit?

Mr. Harel: No, our concern is how people will be able to trace people who buy large quantities of firearms. We have criminal organizations that will be able to buy a lot of firearms without any accountability, without any concern that someone will be aware of that.

[English]

Senator Lang: I would like to go back to the registry itself. That is the key element of the bill, the elimination of the registry. I would like to direct this to Mr. Grismer, if I could.

In your statement, you said:

For officers using the Registry, trusting in the inaccurate and unverified information contained therein, tragedy looms around the next door.

I would like you to expand further on that for the record, if you could.

Second, I would like you to be more specific in respect to the registry and the errors that are in the registry and the reality of the fact that we cannot depend on a registry that is inaccurate. Could you expand on that?

Mr. Grismer: With regard to the first part of your comment, the tragedy, if an officer querying the registry finds there are no firearms listed in that

home and goes into a situation where they have their guard lowered, that represents a risk. They are put at risk.

On the other side of the coin, if they check the registry and the registry says there are firearms there, there may not in fact be those firearms there because firearms do not have to be registered to the owner. That is the fact. Firearms can be registered to an independent body, but the owner can be someone completely different. That is within the Canadian Firearms Centre.

As for the errors and inaccuracies in them, as an expert witness I get called on a regular basis to appear in court. The last one I did was on a whole series of firearms. I had the printout that had been done by the NWEST officer, which was attached to the file. I am looking through the serial numbers and everything. Part of what I do is I verify everything is exactly correct, because it is part of my testimony to the court.

In one instance there was a firearm that had the make and the model description all right; the serial number was wrong. Was it an egregious error? It was an error in a digit. Does that make a difference? It can. It is one instance of errors in them. There are many more, sir.

There are firearms, particularly Browning — and tens of thousands of them — that are registered using the patent number and not the serial number. You now have several thousand firearms, all registered with the same number as the serial number, and that is the patent number. There are two examples there for you.

Senator Lang: If I could follow up on that, you state further that:

Knowing what I do about the Registry, I cannot use any of the information contained in the Registry to swear out a Search Warrant.

Mr. Grismer: That is correct.

Senator Lang: This goes back to my initial question about the registry and the fact that we have a registry in place that is not working. Perhaps you could expand on that statement. That is serious, because there is no point having a registry if you cannot get a search warrant.

Mr. Grismer: The reason that statement is there is because I know the failings of the registry. I know it is inaccurate. I cannot put that information in a search warrant and swear before a justice that the information contained in my information to obtain is true, because I know it is not, and to do that would be a criminal offence. I am not willing to cross that bridge.

Senator Jaffer: I have a question for Chief Harel, but first I have a statement. When your colleagues were here before us, they continuously spoke about the different tools you need to prevent crime and to keep the community safe.

This is a tool that you will miss. When the registry goes, there will be one less tool for you to keep the public safe; is that not correct?

Mr. Harel: This is one of the tools, yes.

Senator Jaffer: You mentioned three things that are of great interest to me. First is ensuring that controls are in place to stop the stockpiling, the reduction of the green book and, finally — and I asked this of the previous chief — controls on the transfer of guns, section 23 in the new act.

Can you expand on why we need the controls, especially with the transfer of guns?

Mr. Harel: First, the person who rightfully owns a gun right now, with this bill, "may" — does not have to — check if the person has a permit and everything. This is one major issue for us, because there are some provisions to have a permit to buy firearms. This person "may" check if this person has a permit to buy a firearm, but there is no obligation to do so.

We then have someone who legally buys a firearm and sells or gives this firearm to another person, and we do not have a clue if he can have that firearm.

In the bill there is no provision that the vendor will have to keep a log or this famous green book from way back when. Will we go back to rightful owners or to the first owner to help with our investigation? These are big delays that we will face in our investigation. Delay is time, and time is sometimes firearms still on the street and, therefore, maybe the safety of our community is involved. I am not talking about the cost of those

investigations. If they are longer, that involves more investigators and more money for the community to spend on policing.

Senator Runciman: Detective Sergeant Grismer, have you experienced this? We have heard from others as well about attitudinal changes with respect to the public and the way they view police officers and policing. There has been the impact of Bill C-68 and a growing lack of respect.

Have you witnessed or experienced that? If yes, how has that affected policing relationships with the communities?

Mr. Grismer: Initially the response from the public was guarded because they did not know how far this was going to go.

In fairness, a lot depends on the police jurisdiction and the tone or spirit with which the individual police service goes at the laws. That does not mean that we do not enforce laws; it just means that there are things of greater importance. When you are trying to get the biggest bang for your buck in the policing industry, you have to attack the things that are out there first and foremost. We do not have a huge problem with gangs in our area. It is growing, but we certainly do not have the problems that places like Montreal or Toronto would have. The gang thing is not the big thing for us.

Our application of the firearms laws and the way they have been applied by both the chief provincial firearms officer, right down to the police services, is one of trying to get people who are not in compliance into compliance. That does not mean that we do not go after people who are of the criminal element or gang related to try to get them for everything that we can. That is why I think the licensing aspect is, as I have said, the absolute cornerstone.

Senator Runciman: I guess it is tough to put your arms around it and describe what the impacts have been with respect to policing in public, the relationship and whether this had an impact. We heard Chief Hanson talk about checking the registry after reading an obituary in the newspaper. Hopefully that sort of incident has been limited.

He also talked about training. We heard him talk about a highly-placed police official talking about blood in the streets if the bill is rescinded. He also talked about mandatory training and suggested there is a widespread misunderstanding of the laws of Canada among the policing community. I

wonder if you share that concern. He talked about a mandatory training program, so that front-line officers and others are more aware of the laws that are on the books and that will be on the books after Bill C-19 is hopefully passed.

Mr. Grismer: I absolutely share Chief Hanson's concerns about training. I personally know of incidents where officers have applied the law incorrectly. Every time one does that, it does not bode well for any police service. A lot of people do not understand the full breadth of the law and what is required of it. They do not know what safe storage or transportation is, or what a safe display is. If they do not understand it — and these are the people who apply the law — you can imagine the consternation of people who are now targeted or to whom the law applies.

Senator Runciman: I heard Chief Hanson talk about registration at point of entry into the country. Would you support that kind of initiative? Do you see any problems with it; do you think it is an initiative the government should consider?

[Translation]

Mr. Harel: I am sure this issue is of interest to the Director of the Canadian Firearms Centre because he is directly concerned by it, and he could give you a much more detailed and comprehensive response than mine. However, in our opinion, all firearms entering Canada should be registered so that we can trace them from their point of entry. But if a vendor subsequently sells the firearm and we have no registry, what good will that do? That the question we ask ourselves.

[English]

Mr. Grismer: I heard Chief Hanson's statement on the registry regarding when someone comes in. I am somewhat baffled by that. My understanding is that all firearms coming into Canada have to come through import, and on import they are tracked by the Canadian Border Services Agency. Generally, firearms coming into Canada are imported by a major importer, which will then sell to dealers. It is that type of thing. My understanding is that there is a paper trail for all of that.

If there is not, then I suggest there ought to be.

The Chair: I have a supplemental on Senator Runciman's comment. Under the Canadian Firearms Program, we do have the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre. Perhaps I will direct my question to Mr. Grismer. What role would that centre continue to play in determining the sources of crime guns, guns that may be found at the scene of a crime? Would that play any role in the future and in helping to assist police in their work?

Mr. Grismer: I am not familiar with all aspects of the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre, so I cannot answer that.

The Chair: That is fine.

Mr. Harel: I asked this question to the director, so I will give an example. If one of my officers finds a firearm from the Czech Republic at a scene, this firearms tracing centre will do all the steps, such the investigation abroad, to try to find where it was made, where it was imported and where the first point of entry was.

It is a long process that takes place, but that is a role they could play in an event like that. It is a tool.

Mr. Grismer: It was not called that when I used it. I have used that organization to track firearms down into the United States, from point of manufacture right through to last point of sale. It was very valuable in that particular investigation.

The Chair: Would it apply to guns that originate domestically? The example the chief gave was one that originated from a foreign country. However, would it apply to weapons that are domestic, or is it for foreign-sourced weapons?

Mr. Grismer: Very few firearms are made in Canada. There are only two companies I can think of; there may be more but I know of two off the top of my head. Those manufacturers keep excellent records.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Mr. Grismer, I have a remark regarding what you said: We have Public Accounts of Canada that have the records of the expenditures for that registry, and nowhere can you see the word \$2 billion. I think it is a good thing that you correct your figures.

I have heard reference to countries where there are a lot of suicides, and everywhere it is where there is a very relaxed policy around gun control. In Switzerland, for instance, where there is one gun for two people, the suicide rate is between 24 and 28 per cent. In the United States, it is even higher because there is more than one gun for two people. However, if I look at the statistics in Germany and Spain, it is 8 per cent and 5 per cent.

According to your experience, do you not think that when we have a good process to register — the whole process, not just one step — that this will also be good to prevent incidents like École Polytechnique and others where the system failed? However, this does not mean that other incidents would not have taken place, because, of course, people suffering from mental illnesses have been probably detected before a sad event happened.

Do you not see a correlation between the number of suicides in a country — between the availability of guns — without very many rules, especially registration, and countries that have a very strict system, as in Germany and Spain?

Mr. Grismer: The registry of a firearm, as I have said, cannot — cannot — prevent a suicide. The licensing aspect is of the person. The registry is of an inanimate object. If the screening of the applicant and the firearms owner is done properly, it can try to weed out, as best as it can, those people who have mental health issues.

However, even with that said, there is no possible way to determine what the person will be like a week, a year or 10 minutes down the road, after he gets the licence. No one has that crystal ball.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: I have given you the opposite to what is happening in other countries where they have a strict registration and a gun control policy that has taken many steps. There is a tremendous difference in the number of suicides.

[Translation]

Mr. Harel, one of the problems with the current system is that it criminalizes individuals who have not registered their firearms in accordance with the rules. Rather than consider this a criminal offence, we could resort to Part 24 of the Criminal Code and make it a minor offence resulting in a fine or

even imprisonment if the offence is repeated a number of times or if the person commits an offence a second time.

Isn't this the sensitive issue that is currently making firearms owners detest the registry, whereas, to all intents and purposes, we could have a balanced sentence, that is to say make it a summary conviction offence, and there would be therefore no criminal record, no problem for travelling and no criminal conviction. Based on our experience, could we go in that direction or simply amend the Criminal Code and change the penalties for individuals who do not comply with the registry?

Mr. Harel: I believe this is a major irritant for those who shoot for sport or who are passionate about firearms.

At the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, we agree that criminalizing people who commit an "administrative" offence with regard to the registry is not the right way to go. Our opinion is that this should not be criminalized. There are alternatives, considering the administration of a program such as this one, and clerical errors, licences not renewed on time, and so on, should not be dealt with under the Criminal Code or be criminalized.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: May I conclude from that that you are still in favour of the registry, but that you think the nature of the penalties for persons who have not abided by the rules should be changed?

Mr. Harel: The CACP has not changed its opinion. We still think the registry is a good working tool for police officers and for our community.

[English]

Senator Frum: On the issue of suicide and whether or not the registry can help prevent suicides, I wanted you to comment on the fact that it is the case that the number of suicides in Canada has remained consistent over the last 25 years and, while the choice of technique may have changed over time, that the number of suicides in this country has been completely unaffected by the registry. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Grismer: The statistics in Canada, as you have said very correctly, have remained very steady. The registry, as I said, cannot prevent suicide. Hopefully the licensing of owners tries to identify people that have issues. I was to a suicide last week. Did the guy use a gun? He managed to end his

life tragically taking a large amount of pills that he stockpiled over a period of time. The registry could not have stopped that any more than the prescription of pills could have stopped that. The point is that the person reached his end. He reached an emotional level that he could not go beyond, and he made the decision to tragically, sadly, end his life. I view these as very tragic events. The registry cannot do that and will not do that.

We, as a police service, track every time we go to suicides or attempted suicides. In our service, if we go to an attempted suicide, there is a report generated. It may require a modification or a changing of the way CFOs or licence applications are done, but I could suggest a remedy, and that would be that any person applying for a firearms licence would then take their application and not send it to Miramichi but take it to their police force in the area in which they live. Who better to have the opportunity to be able to add some comment as to this person's past or if they have had issues with attempts on their life? That application could then be forwarded on for further screening, but at least the police service in the area in which the person lives has had an opportunity to put some comment on that, whether we never had a problem with this person or in fact we have had a problem with him, this person is related to gang activity or whatever. At least we could put that comment on there based on information in our database.

Senator Frum: All you can do is alter the statistics on how many people kill themselves with guns, not on how many people kill themselves.

Mr. Grismer: I am sorry?

Senator Frum: You might be able to help that person not kill himself with a gun, but if that person is intent on killing himself, he can go to pills.

Mr. Grismer: That is it exactly. There is a variety of mechanisms that people are using. You can see on the Internet they are giving more examples of how to do it.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: Mr. Grismer, you said in your presentation that 1,800 weapons had changed hands. That is obviously enormous. To put matters in better perspective, can we establish what percentage of those weapons were taken back by gun dealers? I imagine that, out of all those exchanges, gun dealers took back some weapons.

[English]

Mr. Grismer: I had a presentation that I handed out. I do not have that document in front of me. If somebody could hand it to me, I could reference it. If it is my opening statement, I would have it. I am trying to understand where your question comes from, sir.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: When you say that 1,800 guns changed hands, are we to understand that some of those guns were returned to the gun dealer? Guns were obviously exchanged because some people returned their weapons. I imagine that was not done on a person-to-person basis.

[English]

Mr. Grismer: Again, sir, I see that nowhere in my document. If you could tell me the page, to assist me, I would appreciate it.

The Chair: Maybe we will move along. I am not sure if you are able to comment on the point, aside from the exact number.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: Pardon me, perhaps it was Mr. Harel who mentioned it, but I thought I actually heard it.

Mr. Harel: Pardon me for not reacting. It was indeed 1,850 weapons that changed hands in four years, according to the registry.

Senator Dagenais: Does that include weapons returned to the gun dealer?

Mr. Harel: I don't have that information, senator.

[English]

Senator Baker: I would like to thank the witnesses for their excellent presentations. I am somewhat confused as to a statement made by Sergeant Grismer. I have heard the statement before, and I should really seek clarification of why the statement is made. I think I am quoting you correctly that you said in answer to Senator Lang a moment ago that you

cannot use the information from the registry for the swearing of an information to obtain a warrant.

We all know an information to obtain a warrant is an affidavit, and if you are the affiant of the affidavit, you are listing the grounds upon which you believe a judge or a justice of the peace should issue a warrant to do what you request be done. In those grounds, you could be quoting other police officers. You could be quoting the phone book. You could be quoting a phone call you made to the registration of motor vehicles. You could be quoting an informant. In the introduction to your sworn information to obtain, you normally give the reliability of that informant in past investigations and so on, how reliable that information is. Sometimes the information would only be 10 per cent reliable, 20 per cent or 30 per cent reliable. At the end of that process in that affidavit, the sworn information to obtain, there is a variety of information there. I am at a loss to understand why this committee is constantly hearing somebody say they cannot use the information from the registry because, as you say, you do not know for sure that it is true. There is no rule that says you cannot use that information in a sworn information to obtain. I am at a loss to understand why you made that statement and why other police officers have made that statement as well.

Mr. Grismer: I guess my standards and their standards are higher than everyone else's. I cannot in good conscience say that there is something there. I swear on a Bible that the information contained in that document is true.

I cannot speak for other police officers, but when I swear a warrant I go to everything possible to confirm the information contained therein. The public telephone book is only one resource. I look to numerous police databases.

I cannot include the registry in my information to obtain the warrant because I know there are errors in it. This is the same registry that registered heat guns and caulking guns, so where is its credibility? If it was like AFIS or the DNA database there would be absolutely no problem.

Senator Baker: Your evidence is that you would not use it in a sworn information to obtain, but of course that does not bar other officers from using it in their sworn informations to obtain because, as you say, sometimes there are sub-affiants in those affidavits to obtain. These are statements made by other officers or other persons. The databases include

the databases of Ontario or Quebec which contain information from informants who are not always reliable.

You are saying that you do not put something in your warrant unless you are absolutely certain it is correct and the judge can rely on it, but of course other officers may do differently.

Mr. Grismer: If officers choose to lower their standards, that is not my concern.

Senator Lang: With regard to the use of the registry and whether it works, recently we heard the following evidence: Inaccurate data and misuse and misreading of gun registry and other Canadian firearms centre data is often at the core of numerous failed prosecutions. Have you found that when you go to court?

Mr. Grismer: In fairness, I have not experienced that because, frankly, I do not rely on it or use it. I use what I have in front of me. Many of the guns I get are sawed off and the serial numbers have been obliterated by various means. There is no need for me to elaborate on how that happens.

The point is that I do not research that database. I have seen the errors in it. Why would I bother going there?

Senator White: You talked earlier about confidence in the system. When swearing an information to obtain, we swear that the information is truthful. A serial number, an address and a name is not about an informant. We are talking about whether you have confidence that the information in the data bank is correct, are we not?

Mr. Grismer: That is true.

Senator White: If you do not have that confidence, do you have the confidence, as a patrol sergeant, to tell an officer that there is or is not a gun in a house he is going to?

Mr. Grismer: I do not based on that database. We go there assuming the worst possible scenario and work down from there.

Senator White: From your perspective, on every call that has a potential for harm or violence you assume that there is a weapon in the house?

Mr. Grismer: Yes, there is, of one kind or another.

[*Translation*]

Senator Chaput: My question is for Mr. Grismer. So we are abolishing the firearms registry. The registry is abolished, but before Bill C-19, the bill we have before us here, is implemented, is there any reason to say that there will be a reclassification of weapons? If that is the case, who is responsible for that reclassification and what does that mean; what does the reclassification of weapons entail?

[*English*]

Mr. Grismer: I think you misunderstand the registry they are seeking to abolish. They are looking to abolish a registry for non-restricted firearms that are already classified. The registry for restricted and prohibited weapons will remain in place, so there is no need to reclassify them. They already have a non-restricted classification.

[*Translation*]

Senator Chaput: When I read somewhere that there would be a reclassification, in your opinion, that was not true; it is not necessary, for the reasons you have just given me?

[*English*]

Mr. Grismer: I do not know what you would reclassify them to. They are already classified.

Senator Fraser: There were quite a number of guns, most famously the Ruger Mini-14 that was used at Polytechnique, that are not restricted. Once this bill goes through, there will be no record of where they are. That is one thing that a number of people, including Senator Chaput, are raising.

Should there be a re-examination of the classification system so that those guns will now be listed as restricted and, therefore, information about them will be available to the police and other appropriate authorities?

Mr. Grismer: Senator Fraser, I see no need to reclassify the Ruger Mini-14 or any other of the semi-automatics that we have in Canada. The Ruger

Mini-14 is but one. There are semi-automatic firearms in the use of sportsmen today that are far more powerful than the Ruger Mini-14.

Senator Fraser: Should they not all be subject to some form of tracing, some form of public record keeping?

Mr. Grismer: I do not believe so.

Senator Fraser: I think you said that licensing is the core or the centre piece of the system going forward.

Mr. Grismer: I did, yes.

Senator Fraser: What happens when a licence is revoked or suspended? When a court order says that you no longer have a licence, what happens to that information? Does it get fed to the registry, to local police forces, or does it just sit there in the court records?

Mr. Grismer: In our jurisdiction, it gets fed through the courts down to the police service. It gets placed on the Canadian Police Information Centre database, the CPIC system. The person will have a court order prohibition registered against him for a period of time and it will indicate a start date and an expiry date.

[Translation]

Senator Fraser: Is the same true here, Mr. Harel?

Mr. Harel: So that I clearly understand, the person's licence to have weapons in his possession is revoked?

Senator Fraser: That is correct.

Mr. Harel: Yes, the only thing is that we will not know how many he has. The same is true, in a domestic violence case, when an individual has a court order to surrender his firearms pending the court proceeding. The individual surrenders one firearm. How do we know he does not have 2, 3 or 10 more in a closet or safe at home? The firearms registry was one of the tools that enabled us to monitor that.

[English]

Senator Fraser: Once the court has made the order, how long does it take for that information to be transmitted to the places it needs to go?

Mr. Grismer: It usually happens within a day or two.

Senator Fraser: It is a fairly efficient system, then?

Mr. Grismer: It is a fairly efficient system.

Senator Fraser: Does that information also go to the Canadian Firearms Centre?

[Translation]

Mr. Harel: I know there are a lot of questions on the operation of the Canadian Firearms Centre, for which I am not responsible; I am a user.

Senator Fraser: Unfortunately, we will not be able to have them as witnesses.

[English]

Senator Lang: I think we have established to some degree that the registry is very flawed, and there are some serious problems with the present registry the way it is. Mr. Grismer, you also said in your testimony here that you recognize the true cornerstone of public safety is the training, screening and licensing of firearm owners and not the registration of non-restricted firearms.

I would like you to take a few minutes to expand your thoughts on the registration and the licensing requirements and the procedures that an individual has to go through. Are you are satisfied that we are being as rigid as we possibly can be?

The Chair: Please be as brief as possible in your response.

Mr. Grismer: I will. A person applying for a firearms licence has to pass the Canadian firearms safety course. I am a person that instructs that. I am an instructor of instructors, as a matter of fact. They have to pass that and receive a mark in excess of 80 per cent. Part of that is a practical portion. They have to demonstrate capability of being able to handle a firearm. That is not shooting it; that is just handling it.

From there, their application with their references and everything is forwarded to the Canadian Firearms Centre, where they undergo screening within the centre. If additional screening is required, they forward it back to the chief provincial firearms office, who does secondary and tertiary screening of the individual. Once that individual has passed that screening process, they are then granted a licence.

Senator Lang: I think it is important here, because I do not think this has been expressed enough. When you apply for the application, you are required to have a number of references. There are other people in the community verifying that you are capable of having a firearm's licence. Is that not correct?

Mr. Grismer: Correct.

Senator Lang: As part of that application, having filled one out, you are required to complete that application, and there are some personal questions there that you really do not necessarily want to tell everyone because of the nature of the questions. It gets very much in the area of privacy. Is that not correct?

Mr. Grismer: That is correct.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues, for those questions.

Chief Harel and Sergeant Grismer, thank you so much for your input. It was helpful. We know you have come some distance to be here to help us. You have been a great help, and we appreciate it.

Colleagues, we are pleased to welcome as part of our third panel today Ms. Hélène Larente from the Quebec federation of hunters and anglers. Representing the Quebec federation of anglers and hunters, we have Mr. Bernard Pelletier, spokesperson for the group. Welcome, Mr. Pelletier.

Ms. Larente, I understand you have an opening statement. We will proceed with you first.

[Translation]

Hélène Larente, as an individual: Thank you for the invitation. I am Hélène Larente, from Rapides-des-Joachims in Quebec. I am a hunter

who, for the past 25 years, has been very much involved with hunting and fishing organizations and the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs. In the past six years, I have been coordinator of the Quebec women's hunting program and, for the past 13 years, have been a monitor for the safety education and wildlife conservation program and for the Canadian Firearms Safety Course.

In April 2011, I was the first woman to receive the title of national monitor from the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs. Through my involvement, I know a lot of women who hunt. As I am responsible for the women's hunting program, I can tell you that the female hunters we introduce to the sport are the perfect example of hunters who are aware of the importance of, and advocate, weapons safety and compliance with the law.

Women are increasingly involved in this recreational activity. More than 25 per cent of students in hunting classes in Quebec are girls and women. As a result of women's increased interest in hunting, hunting is increasingly a recreational activity that is carried on by families. Bill C-19 is really legitimate.

Why? First because we currently feel that we are treated like criminals and that it is unfair for us to be treated like criminals, instead of real criminals.

Second, we also fear that, in carrying out our recreational activity, we may wind up with a criminal record simply for forgetting to register our firearms. For example, I saw a roadblock put up by the Protection de la faune and Sûreté du Québec on the edge of the hunting area during the moose hunt. Some hunters were checked and their weapons were seized simply over a weapons registration matter. You have to ask yourself some questions. Was the registry designed for that or to fight crime? In addition, new hunters may simply have to cancel or postpone a hunting trip as a result of excessive waiting times to register their hunting weapons. In other words, their right to hunt, which is a recreational activity like any other, is being interfered with. And yet other recreations are not subject to these kinds of obstacles.

Third, we do not believe the registry protected women or society. It gives a false sense of security because the fact that the weapon is registered does not prevent the user from causing irreparable harm.

Fourth, people who do not hunt do not know how highly regulated hunters are. Since 1994, all hunters have been required to take and pass the 8- to 10-hour Canadian Firearms Safety Course and the 6- to 8-hour Quebec introduction to hunting course.

In addition, since 2011, with proof that they have passed the CFSC, they are required to apply for a firearms possession and acquisition licence. As part of that process, the RCMP conducts an investigation to ensure that every individual has the qualification and presents no risk to others. There is also the Storage, Display and Transportation of Firearms Act, which makes firearms owners and users accountable and requires them to store weapons safely and ammunition separately or render every firearm inoperable.

As a result of all these acts, regulations are already very strict with regard to qualifications and the use of firearms. We nevertheless believe and are in favour of maintaining the mandatory qualification of firearms owners and safe storage and transportation of firearms for everyone's safety.

Hunters are honest citizens and deplore tragedies such as the one at Polytechnique and others. We believe we must find real solutions to combat all crime and gratuitous violence. The funding previously dedicated to the registry should be transferred to and invested in the right places in order to protect more citizens, help people who are in distress and sick and provide more resources.

For hunters, Bill C-19 and the end of the registry and mandatory registration of hunting weapons will mean the elimination of excessive delays, an end to the feeling of being treated like criminals, instead of real criminals, erase the fear of having a criminal record and give us the feeling that our money is being spent in the right place. Thank you.

Bernard Pelletier, Spokesperson, Firearms Portfolio, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs: I represent the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs. I have been a hunter since 1967; that gives you an idea of my age. I have been a firearms safety and handling monitor and instructor for 30 years and a volunteer with the federation since 1979. So I have a certain amount of experience in this matter. I am also a volunteer verifier in the network of verifiers under the RCMP's Canadian Firearms Program.

The Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs is a non-profit organization that has been in existence since 1946 and represents approximately 200 associations and 125,000 members across Quebec. Part of its mandate is to provide training in the safe use of firearms, but that is only one part. To date, there are slightly more than one million certificate holders in Quebec. To give you an idea, that is approximately 408,000 hunters every year, according to the figures of the department of natural resources and wildlife; that is 408,000 hunters who hunt in the forest and who spend approximately \$308 million, of which nearly \$40 million is returned to the federal government and nearly \$50 million to the provincial government. That represents approximately 3,320 jobs in Quebec. That is quite significant.

We realize that there has been an upward trend from year to year. More and more people are taking our training courses, as Ms. Larente indicated. Last year, 16,500 persons were trained by Sécurité nature.

It must be understood that what is specific to Quebec is that, to obtain a hunting certificate, candidates must absolutely take and complete the Canadian Firearms Safety Course.

Elsewhere in Canada, you can take an exam and that is recognized as valid proof that you have taken the Canadian Firearms Safety Course. Not in Quebec. In Quebec, we require people to show up, take the course and then take the exam. In addition, there is the introduction to hunting with firearms course. That is quite structured.

In addition, as a number of speakers have already said, we in Canada must hold a firearms licence in order to go and acquire a firearm. And, in this case, this is a licence that is renewable every five years. So every five years, a police investigation is conducted on the licence holder.

I do not know whether a lot of Canadians undergo this type of investigation as often. I doubt it. I am going quickly because I know our time is limited. I will simply note that it was the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs that requested in 1969 that a safety course for hunters be introduced in Quebec. And we had that course made mandatory in 1972. We are therefore concerned about the safety of hunters, but also that of the general public.

This leads me to the consequences of the long-gun registry. All my comments concern only long guns, that is to say the guns permitted for hunting in Canada. The others — restricted and prohibited weapons — are prohibited for hunting in Quebec, and I therefore will not talk about them.

Ms. Larente talked about this earlier; this distorts the picture people have of hunters, who are likened to criminals because they use or possess firearms. These are generally law-abiding people. You cannot obtain a firearms licence every five years if you do not abide by the law. You cannot explain it to me any other way, unless there are holes somewhere in the system.

Going back to what several people have also said, it is extraordinary and unacceptable for an honest citizen to be considered a criminal as a result of an administrative oversight such as failing to register a firearm. We believe that is unthinkable.

Many studies, many research projects have been done by various researchers. I know this committee will be hearing from Professor Mauser, who will explain his point of view to you, but particularly interesting research has been done by Ms. Baker and Ms. Singh, Australian researchers, and published in the journal on March 16, stating that New Zealand, for example, which has no firearms registry, which is the most flexible place with regard to firearms, is the place where there are the fewest problems, the fewest homicides.

I will go quickly. I will not go back over the costs of the registry; it is pointless to discuss that. Instead I am going to emphasize that virtues are attributed to the registry that it does not possess. Among other things, it is said to have an impact on homicides in Canada. Homicides have been declining regularly in Canada since 1980, before anyone even thought of the registry. Here I have the statistical study on homicides in 2010. It states that firearms are still involved in roughly one-third of homicides in Canada and bladed weapons, knives, still are as well. That has been constant over the years. Most firearms used in those cases are illegal, that is to say non-registered, weapons. I leave that for your consideration.

As far as we are concerned, the solution lies more in education, mobilizing and sensitizing users and people who are around them. For example, funding should be provided for programs that support youths in

disadvantaged circumstances and for social programs that assist victims, and effective controls should be established at border posts.

The problem is not legal weapons, but illegal weapons smuggled across borders or elsewhere. The focus must be on that. Instead of controlling the hammer, we must control the person who uses the hammer, and the best long-term control is education.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pelletier. I suspect there were some other points you wished to make. You may be able to work them into the questions that are asked of you.

You referred to a study that you had. Were you planning to leave that with us? Do you wish to leave it with us?

[Translation]

Mr. Pelletier: I have it on a USB stick. If committee members want to see it, I have it here.

[English]

The Chair: I leave it up to you as to whether you think it is information relevant to this study. If you care to leave a copy, we would be pleased to have it.

Mr. Pelletier: I think it is interesting to read.

The Chair: That is fine. If you could leave a copy with us, we would appreciate it.

We will begin questions, starting with Deputy Chair Senator Fraser.

[Translation]

Senator Fraser: Thank you for accepting our invitation. Since the timeframe was short, we appreciate your being here. First of all, both of you spoke about the feeling that an attempt has been made to criminalize honest people. I can tell you that this is not a secret: I am in favour of maintaining the registry, but not to criminalize honest citizens. It is more

because there is a not enormous but very dangerous percentage of long guns circulating illegally. As for you, we know you are not criminals, and you would not be volunteers in an association such as yours for all that time if you were not dedicated to the interests of citizens.

However, do you think it would be useful if we abolished the long-gun registry and went back to the old system in which the dealer who sells the weapon has to keep files on the weapons he sells?

Ms. Larente: I believe the registry will change nothing. The weapon can be transported one month, a year or two years later, and the registry then is worth nothing. Is it really necessary to spend money on that? The merchant has to ensure that the person who buys a weapon has a possession and acquisition licence; that is for sure.

Senator Fraser: Should it be mandatory for the dealer to check the licence?

Ms. Larente: The person has to be qualified to possess weapons, a person who is not dangerous to others.

Senator Fraser: One of the witnesses who testified before you said that, at one point, before becoming a police officer — and he is opposed to the registry — he worked at a store where firearms were sold. He said it was not a major chore to keep the files I was asking you about. That is for your information. Would you have any comments, Mr. Pelletier?

Mr. Pelletier: That method is ineffective. As Ms. Larente said, what happens to the weapon afterward? No one knows; you go around in circles. If I rely on what I read in the version of clause 23, a person who sells a firearm must ensure that the person who buys it holds a valid firearms licence.

Senator Fraser: Where did you find that?

Mr. Pelletier: In the revised text.

Senator Fraser: Not the licence, but the fact that the dealer must ensure it.

Mr. Pelletier: A person may transfer a firearm that is neither a prohibited firearm nor a restricted firearm if, at the time of the transfer, the transferee

holds a licence authorizing the transferee to acquire and possess that kind of firearm; and the transferor has no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized to acquire and possess that kind of firearm.

Senator Fraser: The transferor has no obligation to verify. It is up to the buyer to have a licence, but the dealer has no obligation.

Mr. Pelletier: I am not a legal expert.

Senator Fraser: That is why we are here. Senators are used to examining the commas and semicolons of every bill. We are talking about the same part of the bill.

[English]

The Chair: I have a supplemental. It may be a bit of a stretch, though.

Senator Fraser: Whatever. You are the chair; you are allowed.

The Chair: You did touch upon it, so I will wage a question.

Ms. Larente, my question goes in so many ways to the heart of the issue that is relevant for so many people when considering the repeal of the long-gun registry. You made a statement that you do not think the registry protects women or society, and you touched upon some aspect of that when you were answering Senator Fraser's question. What do you mean? Why do you say that you do not believe the registry protects women or society?

[Translation]

Ms. Larente: I said women in society, meaning that it is not just for women, because, whether the weapon is registered or not, the action that has to be taken will be taken all the same; that will change nothing. The registry is there for no purpose, and this is all money spent in the wrong place because, regardless of whether the person has a firearm or a bladed weapon, if the person is going to be in danger, it is not the weapon that will make that person more comfortable or enable him or her to escape. Whether it is a firearm or a knife, if the act is going to be committed, what will happen will happen in any case.

[English]

The Chair: Therefore, the issue for you is that the weapon could cause the injury, but it is the issue of the person and the activities of the person that you see as being the important thing.

[Translation]

Ms. Larente: Indeed, it is the person. This is a matter of education and supply of services. This came up just recently, regarding people who need help and who cannot access services because there are not enough of them. We need funding for that. When you cannot get the help you need, you fall further, and it is when you hit bottom that things often get done.

[English]

Senator Lang: I would like to welcome our guests today. I come from a region of the country that is three time zones — three hours — away from where we live here. You sound like you are making a presentation in the Yukon from the majority of people who live there, and I am sure Senator Watt would echo that. Senator Fraser, you should know that we feel the present law does make us criminals, and I do not think we will get away from it until we do away with the registry.

I want to go back to the registry again and the fact that the registry is and has been in place for some 20-odd years. We have had as high as \$2 billion quoted to us on the expense. We know it is very expensive. One can argue the numbers, but the fact is that, over the last number of days, in our hearings and in the other place, we have seen that the registry is full of errors; it does not have accurate information, and, subsequently, it gives a false sense of security, as Ms. Larente said earlier.

In your statement here, you described the situation where the police put up a roadblock, apprehended and stopped all the hunters that were coming out of that particular area, and proceeded to take rifles away from those who were legally there. For whatever reason, they confiscated them. I do not know whether or not they were given back; perhaps you can tell us that. Does that not go back to the fact that the information in the registry is not accurate and is, subsequently, open to abuse and interpretation? The law-abiding hunter or fisherman is faced with this consequence, and then it is turned into a criminal act. Could you comment on that?

[Translation]

Ms. Larente: To my knowledge, the registry's basic objective was really to fight crime. It can now be used for other purposes, such as monitoring ordinary citizens for no reason. One day a decision is made to throw up a roadblock and to check all hunters leaving the area without any justification, to see whether their weapons are registered or not. We have become targets for checks, the sole purpose of which is to write tickets. That is how we perceive it. We really feel we are being considered as potential criminals. We wonder why we are being targeted. The registry was not created to target us; so how is it that we are being stopped just for that?

[English]

Senator Lang: Thank you very much. I think that is a very valid observation and one that is held across the country by those who have long-guns and know something about long-guns.

I would like to go into another area. Both of you indicated that you are involved, in one manner or another, as instructors to qualify individuals for the purposes of the licensing process. Perhaps, Mr. Pelletier, you could expand on that. Is the process rigid enough and does it go a long way to identifying individuals who should not have a licence?

[Translation]

Mr. Pelletier: To my knowledge, yes. When I was an instructor — I stopped my activities last year — we very much emphasized with monitor candidates that people should be aware of this and that they should be attentive.

Personally, as a monitor, when I had doubts about a candidate, for example, about a student who wanted to take the Canadian Firearms Safety Course, I did some checks, and that is normal. And as a shooter, if I am aware that my neighbour is having problems, I am going to try to help him in one way or another, precisely to prevent that kind of situation.

We often look at actions, the unfortunate incidents that have occurred in Quebec, among other things, and these are often people who have not had any support from their environment, who have wound up in situations involving mental health problems and no one has taken care of them.

So as a monitor, you have to be attentive to that. We are not police officers; we are not there to say who can have it or not. We are there to provide basic training and to ensure that the people who complete the course, in one or two weekends — it depends on the people — will be qualified to file an application for a licence to acquire and possess a firearm.

[English]

Senator Fraser: For the record, in response to Senator Lang, I would reiterate that I do not dispute the reality of the sentiment you talk about. I know that many gun owners feel that this law criminalizes them.

All I was saying was that that is not the motivation for those of us who wish to preserve the registry. On the contrary, if ever there were two non-criminals, these people are they. I am not disputing the reality of the emotion.

The other point, for the record, is that although we hear a lot of talk about the cost of the registry, the RCMP has said that it will save \$4 million a year if the long-gun registry is abolished. Four million dollars is real money. If I win it in the lottery, I will be very, very happy person, but it is a long way from some of the numbers we heard.

The Chair: I understand why you made your comment, but, if that could be directed towards a witness, it would be helpful as a question.

Senator Fraser: It was a point of clarification.

The Chair: You are baiting Senator Lang to respond to it.

Senator Fraser: But he is leaving.

The Chair: In any event, could we just keep that in mind as we move forward?

[Translation]

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Ms. Larente, earlier you said that hunters had been stopped on the highway during hunting season. I have previously been stopped on the Laurentian Autoroute on a Friday evening, when everybody goes to the country. I was not speeding or driving dangerously. I

was asked to show my driver's licence and registration, and I gave it to them, but I was not drunk.

Do you think that being stopped for no apparent reason is something you cannot expect when you own a vehicle? I did not protest against the officer who stopped me. I simply told him that I had not been drinking and that I was going to the country.

Ms. Larente: I understand perfectly well that the officer was doing his job in his own area, but I am talking about a Sûreté du Québec officer who went into a hunting area, that is to say into a wooded area. That officer usually patrols paved roads, provincial or municipal roads, not forest roads. Why did he station himself on the edge of a forest road to check hunters? The focus was really on that, not just to check the people leaving, as he would normally do on patrol. It was not really his place.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: I can tell you that our police officers are generally hidden behind the columns of overpasses, and we usually do not see them.

Ms. Larente: But police officers' work is to check people who drive cars, not those coming back from hunting.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: The question here is the registration of a weapon or a car in order to comply with the law. Would it not be better for your members to register their weapons, simply to ensure that all the necessary safety measures are taken, measures that most chiefs of police have recommended to us? Would it not be better to get a fine rather than to commit an indictable offence? Would it not be simpler to ensure that everyone has a licence, which would also make it possible to determine whether the individual has obtained his weapon legally rather than commit an indictable offence and incur penalties and all kinds of problems?

Between you and me, some people have illegal weapons. That has been said before us. Would you consider it excessive if registration were required and if failure to register or being late in doing so resulted in a fine? Would that be so penalizing relative to those people who are not hunters?

Ms. Larente: It is unnecessary.

Mr. Pelletier: For us, that is not the question. It is an ineffective tool. The wrong tool is being used to increase public safety. If I were an economist, I would tell you that we have just fallen under the law of diminishing returns. I can increase the production of my garden by adding fertilizer, but if I add too much fertilizer, I will not only not achieve my objective, I will destroy my garden. We have gotten to that point with this type of act, under which honest citizens are systematically targeted. In the meantime, criminals can walk around the forest as they wish, where they wish, with the weapons they wish, or do so in the city. No one cares, and they don't care. And we can do nothing about that.

For example, we in Quebec also have Bill 9, which provides that a person, a hunter cannot go into a schoolyard with a firearm concealed in his car. All right. So what? Will that prevent a criminal from entering a schoolyard with a firearm in his car? It's inappropriate. At a time when we have budget cuts everywhere, and we are looking for money everywhere, regardless of the fact that that is as little as \$4 million a year, I know a lot of community organizations that would be happy to have that \$4 million. They could do a lot more positive things for society than this registry.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: So all the police associations understand nothing and know nothing about safety?

Mr. Pelletier: I utterly respect their point of view.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: You are saying that it is pointless. I am telling you that a number of police associations have come and told us that this is very useful in the chain of tools they have to do their job.

You hold a licence and you teach. I do not see how I could accept the expertise of someone who, to all intents and purposes, does not have to administer that registry. It is the police who take care of that.

Mr. Pelletier: Then how do you explain the incident in Killam, when police officers seized a weapon that had already been identified and two police officers were wounded. There is a firearms registry. How does that happen? It is a miracle?

Senator Hervieux-Payette: I do not see the connection.

Mr. Pelletier: The connection is simple; it was already a known weapon. The police knew that there were weapons at the site. And yet police officers were still wounded. The problem is not the weapon, but the user of the weapon. You have to work on people, and in a positive way. There can definitely be no pity for criminals; they have to be eliminated — that is all — removed from the system so that they can cause no more harm. But honest citizens, please, let them work, leave them alone.

[English]

Senator White: Mr. Pelletier, do you have a possession and acquisition licence?

Mr. Pelletier: Yes.

Senator White: I have a possession and acquisition license. You have a rifle, and I may not have a rifle. I can borrow your rifle and go hunting; correct?

Mr. Pelletier: Yes.

Senator White: It is not registered to me.

Mr. Pelletier: No.

Senator White: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Senator Boisvenu: Bravo, Ms. Larente. You work in a field of activity mainly occupied by men. I worked at the wildlife department for 15 years. I knew at the time that very few women were involved in this very useful activity of hunting.

Mr. Pelletier, it is a pleasure to see you again, a former Abitibi neighbour.

Ms. Larente, do you feel that the farther you are from the regions, such as Abitibi, Lac Saint-Jean, the North Shore, Beauce and Gaspé, the farther you are from an activity called hunting, which is a wildlife management activity, and the more dangerous firearms become in people's minds. They even become a symbol of crime. And the more people insist that it is the weapon that is dangerous, not the person who possesses it?

Ms. Larente: No, the weapon in itself; it is the user. It is the same thing whether the person lives in Abitibi- Témiscamingue, Gatineau or Montreal.

Senator Boisvenu: The farther you are from the regions where an activity like hunting or trapping is carried on, the more you have a negative perception of firearms. And it is not the person who possesses the firearm who is criminalized, but rather the weapon, as such; it becomes a tool for crime.

Ms. Larente: People tend to think that.

Senator Boisvenu: There are a lot of women in your association. We know that the registry is very much related to this struggle that women have carried on, mainly following the tragedy at Polytechnique. What is the perception that the women in your association have of the registry? And this kind of contradiction with the view that women in our society have to be protected?

Ms. Larente: That goes back to talking a little about education and increasing people's awareness because I can tell you that some women take the course and say they are afraid of weapons. They want to take the course because they want to go hunting with their husbands or sons. When they take the course and have handled weapons, they realize that the weapon in itself is not dangerous. They wind up so proud and reassured and say that, ultimately, a weapon is not as dangerous as that. People just have to be ready to handle them. That is something that constantly comes out of the comments by women who take the training courses.

Senator Boisvenu: Mr. Pelletier, earlier you talked about a report that I have in my possession. It is a comparative study of Canada, England and Australia.

Canada adopted its system in 1995 but introduced it in 2002; England in 1995, and New Zealand abolished its in 2000.

The statistics indicate that, since 1986, crime has declined at a constant rate of 1.7 per cent in Canada, 6.6 per cent in Australia and 7.7 per cent in New Zealand, which does not control hunting weapons. What does that tell you as a hunter?

Mr. Pelletier: That shows what we have been discussing since earlier, that this type of registry serves no purpose. It will not reduce crime. However, what it also indicates is that we should increase education for hunters and the general public. Put yourself in the place of a four- or five-year-old child today who is starting to watch television. What is he going to see? In the course of a day, he is going to see roughly several tens of murders on TV committed with weapons. They will not draw a distinction based on the type of weapon. The same is true of the movies. And that is a matter of the education on weapons that our society agrees to give its citizens. We believe that is scandalous. Let us educate people so that they understand what a firearm is. The same is true when you train people to go work in the forest. You show them how a chainsaw works. A chainsaw that you do not know how to operate means a severed leg. For us, firearms — I repeat — are tools. The same is true of a hammer or a chainsaw. You have to learn to use them in a manner respectful of others. We were giving some parts of our courses, concerning safe storage, before the act was even in existence. Now that is governed by law, but that was previously not the case, not in the same way. We have always said that weapons had to be stored safely. We provide methods. There is a 1998 study, which is starting to be dated today, by Professor Jean Caron of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, who found that the biggest impact on the suicide rate could be achieved through storage. Make access to weapons as difficult as possible so that no one can act on an impulse.

Senator Chaput: My question is for both of you. You support the idea of abolishing the Canadian firearms registry. You are honest people and hunters and you feel treated like criminals as a result of that registry. I very much respect what you are saying.

I have previously heard those kinds of comments back home in Manitoba. We are setting the registry aside; it is abolished. I want to discuss the licence to purchase a firearm. In your opinion, is it entirely normal to be required to have a licence before purchasing a firearm, and would it also be very normal for the individual selling the firearm to be required to verify at the time of purchase that your licence is legal? Would that also be normal?

Ms. Larente: In response to your first question, it is normal to have a possession permit. That is what qualifies us and tells us that we are not a dangerous person and are a person who can handle a weapon.

In response to your second question, it is not really necessary for the person to check to see whether the other person has a possession licence. For example, when someone is stopped because he is engaged in an activity involving a weapon, it will be his responsibility to have his licence or authorization to possess a firearm. It is going to be called an authorization licence now, a firearms licence. It is the one who is stopped who will be in violation. It will not be the person who transferred or sold the firearm to him.

Senator Chaput: In your view, it is the person who buys the firearm who is responsible, not the person who sells it?

Ms. Larente: The person who buys.

Senator Chaput: What do we do about the fact that one of our witnesses told us, and he was not the only one, that it is people who are dangerous, not the firearms? These dangerous people, for example, could go and buy a weapon with an invalid licence that is not verified by the vendor. What do we do about that?

Ms. Larente: If you are talking about a weapon purchased for the first time, I believe I may have misunderstood the question; for the first time, yes, that can be important, except that, when the weapon is subsequently transferred, the individual will not act like a police officer. He may ask the individual, but if his licence is not valid for reason X, it will not be the transferor's responsibility.

Senator Chaput: It's fine for the first purchase.

Ms. Larente: But there is no problem for the others.

Senator Chaput: Did you want to add something, Mr. Pelletier?

Mr. Pelletier: No.

Senator Dagenais: So we are going to get back on track. Thanks to our two witnesses. My question is for Ms. Larente. I heard you talk about the undue delays attributable to the firearms registry. And those delays could have put you in a situation; there is a hunting season, and you might not have been able to go hunting. I would like to hear you talk about the delays. Obviously, the delays are attributable to the registry.

Ms. Larente: The deadlines have changed considerably. They have been somewhat shortened in recent years. We have to be honest about that. They could run to five or six months, and even nine months in the initial years, and it even says nine months. If a new hunter takes the course in July or August, and the hunting season is in October, if we are talking about six or nine months, you can forget that. He has already spent money to go hunting, but he will not be able to go. He will have to cancel if he has already reserved or postpone because he will not have his licences or certificates in time to go hunting. These kinds of delays are unpleasant. If a document has been lost, that causes delays. You must not lose that document just before going hunting because then you're done finished.

Senator Dagenais: So the registry delays are causing you prejudice.

Ms. Larente: Yes, indeed.

[English]

The Chair: Senator Fraser, do you have a second round question? If you do not, that is fine, but sometimes you do.

Senator Fraser: I have a supplementary.

[Translation]

You said that it was originally very long but now it can be, what, a month, you were saying?

Mr. Pelletier: I have not bought recently.

Ms. Larente: It is still five or six months.

Mr. Pelletier: It is still done quite quickly. It is a few days.

[English]

Senator White: It is a minimum of 28 days, but on average 6 to 8 weeks.

Senator Lang: I was wondering perhaps if you wanted to expand further. I found it very interesting that I think you said in your presentation that 25 per cent of the participants or people involved in the organization were women.

Has that been expanding progressively over the years — say over the last 10 years — to get to 25 per cent? That is quite a number.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larente: In the past 10 years, it has increased considerably, yes, in the past 10 years.

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, that concludes our time with this panel. I want to thank Ms. Larente and Mr. Pelletier, who are both very knowledgeable about the subject and who certainly have a passion for it. That passion came through loud and clear. What you had to say was helpful to us and we appreciate you taking the time to be here today.

Senators, we are pleased, as our fourth panel today, to have two different organizations and an individual. From the Quebec suicide prevention association, we have Mr. Bruno Marchand, Director General, and Mr. Luc Massicotte, Mobilization Coordinator. From the Dawson Student Union, we have Mr. Mathieu Murphy-Perron, Executive Director, and Ms. Morgan Crockett, who is a student at Dawson College. We have a gun control activist, Ms. Francine Anna Dulong. Welcome.

We will proceed with opening statements, in no particular order, so do not be offended as I pick one to start with. Mr. Marchand.

[*Translation*]

Bruno Marchand, Director General, Association québécoise de prévention du suicide: Mr. Chair, senators, thank you for allowing us this time as part of the study you are conducting on this bill.

Quebec's Institut national de santé publique estimates that measures to reduce access to firearms have resulted in a reduction of 250 suicides per year for the country as a whole. Obviously, it could not be said that those 250 suicides were avoided solely as a result of the registry. However, the World Health Organization has adopted that position, saying that the reduction in access to means is one of a number of measures that have helped significantly reduce suicides in any given location.

Why? This may be quite difficult to understand because one gets the impression that suicide by firearms is one method among many — we know there are several methods. It is one method among many which make it possible to achieve an end, not death, because a vulnerable person does not want to die, but to put an end to suffering.

So one might think that the method might differ depending on what is available or not. However, studies have shown that people choose the means not as we would do it if we decided to work toward an objective, to go somewhere, to take a bus or car or to go by foot. For a vulnerable person, the choice of means is something that, consciously or unconsciously, is his or her own, that belongs to that person's culture, that belongs to the civilization in which that person lives and that, for that individual, is something — this will seem odd to you — that is precious to that individual. We know from the studies that there is no tactical displacement by another means, when the desired means is not available, at least in the short and medium terms.

The World Health Organization tells us that reducing access to the means has an impact on suicide rates. In this case, we are talking about firearms, which are the most lethal means. Some 98 per cent of the people who use firearms to attempt suicide die as a result.

What do we do? We remove the means that these individuals thought they would use to end their suffering, and this gives us time to intervene. Here we are thinking about police officers, but also about front-line workers and people around the individuals. This affords time to find a permanent solution to the temporary problems of the individuals who are feeling this ambivalence about life and death in which they are suffering without knowing how to stop suffering. Sometimes they want to live and sometimes they want to die.

Reduced access to the means is an effective measure to prevent suicide. That said, a registry alone cannot do everything. However, it is one of the measures that, combined with others — we could name several in Canada — could have an impact on suicide rates. It also enables Quebec's Institut national de la santé publique, and this is what we have shown in our brief, to say that we have probably saved 250 lives in Canada, that we have probably prevented 250 suicides and that we have removed 250 suicides from our statistics because the means was not accessible or available.

It is obviously not unrealistic to the point of thinking that everything can go back to the way it was. We are opposed to Bill C-19, but we understand that the Canadian government has decided to head in a different direction and to disregard public health positions, particularly regarding suicide prevention. It will be up to you to be the judge of that.

However, it is important for us to say — and you will find these elements in the brief, I am summarizing them this way; we are asking senators to evaluate very carefully the impact that the adoption of this bill might have, and the impact that it might have if the amendments are not put forward. So we are advancing the issue of the accountability of the vendor, the individual who sells the weapon, with an obligation to ensure that the licence is valid and to trace what he has acquired and sold.

We are convinced — and if you are not, let the provinces judge the matter — of the benefits of letting the provinces recover the data. The provinces must be given the choice of recovering the data if you head in the direction of Bill C-19.

Lastly, because my time is increasingly limited, we are working very hard — not just on the reduction issue — on means and other measures to reduce suicide in Canada. I am not telling you anything new, but the resources allocated to suicide prevention are virtually non-existent or very minor relative to the significance of this public health problem, which results in the death of nearly 4,000 Canadians a year, depending on the year.

We believe that work must be done, in the amendments, in this bill or through other means, on future measures that will offset the negative effects that this bill might have, particularly through campaigns promoting safe storage, particularly through the distribution of trigger locks, through ways of removing or limiting the availability of this firearm that can be very lethal for a person who does not want to die and who is in no way a criminal. This situation can happen to any one of us in difficult times, particularly since the means is available to us.

We need the Government of Canada to prevent suicide. We have done a lot, we have done it together, and we can do even more, and we could make it so we lose no more Canadians through suicide, but Bill C-19 alone does not help us move forward; it makes us take a step backward. How can we combine it with effective measures? That is what we are asking you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. This is a large panel, and I know there are a number of you wishing to make opening statements. Again, make the points you want to make, but keep in mind that it reduces the time we have for questions.

Mathieu Murphy-Perron, Executive Director, Dawson Student Union: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Mathieu Perron, and I am a staff member of the Dawson Student Union.

Morgan Crockett, Member, Dawson College student, Dawson Student Union: I am Morgan Crockett, and I am a student at Dawson College, studying law, society and justice.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: I hope this will not be too confusing, but we will share our presentation. We will move as expediently as we can.

We come before you representing the 10, 500 students at Dawson College, in Westmount, Quebec. On September 13, last year, we marked the fifth anniversary of the shooting at our school where Anastasia De Sousa died, 19 more people were injured, and the shooter eventually took his own life.

Ms. Crockett: We are here today to ask you to do the right thing. This chamber has a proud history of listening to, debating, and providing sober second thought on issues that may have been overlooked by your colleagues in the House of Commons. Give yourselves and Canadians the opportunity to thoroughly study Bill C-19 and its repercussions for public health and safety. The country's students and youth are watching you and looking to you for guidance.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: Some people have said that enough debate has already taken place on this. However, there has been little debate on some of the radical provisions included in the bill before you, those that would eliminate the mandatory licence verification for individuals buying non-restricted firearms and the mandatory keeping of firearms records by vendors. These measures were not part of the commitments made by the Conservative Party in the last election. In fact, when previous incarnations of this bill came before the House of Commons, the government at the time said that such provisions "help to ensure that guns do not get into the hands of individuals who should not have them, such as convicted

criminals, and help investigators identify the owners of stolen firearms or conduct criminal investigations."

Ms. Crockett: We agree. They are logical and rational protections. Doing away with them quickly, under cover of a debate on the long-gun registry, is very worrisome. The full effects of their elimination have not been thoroughly considered. A lack of due diligence on this law could cost lives. We ask that you carefully study the ramifications of these provisions. If lives are lost or criminals not brought to justice due to the content of this bill, ignorance as to exactly what it proposed will not be an excuse.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: We at the Dawson Student Union are used to hearing the tired argument that the registry did not prevent the shooting at our school. We tell cynics that it is precisely this experience that spurred us to carefully study all aspects of this issue. We empathize with victims and survivors of gun violence, and it is with love and empathy that we are here before you.

Ms. Crockett: The Beretta CX-4 is classified as a restricted firearm in Canada and is not affected by Bill C-19. This being said, we would like to remind you of the words of the Supreme Court of Canada: "Guns cannot be divided neatly into two categories — those that are dangerous and those that are not dangerous. All guns are capable of being used in crime. All guns are capable of killing and maiming."

While the gun registry did not prevent the shooting, the police first on the scene afterwards said that knowledge given to them by the registry helped them to respond more effectively. It told them the types of guns he owned and how many and gave them a licence photo.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: In the days following the shooting at our school, the Sûreté du Québec used the registry to identify, track down, and disarm a potential copycat of the shooter on the Internet. A 15-year-old with a valid firearms licence posted on a website where the Dawson shooter had a blog, threatening students at a high school in the small town of Hudson. He bragged that he was a better shot than that shooter and said he wanted to die in a similar fashion. He included a picture with the posting where he was masked and holding one of his father's guns. The registry was a key tool — and we recognize that it is a tool — used to stop him from ruining thousands of lives.

Ms. Crockett: When our laws falter, we must not just shrug and accept defeat. Our responsibility is to find the holes in the system and fill them. We can testify that the costs of gun violence are high and that we simply cannot afford to weaken our gun control.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: We understand that Canadians have doubts about the program's usefulness or think that registering their firearm is difficult and complicated, but we extend our hand to them, with an open mind, so that we can find common ground.

There have been interesting ideas proposed as to how to make the registry work for everyone. Some MPs have proposed, brilliantly, bringing both gun registry activists and opponents together into the room to talk to one another to figure out a way that everyone can be happier in this situation. We ask that the registry, the mandatory license verification, and the obligation that vendors keep track of which firearms are being sold be maintained and that this dialogue continue. The issue does not need to be as divisive as some have made it out to be. All we are seeking is dialogue and compromise.

Ms. Crockett: All Canadians have paid for the registry. Quebec, in particular, sees the registry as an integral part of its values. On three occasions, Quebec's National Assembly voted unanimously to keep the registry. The federal government should not deny Quebec the data its taxpayers have paid for and spend millions fighting it in court.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: We hope that this committee will do its proper job, examine all elements of this bill, and show due diligence in ensuring that all facets of Bill C-19 are carefully examined. Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Ms. Dulong, do you have an opening statement?

Francine Anna Dulong, as an individual: Yes, I do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the time to speak to the committee about this important issue. I am here as a teacher, a Canadian citizen, and a grieving daughter, as I witness a gun sale loophole becoming a reality in Canada through this bill. That kind of

loophole is one half of the equation that set the stage for the death of my mother, Jocelyne Couture-Nowak, at Virginia Tech University, in the United States, less than five years ago.

All guns are lethal, and any gun in the wrong hands is dangerous. If you look at gun control, you have two sides of the equation — ease of access, which is the supply, and the people who are looking for guns for whatever reason, which is the demand.

Currently, whether to prevent a mass shooting or a single murder, we have mandatory licence checks. They ensure that only those with a valid licence can purchase a gun, as do records of sale and registration that track legal weapons. They support each other. Bill C-19 will take away not only the registration of long-guns but also the legal obligation to check these licences and the gun dealer and manufacturer record of those transactions. We are essentially creating an open, private space for firearms to get into the wrong hands, which is exactly how my mother's killer was able to purchase the gun that killed 32 people, wounded 25, and killed her. We are creating the Canadian version of a gun show loophole.

Amendments in Bill C-19 severely weaken the protections of our licensing system. When you are changing the law to no reason to believe that a person cannot possess a type of weapon, this bill can give a get out of jail free card to those who choose to break the law when they try to buy guns. While selling guns to an unlicensed person will remain illegal, the ability of courts to hold people to account for the crime will be greatly diminished. After an act of violence occurs, we are putting the onus on the Crown to prove what someone may have believed.

The coroner's inquest into the shooting of Arlene May in 1998 identified the lack of mandatory licence validation as a major loophole in the former system. Her former partner was able to purchase a gun, despite being prohibited by a judge from owning guns under bail conditions after he assaulted her.

We must learn from experiences of the past. "No reason to believe" simply will not be enough to deter sales to those with a licensed card but without a valid licence.

Bill C-19 also eliminates mandatory records for transactions for both dealers and manufacturers in Canada. That eliminates a practice that was

first put into place here 35 years ago, a practice that helps police to find out where crime guns come from and shut down those sources.

Critics also claim the registry is a waste of time, money and is inherently flawed. However, there are many examples of the registry helping to combat the illegal gun trade. I will highlight two for you.

In March 2011, a licensed gun dealer from rural Quebec was charged with illegally selling 63 guns, including long- guns, to Montreal street gangs. The police investigated after three guns registered to this individual were used in gang crimes.

More recently, in February 2012, an employee of a B.C. hunting store was charged with stealing 159 firearms from that shop and trafficking them by posting them on websites popular with gun enthusiasts. The police have lauded the registry for helping to apprehend the suspect and recover the stolen firearms.

Bill C-19 will make crimes like this one easier to commit and harder to solve.

What this law does is eerily similar to how guns in the United States through the gun show loophole. Under Bill C- 19, rifles and shotguns can be sold to someone who should not have guns, just like Arlene May's killer, and they can become an instrument of crime, violence and death, leading to a lifetime of grief and traumatization.

Some argue that Bill C-19 will end the criminalization of law-abiding, gun-owning citizens. They are harmless duck guns used solely for hunting and sporting activities. I grew up in rural Nova Scotia, in a hunting family, and I understand their point of view. What I claim in no way criminalizes legitimate gun users. Guns come with responsibilities, just as cars do. Law-abiding firearm owners understand that. They have a licence; they have registered their weapons.

It takes little time, comparatively, to register a gun, write up a transaction, or phone to check a valid licence. It takes much longer to investigate gun crime, bring criminals to justice and support innocent victims and their families, and it takes a lifetime to recover from gun violence.

My mother always told me that in Canada we took gun ownership seriously and, although not perfect, our current legislation supports this very Canadian approach. It is not perfect but we can work on it. My mother was proud to work in a country that works toward gun violence prevention through education, international leadership and a legal system that protects the most vulnerable.

Whether a national tragedy or a single victim, if you had the chance to avert a death by gun violence, would you not take that chance? If you had the tools at your disposal after a violent death to seek out justice, would you use those tools or throw them away? The long-gun registry is one of these tools. This bill will leave other families to suffer the fate that I and too many of us suffered that day in Virginia. I humbly ask this committee to reassess Bill C-19 and the amendments therein in their entirety. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dulong. We will now have questions from our committee members, beginning with Deputy Chair Senator Fraser.

Senator Fraser: Thank you very much for being here.

[Translation]

It is very important for us to hear what you have to say.

[English]

Ms. Dulong in particular, you have my condolences. I know it is not easy for people who have been through what you have been through to testify before a committee like this, and we are very grateful to you.

It seems to me that a common thread for all of you comes back to this question of whether the merchants have to verify the validity of the licence at point of sale — not just determine whether someone has a card, but if it is still valid.

Do you have any sense of the impact of not requiring that validity to be checked? I take for granted that the huge majority of people who will be buying guns will be good, honest citizens who want to go duck hunting or whatever. However, there are some others.

In the course of your work and your research, have you gathered from any source any sense at all of the likelihood or of the proportion of gun buyers who would not be the kind of law-abiding citizens that the proponents of this bill want to protect, if you see what I mean? Have any of you?

Ms. Dulong: When I cited the example in February 2012, you do have a gun dealer who is using the system in order to steal guns and was using the registry to legitimize that. Also, you can see a lot of examples in the States. Yes, the laws are different. However, when you weaken that law, you open the door.

You are already opening the door. You are looking at different interpretations of that law by not making it an obligation and changing the wording to "reasonable belief." You have the minister's or the government's interpretation, you have the court's interpretation, and you have the interpretation of the police on the front lines. The great example of this is the current case in Florida with Trayvon Martin and the "stand your ground law." That law uses the same kind of wording — "reasonable belief" to defend oneself — and you have three different interpretations of a law.

Senator Fraser: If it gets to court.

Ms. Dulong: Yes, if it gets to courts. The special prosecutor for that situation who has been appointed to that case said, "This is even more difficult because now the state has to prove beyond a reasonable doubt to perhaps even get charges laid or for it to come to court."

Senator Fraser: This is a different question now — it is not a follow-on, but it is my last on the first round.

We heard testimony earlier today from Chief Hanson of the Calgary Police Service that there is no requirement to register guns at the point of entry into this country; gun dealers can import them and there is not necessarily any registration made or required.

Are you aware of that situation? Some other witnesses seem to think that, in fact, registration did occur at the border but he was very positive that it does not. Do you know anything about that?

Ms. Dulong: Manufacturers in the States are required to have records of transactions, but gun dealers are only requested. That is at the manufacturing level.

I do not know how it works specifically in Canada. However, what does scare me is that we are looking at repealing records of transactions being an obligation at the dealer and at the manufacturer level. I think that should be investigated.

Senator Fraser: One of the things that a number of people have suggested is that we revert to the system where the seller is required to keep records, as was the case before the registry.

Ms. Dulong: Yes. It was in previous bills and I am wondering why it is not in Bill C-19.

[Translation]

Senator Fraser: Would someone like to add something?

[English]

Both by daughters attended Dawson and I am glad to see you here today.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: Thank you for having us.

Senator Lang: I want to thank you very much for coming here this afternoon. I want to assure all of you that it is not the intention of any member around this table to put anyone in harm's way. The question being put to us is clear and unequivocal: The registry that we have in place does not work. The question that I think is being addressed to all members here is whether it accomplishes what some people may think it accomplishes.

Over the past number of weeks, we have heard from front-line police, from those involved on a day-to-day basis hunting and fishing, and from those gun owners who have registered that the gun registry does not accomplish what we think it should accomplish, primarily because of the fact that the registry itself is set up in such a manner that it is full of flaws. The ultimate end of this is that it is giving a false sense of security to some law enforcement officers where they believe that, because an individual they are investigating is not on the computer, they feel that perhaps there are no

guns involved. It is a false sense of security. We have heard it time in and time out. That is something that we have to be very concerned about from the point of view of enforcement.

I want to go to an area that I think is paramount and hear what a number of you have to say about this, and it is the actual question of the licensing and the requirement for licensing and the way one goes through the process. Do any one of you here have a long gun licence?

Mr. Murphy-Perron: No.

Senator Lang: You obviously have read the legislation and you should be aware of what one has to do in order to be able to qualify to have a long-gun firearm. Do you feel that is rigid enough? To go through it quickly, you apply. You have to go through a test. One of the most important elements from the point of view of community is that you have to have a number of references from the community. There is a police check, and then you take an exam and you take a two-day course. You do not take a one-day course, but a two-day course.

On the question of the licensing and the application for licensing, do you see anything else that could be done there? The whole concept, of course, is to, as best we humanly possibly can, prevent those who would apply for a long-gun registration who are not qualified. Could you tell us if that system is rigid enough and does the job we are asking it to do?

[Translation]

Luc Massicotte, Mobilization Coordinator, Association québécoise de prévention du suicide: The controls are probably sufficient as regards having access to a weapon. Obviously, we view the matter from the point of view of suicide prevention. The gun registry also helps protect weapons owners from their own distress.

We do not consider weapons owners as criminals. Not at all. However, every one of us here may be in serious distress at some point and that weapon can become something very dangerous for oneself and for the members of one's family, and the long-gun registry makes better intervention possible.

Canadians are sensitive to the issue of suicide prevention — legislators are as well with Bill C-300 — and would like to have in place everything possible to prevent those 10 suicides a day in Canada. The registry is one appropriate and very useful tool to saving lives, as well as for people in situations of distress, even if they have acquired their long gun entirely legally and meet all the conditions for obtaining it.

[English]

Senator Lang: It is very important. I do not know if you are aware of this, but one of the other requirements is the safe storage of firearms and the separation of them from the ammunition. There is only so much can be done in legislation to do the best we can to prevent those situations that you have just described.

The argument and position that could be put is that one of the reasons we have had such a decrease in suicide by long-gun rifles is because of the fact that the licensing is so stringent. You have to qualify. You have to have references from the community. Every five years, you need to have a renewal of that licence. Within two years of that licence, if there has been a spousal breakup or matrimonial change, the previous spouse has to be contacted to see whether or not the licence should be renewed and you are able to keep your firearms.

Is the question of the storage and the fact that the storage of the long-gun is required to be separate from the ammunition not another step that at least helps prevent that emotional situation that you are talking about, which is really so unfortunate?

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand: You are right about suicide prevention. Safe storage is one of a set of means. If they are not used, a registry alone would not be enough. If, after obtaining a licence, and after taking the course and successfully completing it, an individual whose mental health varies because he has experienced problems has his weapons taken away from him, he can nevertheless obtain more by showing a document that might not be valid. We are going to be required to rely on what the vendor decides to do or not to do, and we are therefore jeopardizing the lives of Canadians, people who could otherwise be protected by stricter measures.

Are the measures adequate? I think others should be added, but is it the set of measures that makes a difference? You are right.

[English]

Mr. Murphy-Perron: I agree that the measures in place for licensing are very stringent, and they are applaudable. However, those measures mean nothing if licence verification is not required at the point of sale for non-restricted firearms. Bill C-19 does not include that in its provisions. All the work that has been done over the past few decades is out the window if it is not a requirement for the vendor to see the licence when they are selling a non-restricted firearm. It is as simple as that.

Senator Jaffer: I want to thank you all for coming and presenting your point of views. I will adopt Senator Fraser's comment and what she said, Ms. Dulong, about your courage in being here.

I have a question for Mr. Marchand and Mr. Massicotte. You heard my colleague Senator Lang speak about the storage of guns, and you obviously know about that. When I was listening to what you were saying, I perceived a real concern by you that guns are a faster route to put the suffering to an end. Can you elaborate on that? One of the things you hear from many people, and we heard it around this table today, is that there are other ways to commit suicide. Why are you so concerned about firearms?

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand: First, a firearm is the most lethal means. Some 98 per cent of people who use it die from it. It is the means that takes the shortest amount of time use. Even drugs that may be lethal nevertheless take time to use. We are able to save people who have taken sufficient quantities of drugs but that have not yet had the time to take full effect. This enables us to intervene if we are aware.

First, the highly lethal nature of a firearm is of primary concern. Second, this concerns quite a large percentage of all suicides committed. It is not the most used means, but it is one of the most used means. This is not something minor; it is something that takes the lives of many Canadians. Third, I would say that it may be one of the means, together with drugs, on which we are most able to take action to prevent suicide because we can have tools like the registry, and others such as storage, which have an

effect on suicide prevention. When we are able to act as effectively as that, it is hard to do away with it, in view of all the effects that can cause.

[English]

Senator Jaffer: Senator Lang set out all the steps you have to take. It is not easy to get a gun. That will still be in place. The licensing, the training and all the things he set out will still be in place.

When I was listening to you carefully, I got this feeling that you felt that we were moving closer and closer to our neighbours in the south. Having heard what Senator Lang said, are you now convinced that we are not moving the way of our neighbours to the south?

Ms. Dulong: Licensing in Canada is the thing in our system that I applaud and the major difference between our two countries in gun control. The rest of the world, especially the United States, is very curious about what we will decide in this room and how this legislation will go forward. There are many different groups that have been interested.

To not have that mandatory check, to not have it work in tandem with the registration, which encourages responsible handling and responsibility in all senses, and to not have that with any way to trace weapons, if you do not have those three things working together, you start to create more holes. I am worried about that.

For the past five years, I have seen many different survivors from many different events in the States, large and small — Tucson, Arizona, the Chardon high school shooting, Virginia Tech — and they are constantly coming forward and speaking of holes in their system. One of the largest things is private gun sales. We have already seen that the registry has prevented selling on-line particularly. Private sales, gun shows and amnesty are holes that people can take advantage of, and they will. It has happened before. That is what I would like to prevent in our country.

I do not think we should have to worry. I personally would not want to have to worry, and I also want to be able to move forward. You do have the hunting side. It is a Canadian past time just as you have it in the States, so how do you put those two things together? Why are we moving backwards and taking away the provision of the licensing, the provisions of the records of transaction with the registry and scrapping it all? Why are we not moving

forward to find non-criminal ways to get rid of these administrative charges that are putting hunters in a criminal position and also respecting victims and public safety? Those two things go together.

[Translation]

Senator Boisvenu: Thank you for your testimony. Like Senators Fraser and Lang, I have a great deal of sympathy for the tragedy you have experienced, as both a front-line worker and family member.

As you know, I have defended the victims of crime for 10 years since my daughter was murdered. We are always filled with emotion when we have to testify about a bill that ultimately may reduce protection for families. As relatives of victims, we want as many tools as possible to protect our families and those close to us. As legislators, we have to analyze as objectively as possible, even though it is sometimes difficult to make administrative and legal decisions.

No studies have provided us with evidence that there is a direct link between gun registration and a decline in crime. A drop in the rate of firearms-related deaths has been observed since 1979. It has been constantly declining in Canada at a rate of 1.4 per cent since 1979. And even though we adopted the entire bill in 2002, we have not had a sharp drop. Instead it stabilized in the 10 years after the registry was adopted.

We have also observed a 60 per cent reduction in the rate of suicide involving firearms since 1979, but a 45 per cent increase in the use of suffocation and hanging. We see there has been a transfer. We have seen the same thing in suicides. We have seen a kind of transfer from hunting weapons to bladed weapons and handguns. There has been a transfer of means that people use to commit suicide and murder. I believe that one suicide or one murder is still too many.

This week, I was listening to the advertisement of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec on suicide. They do not talk about registering weapons, but about safely storing weapons. I would like you to tell me whether I am right or not. The registration of weapons has not had a greater effect because we do not really know what it has done. However, most specialists tell us that the safe storage of firearms has really had an impact on the use of firearms because the proximity of the means makes people use them.

Has the storage of firearms not had greater impact than registration?

Mr. Marchand: I cannot tell you whether that has had more or less impact. I would be hard pressed to tell you. However, according to the experts, INSPQ has said that all measures as a whole — there are many; you mentioned storage, and you are right; we can talk about weapons handling and courses — enable us to work toward prevention and saving lives. Registering long guns was one of those measures.

You are deciding, as a government, to repeal this measure without knowing its impact on others, and perhaps other measures had more impact, but we know that we cannot say today that it had no impact or that we are not running a risk in repealing it, and that makes me fear the worst. We know how lethal this means is. We talked about it earlier and it is the lives of vulnerable people, not those of criminals, that are at risk; it is vulnerable people we want to save. We had a set of measures, and we are taking away a number of them. If I were a senator, that would trouble me.

Senator Boisvenu: How do you explain that the number of homicides and suicides stabilized when all the mechanisms provided for under the registry were put in place in 2002? The decline was much less sharp, whereas it was declining when we did not have a registry. I am trying to understand why the registry had no effect on suicides, when the rate declined every year from 1979 to 2002. We did not have a registry. We adopted the registry, and we saw the rates stabilize. Isn't that contradictory?

Mr. Marchand: Not in the case of suicides. Perhaps in the case of crime. In the case of suicides, the statistics do not show that. The statistics, particularly in Quebec, climbed until 1999 and then fell until 2009. We have statistics for the most recent years. They continued to fall starting in 2002. We believe the 32 per cent decline between 1999 and 2009 is attributable to the set of measures addressing firearms, but not just to that. We cannot do just that to prevent suicide.

Senator Boisvenu: There has been a lot of prevention.

Mr. Marchand: You are right. And if we had just reduced access to means, that would be insufficient. If the registry had not been introduced, we would not have had an impact because the statistics dropped, and you can see this in our brief; this has been proven. There was a significant decline in the number of suicides by firearms.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Earlier today, I cited some figures on the causal relationship between the possession of weapons in general in a population, that is to say in a country; the percentage of people who own a firearm is obviously very often linked to the liberalized possession of firearms.

Where legislation restricts or manages firearms, the crime rate declines considerably. I will cite the UN statistics. Of the total number of homicides committed in the world, 36 per cent are committed in Africa; 31 per cent in the United States, including Canada, since we are just included in a statistic, 27 per cent in Asia, but 5 per cent in Europe and 1 per cent in Oceania. When I look at the world figures, once again the UN tells us that 80 per cent of victims and those who commit homicide are men, and, according to the other statistics from 2008, nearly 80 per cent of all those killed by their current or former partner were women. There is a direct correlation between liberalized possession of firearms, that is to say as in Switzerland and the United States, where there is one weapon for every two individuals in the country. The figure is even higher than in the United States.

As regards the registry issue, this is simply a tool, as you say. My father was a hunter all his life, and I ate wild meat all my life. This is not punishing these people; it means ensuring that weapons do not circulate like any kind of object you buy such as a pair of shoes. There is a responsibility because it is a tool that kills.

[English]

The Chair: Senator, you are giving a lot of evidence and opinion and that is fine if it is to frame the context of a question. Could you please get to the question?

[Translation]

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Ms. Dulong, you have studied the issue. Do you see a causal relationship between the widespread distribution of firearms and very liberal access and incidents involving firearms, homicides, murders and suicides?

[English]

Ms. Dulong: Yes, I definitely think so. If you have ease of access, it becomes easier for anyone to access a gun. Ease of access is talking about the licensing system. We have a wonderful licensing system in this country but if you start taking away the supports for that licensing systems it starts to break down.

If you look to the south that is what happens. If you look at the statistics that is what happens. There are many ways to get around it. If you look at the case of Arlene May, which was a domestic violence case, her partner had a licence that had been revoked but he still had the physical copy. That is what he used to get his firearm. That can happen if Bill C-19 passes; it can happen very easily.

The Chair: Senators, we will have to move along. We have a number of senators still on the first round and we are starting to run short on time, which is not surprising with a large panel that we are so pleased to have before us.

Senator White: Thank you for being here. You have my condolences.

I listened intently. Other people have referred to subsection 23(1), which I will read:

A person may transfer a firearm if, at the time of the transfer

(a) the transferee holds a licence authorizing the transferee to acquire and possess that kind of firearm;

(b) the person has no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized. . . .

That is from the Firearms Act, not Bill C-19. There is no change.

Do you recognize that this same wording is in the Firearms Act today as it is Bill C-19? It actually states that the transferee holds the licence — it does not talk about seeing it — and the person has "no reason to believe." There is no change in that, for reference.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: I have further wording here also in the Firearms Act. However, beyond that, I believe that an adequate addition would be along the lines of: "In the case of a transfer between individuals, the transfer

verifies the validity of the transferee's firearms licence with the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre and obtains a reference number for the inquiry." That is language that should have been included in Bill C-19, and I believe it would address a lot of our concerns.

Senator White: Are you suggesting an addition to the Firearms Act as it stands today, not just Bill C-19?

Mr. Murphy-Perron: There was wording in the Firearms Act that we felt addressed many of the issues we have now. This is additional wording.

Senator White: Yet it is not a requirement to actually see the licence.

Mr. Murphy-Perron: Still no requirement to see the licence.

[Translation]

Senator Chaput: My question has been answered in part, but I am going to ask it nevertheless. We are faced with the repeal of the registry. It is going; it will be abolished. And now we have Bill C-19, which we are discussing today, which is something else.

We agree that the registry was an additional tool to combat crime. Some people would not agree, but I believe you agree. We have lost that tool. If I have correctly understood, for Bill C-19 now to become a tool to fight crime, some of you said that there would have to be an obligation on the vendor's part to verify whether the licence is legal. Are there any other points in Bill C-19 that need to be changed so the bill really becomes a tool to fight crime, apart from this one?

[English]

Ms. Dulong: To reinstate records of transaction at both the gun dealer and manufacturer.

[Translation]

Senator Dagenais: Thanks to all the witnesses. This morning I had the chance to meet Mr. Marchand and Mr. Massicotte, whom I thank by the way. You are working for suicide prevention. Are you aware that, if a member of your family is depressed, you can seek a court warrant to

enable police officers to seize all firearms in that person's house to prevent an unfortunate incident from occurring?

Mr. Marchand: Yes.

[English]

Senator Runciman: Thank you all for being here. It is important to hear your perspectives. I have a couple of questions for clarification.

Mr. Marchand, I think you were saying in your submission that the registry reduces access to firearms. How does it reduce access to firearms? What is your view with respect to that?

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand: Let us take a concrete example. I contact police officers to have weapons taken away from someone who is in a condition inconsistent with the possession of weapons and who is threatening to make an attempt on his own life. If that person is able to get to a dealer and to obtain another weapon, since there is no obligation to verify the validity of his licence, his life is once again threatened and the police officers' work is nullified. Making arms readily accessible or limiting the merchant's responsibility means that it is much easier for a vulnerable person to obtain another weapon.

[English]

Senator Runciman: I would still like to see licensing and background checks reducing access but not a database.

There is a reference in your written submission on page 6 that the cost of the registry is relatively low considering the hundreds of lives that have been saved. Where did you come up with that "hundreds of lives have been saved" by the registry? Is that an assumption? We have had testimony that there has been no indication that any life has been saved by the registry. What do you base that on?

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand: That is based on two factors: first, on the fact that the number of deaths by suicide has declined in Quebec since the registry was implemented, and, second, on the fact that the Institut national de la santé publique, a credible and serious institution, estimates that 250 deaths by suicide have been prevented by these measures as a whole, including the introduction of the firearms registry.

[English]

Senator Runciman: With respect to suicides, I have here from the World Health Organization something that indicates international suicide rates. I am assuming you have seen this. If you look at these facts, there is no correlation between gun laws and the rates of suicide; in fact, the United States has a rate lower than Canada, France and Finland.

How do you come to grips with what you are saying with respect to the gun registry while here we have a country with looser gun laws, as we all know, having lower rates of suicide, as indicated by the World Health Organization?

[Translation]

Mr. Marchand: You are right; we can observe those figures. However, suicide is a complex problem. It cannot be reduced solely to access to the means, including firearms. We can talk, for example, about the religion the individual practises. It has been proven that, in places where people are Catholic, the suicide rate is lower than in places where people are Protestants. We could bring in other factors such as that, which, added together, have an impact on a country's suicide rate. Yes, they make it possible to have lower suicide rates in the United States than in Canada, but we know — and it is the World Health Organization that says this — that reducing access to the means, particularly firearms, is not a trivial example because it has an effect. It is difficult to compare Canada with the United States with regard to suicide because there is an entire cultural issue. However, if we reduce access to the means, we know that we are reducing the chances of suicide.

[English]

Senator Runciman: I think it has a bearing with respect to the gun laws. I think we can say the most liberal gun laws in the world are in the United States.

Senator Lang: I would like to make a comment. When we talk about the gun laws in the United States and compare them to Canada, you are comparing apples to oranges. I have lived in the States and so I can share your concerns about their gun laws down there. We are very fortunate to be here.

I want to refer to section 23 and give the witnesses some comfort in respect to the transfer of long-gun firearms in respect to the responsibility of the individual when they do transfer to check that individual out and ensure they have a legitimate firearm licence. If they do not — so you realize this — they do commit a criminal act, and it refers to section 101 of the Criminal Code. It is up to a five-year sentence.

This is very serious. If I sell my long-gun rifle to you, sir, when you have your licence, because I have my licence, if I do not verify that you have a licence and it is found that I have not verified that you are legitimate, I bear that responsibility. I think that gives you some comfort from the point of view of the actual transfer of long-gun rifles and non-restricted firearms.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification, Senator Lang. We will have a final comment by Senator Fraser.

[Translation]

Senator Fraser: Mr. Marchand, you said that the suicide rate is higher in regions where the rate of firearms possession is higher than in other regions. You cite Montreal and the North Shore of Quebec as examples.

Do you know how many of those suicides, particularly on the North Shore, where there is a very high rate — 19.8 per 100,000; that is atrocious — are committed using firearms?

Mr. Marchand: We have those figures by region, but they vary, by region, from 10 per cent to 30 per cent, 35 per cent.

Senator Fraser: Depending on the region. So it is lower in the cities?

Mr. Marchand: Yes.

Senator Fraser: So you are saying that it is not just that suicide is more common, but that suicide involving firearms is more common in those regions?

Mr. Marchand: Absolutely.

Senator Fraser: If you could give us those figures, that would be appreciated.

Thank you very much. The notes at the end of your brief provide a long and invaluable list of studies on the subject.

[*English*]

Senator White: Do you also have the data related to how many of those suicides with guns were by people that they were registered to, please? Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our time on this panel. I know that many of us have expressed this, but thanks to each of you. You have very personal and different reasons for being before us here today, but there is a similarity. It is personal to you; we know that. It is not just a subject matter or a study matter, it is a personal matter. We have heard your messages loud and clear. We thank you so much for that.

We are pleased to have four individuals as our fifth panel of the day. I will introduce Professor Foote from the University of Alberta, who is joining us by video conference from Calgary. Welcome, Professor Foote.

A. Lee Foote, Associate Professor, University of Alberta, as an individual: Thank you, Chairman Wallace. I am actually in Edmonton.

The Chair: As well, with us at our table is Professor Gary Mauser from Simon Fraser University; Professor Martha Jackman from the Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa; and representing the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions is Ms. Linda Silas, President. Welcome.

We will now have opening statements from each of you. I will begin with Professor Foote.

Mr. Foote: Thank you. My name is Lee Foote. I am an urban, college educated, upper middle class, subsistence hunter. I realize that that sounds a bit odd. To make things even odder, I, like many others on the political right and left, am strongly in support of the long-gun registry elimination through Bill C-19.

I am not alone as an urbanite, either. There are many citizens in large cities with tremendous investments into and commitments to owning legal firearms. They are a tool for a core lifestyle activity. My interest in speaking is to provide a perspective on the legal, legitimate and essential roles of rifles and shotguns in the hands of responsible and safety- trained citizens who use them for hunting and conservation purposes.

In many ways, long guns are to hunting what golf clubs are to golf, bread knives are to baking and snow shovels are to shinning. They are just a tool. I am not being flippant by saying this. Putters, bread knives, shovels and firearms are inanimate but essential tools that allow participants to delve into meaningful activities that add richness and fullness to their lives. There are small risks involved in the use of each of these tools during their respective activities. It is tempting to say that restricting them will serve humanity better, but a more constructive assertion is that with proper, detailed training, as required in Canada today, the risks plummet to background levels.

Even though golf, baking, hockey and hunting occasionally result in injury, something that is very unfortunate but happens, the absolute risk of injury from a firearm in the hands of a legal Canadian user, which means a person that has the safety training and the permit, is not a substantive risk to the public. For 11 years, I have hunted and killed deer and taught a class of university students how to handle and convert this intact deer carcass into delectable, recognizable cuts of delicious meat. I have hunted every year for 48 years and have never witnessed a firearm accident. I wish I could say the same for my hockey and kitchen knife activities, each of which have involved at least one small accident.

Each year I provided my family with between 100 and 300 kilograms of healthy, lean, organic, free range, wild killed and legally harvested meat. Geese, grouse, white-tailed deer and the occasional moose are important substitutions for the agriculturally produced meat we would have otherwise purchased. In fact, my 15-year-old daughter is a vegetarian except for wild harvested meats. The thousands of dollars I have paid for licences, tags

and permits go to support the Alberta Conservation Association, and they are engaged in habitat management, biodiversity maintenance, carbon sequestration, endangered species restoration and university-sponsored wildlife research.

Please do not fall into the simple but alluring trap that hunters as a group are unthinking or uncaring. Most are passionate conservationists, and they are very interested in the equality of the environment where their intrigue for outdoor experiences lies. We take this seriously. We are committed to safe, healthy outdoor recreation. It is a lifestyle, a family-oriented heritage activity, where we share time afield with our friends, children and other family members. Hunting with long guns is something into which we invest our money, our political clout, ourselves, our time and our identity.

I do not propose to speak for First Nations people but, from my many discussions with these people, as well as with Metis hunters and trappers, I recognize a similarity of meaning, of connection to the earth, of depth of commitment to participating in natural cycles, of pursuing and procuring one's own food instead of paying for plastic-wrapped protein of unknown origins from some grocer's shelf.

It is not too big a step to say that wild game and the process of procuring it is a spiritual and life-giving activity. It is no surprise how often people share venison and wild fowl in stark contrast to how rarely someone appears at the doorstep and offers us a purchased beef tenderloin or raw chicken. This meat, this nutrition, the sharing, the reflection on life, the natural community and the passion are played out every time we sit down to a family meal of wild meat. It is a life-giving process. Long guns are an essential and relevant tool in this process of life quality.

On behalf of millions of hunters across North America, particularly in Canada in reference to Bill C-19, I thank you for this opportunity to present some perspective and a window into some of the meanings of legitimate long gun use. Thank you very much.

Martha Jackman, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, as an individual: I have been teaching constitutional law at the University of Ottawa since 1988. I am the author of over 60 articles, book chapters and monographs in the area of constitutional law, and I have been engaged constantly in test case litigation involving Charter issues, particularly equality right issues. I would like to speak to two points. First, I would like to

talk about the constitutional significance of the long gun registry, and then I will speak briefly about the constitutional significance of Bill C-19.

In its 2000 decision in the firearms reference, the Supreme Court of Canada rejected the distinction that many witnesses have attempted to make before the committee. What the court said was:

. . . the opponents of the . . . gun control law argue that ordinary guns, like rifles and shotguns . . . are not dangerous property.

They argue that:

Ordinary guns are used mainly for lawful purposes in hunting, trapping and ranching.

The difficulty with this argument is that while ordinary guns are often used for lawful purposes, they are also used for crime and suicide, and cause accidental death and injury. Guns cannot be divided neatly into two categories — those that are dangerous and those that are not dangerous. All guns are capable of being used in crime. All guns are capable of killing and maiming. It follows that all guns pose a threat to public safety.

The Supreme Court also rejected an argument that has been made before this committee that the long gun registry is not an essential or integral part of the federal gun control regime, whose pith and substance is public safety. The court approved the reasoning of the Alberta Court of Appeal in this regard, and the Alberta court held:

While guns preserve lives and serve as useful tools, they also wound and kill. The latter aspect of guns — their inherent dangerousness — is the focus of the impugned provisions of the Act. Parliament's aim was to reduce the misuse of guns in crime, including domestic violence, as well as to reduce suicides and accidents caused by the misuse of firearms. The licensing provisions, which require applicants to pass a safety course and undergo a criminal record check and background investigation, support this purpose. The registration system, by seeking to reduce smuggling, theft and illegal sales, also addresses misuse. The licensing and registration provisions are inextricably intertwined.

What, then, is the constitutional significance of the repeal of the long gun registry and of Bill C-19?

Numerous witnesses before this committee, including the Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, the Polysesouvient and the Coalition for Gun Control, have underscored the ways in which Bill C-19 undermines the federal gun control regime and its public safety objectives. By doing so, Bill C-19 threatens the section 7 Charter rights of Canadians generally, and the life, liberty and security rights of women who are vulnerable to domestic violence in particular. By undermining the effectiveness and public safety objectives of the federal gun control regime, Bill C-19 is arbitrary and thereby violates section 7 principles of fundamental justice. By undermining the effectiveness of the federal gun control regime, Bill C-19 will have a particularly adverse impact on women who are vulnerable to domestic violence and will thereby violate the section 15 Charter equality guarantees in a matter that cannot be justified under section 1 of the Charter.

Finally, as a number of witnesses have documented before this committee, Bill C-19 is inconsistent with international law and Canada's international treaty obligations, in particular, the UN firearms protocol, which Canada signed in 2002.

Ironically, the federal Justice Minister seems to acknowledge this in suggesting in his testimony before this committee that if Bill C-19 is enacted, we would have to pass other legislation in respect of long guns in order to comply with international agreements.

In summary, Bill C-19 is inconsistent with the Canadian government's domestic Charter obligations as well as with its international obligations. The bill should not be adopted. If the bill is adopted, it should be amended to reinstate the requirement that businesses keep sales records, to maintain the obligation to verify the validity of licences during the sale and transfer of long guns and to retain the data in the current registry.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Jackman.

Ms. Silas, please provide us with your opening statement.

Linda Silas, President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions: On behalf of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, I thank you for this opportunity. I say a special "bonjour" to your chair, who is a proud New Brunswicker, like I am, and ask him not to be too strict because I learned last night I was presenting here and I talk way too fast.

Health promotion is a key issue and a key role for nurses. Gun control legislation works to prevent injury and death and can therefore be linked to other injury and death prevention policies such as seatbelts and hockey helmets. As well, gun control is a women's issue as it reduces the risk of spousal homicide, intimidation and injury.

Ninety-three per cent of our members are women. For nurses, firearms control, including the long gun registry, is not a north-south or rural-urban issue. Gun control is a health and safety issue and a gender issue.

In April 2010, CFNU joined Canadian health care organizations such as the Canadian Association for Adolescent Health, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Public Health Association and many others in a joint statement supporting gun control and the long-gun registry. Why? Because over the years members of the health community have fought for stronger control for firearms. Why? Because of the staggering burden of preventable gun deaths and injuries.

As health professionals, we know the importance of investing in prevention, whether it is road safety or prevention of infectious disease. It is true that one cannot easily measure prevention, but we can measure the effect of ignoring it.

Some may tell you that gun registration does not make a difference. It is an old adage: Guns do not kill people, people kill people. Well, gun control, including registration, reduces the risk that people can kill people.

Risk reduction is what drove the Ontario legislature to pass Bill C-168, which went into effect in 2010. Bill 168 amended the Occupational Health and Safety Act with respect to violence and harassment in the workplace. The deaths of two women at work, one through the use of a firearm, led to the requirement of employers throughout Ontario to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect a worker at risk of physical injury.

Many groups advocated for these changes. The persistence of the two families of the murdered women was a key factor in convincing governments to act. One of the women murdered at work was a member of our provincial affiliate, the Ontario Nurses' Association. Yes, she was a

nurse. This legislation is a significant win for all nurses, who are more likely to be assaulted on the job than a police officer.

For CFNU, gun control, including registration, like Occupational Health and Safety legislation, is one important part of good public health policies.

We urge you to think like the legislators in Ontario, following two high profile murder-suicides, and ask: Will the passage of Bill C-19 assist in or inhibit those wishing to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstance to protect a person at risk of committing violence against themselves or others?

As nurses, we believe we have a role to play in securing communities. As legislators, we see your role as passing laws that provide tools to facilitate the work of law enforcement to reduce the risk of violence and ensure gun-responsible ownership. This means safe storage. Gun owners are held accountable for the guns they purchase. Compel gun owners to report missing or stolen firearms. Reduce illegal trade. Give police and first responders modern tools that exist in 2010-11 and trace guns to their rightful owner.

The ultimate goal of the Canada gun control law is to create safer and healthier Canadian communities. Standards need to be maintained in order to keep firearms away from at-risk people. Measures proposed by Bill C-19 will have serious consequences. We urge members of the committee not to support this legislation until further public health assessment and gender-based analysis be undertaken. Bill C-68 took 14 women to die in Montreal; Bill C-168 took two women to die in Ontario, as nurses.

As an emergency nurse from Moncton, New Brunswick, I have seen gun injuries from some people while they are hunting for that perfect steak or some people in a violent act. As a woman, I am here to try to convince this committee not to pass Bill C-19 in the name of safe communities across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Silas.

For our final opening statement, I will turn to Professor Mauser.

Gary Mauser, Professor Emeritus, Simon Fraser University, as an individual: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I

appreciate very much this opportunity to appear before you. I am a professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University. As part of my duties, I have published in academic criminology journals for more than 20 years and I continue to publish. I am here as an individual criminologist to present facts, not myths.

I will address four points: first, responsible gun owners are less likely to murder than are other Canadians; second, the police have not demonstrated the value of the long-gun registry; third, the long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing homicide rates; and, fourth, the data in the long-gun registry are of very poor quality and should be destroyed.

Bill C-19 deserves your support because the evidence demonstrates that scrapping the long-gun registry is a modest step towards improving public safety.

Law-abiding gun owners are less likely to commit homicide than are other Canadians. This should not surprise. Firearms owners have been screened for criminal records since 1979. It has been illegal since 1992 for people with a violent record to own a firearm.

Statistics Canada data show that licensed gun owners have a homicide rate of 0.6 per 100,000 licensed gun owners. Over the same time period, 1997 to 2010, the average national homicide rate was 1.85 per 100,000. That is three times higher. Thus, Canadians who have a firearms licence are less than one third as likely to commit murder than are other Canadians.

Despite these facts, the RCMP budgets over \$20 million annually for the long-gun registry.

Second, the police have not demonstrated the value of the long gun registry. Scrapping the registry will not compromise law enforcement's ability to trace firearms — it cannot. Statistics show that police recover registered long guns in only 2 per cent of all homicides.

During the eight years from 2003 to 2010, there were 4,811 homicides. Of these, 1,485 involved firearms. Statistics Canada reports that only 135 were registered. In just 73 of these cases — that is 5 per cent of all firearms homicides — the gun was registered to the accused, and, of course, some of the accused may be innocent.

Only 45 of these 73 cases involved long guns. Less than 1 per cent of all homicides involved long guns registered to the accused.

Neither the RCMP nor the chiefs of police, unsurprisingly, have provided a single example in which tracing was more than peripherally important in solving a case. The long-gun registry has not proved useful, either, in solving police killings.

The long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing homicide rates. There is no convincing evidence that the registry has reduced criminal violence. Not a single refereed academic study by criminologists or economists has found a significant benefit from the gun laws. To give you a simple statistical illustration, the homicide rate fell faster before long-guns were required to be registered in 2003. The homicide rate fell 31 per cent from 1991 to 2002 and just 7 per cent from 2003 to 2010.

The data in the long-gun registry are of such poor quality that they should be destroyed.

Registered guns are rarely involved in crime, and, even when they are, the many errors and omissions in the registry vitiate its utility. The Auditor General found that the RCMP could not rely upon the registry in court due to the large number of errors and omissions.

These irregularities stem from multiple causes and remain inherent in the registration system. Even if the RCMP has improved data processing since this evaluation, these problems will persist.

In closing, I wish to urge the honourable senators to support Bill C-19 and the destruction of the data in the long-gun registry. These data should never have been collected.

The Chair: Thank you Professor Mauser. Before we turn to questions, I have listened to your presentation, professor. You quoted a number of statistics. Can you tell us the source of those statistics? Are there reports that we could —

Mr. Mauser: The source is Statistics Canada.

The Chair: It is all StatsCan? Okay.

Mr. Mauser: I put in a request, through a member of the other place, to the Library of Parliament who chased down the statistics in Statistics Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Senator Fraser: Professor Mauser, you are a member of the minister's Firearms Advisory Committee. You have been associated with the National Firearms Association and with the American National Rifle Association, and you have previously stated, as I understand it, that you believe that both the handgun registry and licensing provisions should be abolished. Do you still hold those views?

Mr. Mauser: My argument here is based on Statistics Canada's statistics that you can check out. I am not a member of either the NRA or NFA. I am here as an individual. I do not represent anybody except myself. I think you will see, if you wish to invest the intellectual energy, that the statistics are sound.

Senator Fraser: My question was, do you believe that Canada should have a system of licensing firearms?

Mr. Mauser: I think it is really important to have criminal record checks, which is the key part of licensing, so in that I support licensing.

Senator Fraser: I see. You say that neither the RCMP nor the chiefs of police have provided a single example in which tracing was more than peripherally important in solving a case, and the long-gun registry has not proven useful in solving police killings.

I am looking at a decision from the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, from 2009, relating to the Mayerthorpe killings in which, as you know, four members of the RCMP were killed with a registered long gun.

Mr. Mauser: Unregistered long guns.

Senator Fraser: There was a gun found there that was, in fact, registered to a man who had provided that rifle to his grandson "when he believed that the government planned upon eliminating the gun registry requirements." That is a direct quote from the court decision.

The grandson then loaned or gave — I am not sure which — the gun to somebody who ended up being involved in the Mayerthorpe case, and it was because of the registry that they were able to track that.

Do you not consider that that is an example of the utility of the registry?

Mr. Mauser: No. If you look at my statement, I argued that the registry was not important in identifying the murderer, and it was not.

The murderer committed suicide, and the RCMP do not dispute that.

Senator Fraser: It was relevant in the police investigation of that case.

Mr. Mauser: I did not say it was never relevant. I said it was no more than peripherally relevant. The murderer was identified before the registry came into play, and the registry was useful for other things. The registry was useful in tracking down the accomplices, the friends, and the colleagues, if you wish, but not the murderer.

Senator Fraser: Nonetheless, it seems to me that there is an interesting association of events there.

Professor Jackman, could you clarify things for me in connection with the way the law now works? I do not know if this is exactly your field, but let me try it.

There has been a lot of discussion and a fair amount of concern raised by quite a number of witnesses about the absence, in Bill C-19, of a requirement for the transferor — normally the seller — of a long gun to check the validity of the licence of the transferee, the person getting the gun. As I understand it, the way it works now, under the present law, is that you cannot transfer a gun to somebody until you have gone to the registrar or the chief firearms officer to get a registry certificate and that that will be denied if there is not a valid licence. Is that the way you understand it?

Ms. Jackman: Yes. I think this issue illustrates the point that I was trying to make and that the Supreme Court made in the Firearms Act Reference, which is the extent to which these two parts of the legislative scheme function together. As it currently stands, verification is done both through the verification of the registration and through the onus that is placed on the seller.

This bill offloads the responsibility from the Government of Canada to a transferor to ensure that there is no reason to think that the person acquiring the firearm should not be able to do so.

Senator Fraser: It does not include an actual obligation to check the validity of the licence.

Ms. Jackman: Absolutely not; there is no obligation. I am a constitutional lawyer not a criminal lawyer, but, as to the notion that you could prove beyond a reasonable doubt that somebody transferred the firearm and did not have reason to believe that the transferee was authorized to acquire it, I would not want to be the Crown prosecutor in a case like that.

The Chair: Just a supplementary to Senator Fraser's question, that the transferor had reason to believe would be factually determined, would it not? It would depend on the facts of the given case.

Ms. Jackman: That is the *actus reus*. Essentially, what the act now provides is that a person can transfer a firearm if, at the time of the transfer, the transferor has no reason to believe that the transferee is not authorized to acquire it, so the standard is "no reason to believe."

As I say, that is part of the *actus reus* and it has to be proved by the Crown beyond a reasonable doubt. That is a very high threshold. Since there is not even an obligation to retain records, I am sure the temptation for the transferor is to say, "I checked," and there is absolutely no way of knowing if that is true or not.

This bill illustrates the point the Supreme Court of Canada made, that both the licensing and the registration parts of the legislation were designed to work together and they are inextricably linked; you cannot get rid of one part without compromising the public safety objectives of the other.

Senator Lang: I am like a broken record, but I would like to go back to the registry itself. The evidence and testimony we have heard over the last number of weeks clearly brought forward, in many cases, issues with the registry and the validity of the registry.

The question, of course, that is being put to us as a committee, and which will be put to the Senate, not unlike in the other place, is whether or not the registry performs the function that it was intentionally designed to perform.

I should point out that we have been told in this place that there are presently approximately 1 million unregistered long-gun firearms in Canada. We have also heard testimony in this place that the registry itself is flawed from beginning to end. In other words, it is misinformation and it is also providing a false sense of security to those who have to enforce the law. What we have been told, on countless occasions, especially with younger policemen, is that it gives them a false sense of security if they go to the registry and there is nothing registered; they have the feeling that there are no firearms involved. That, in itself, should be cause for concern for all of us around this table.

Mr. Mauser, you addressed the issue straight on. You said the data in the long-gun registry is of poor quality and should be destroyed. Further on in your statement you said the irregularities in gun registration stem from multiple causes that remain inherent in the registration system.

I would like you to expound on that, because I think it is very important that we clarify and understand the registry and the pluses and minuses as it exists today.

Mr. Mauser: Thank you very much for the question. When the registry was begun, it obviously dealt with people giving information about firearms that had not previously been registered. There was a deadline and many people rushed to comply. They are not experts. They may own a firearm, but there are many easily made mistakes, so the original collection of data contained many mistakes. People would honestly think that they were describing their firearm correctly, but they were not. There are many examples of poorly described firearms in the registry.

Second, there are lots of other governmental departments that entered information in the registry, not just the police. The police testified to the Auditor General in 2002 that they could not trust the registry in court because they had not verified the information, so they did not feel comfortable claiming things that they found in the registry. The RCMP reported error rates of between 43 and 91 per cent in the applications that people submitted. An ATI request in 2003 discovered 4,438 stolen firearms that had been successfully re-registered without alerting authorities. There are other stories of the same gun being entered multiple times in the registry.

This unacceptably high error rate was verified in 2006 by the Auditor General. With these high error rates, the RCMP finds it fiscally challenging to verify it all, and therefore they have not. These error rates persist.

At the same time, no one knows, but some number of people did not register their firearms or get licenses when the system began. Estimates vary from 40 per cent of gun owners licensed themselves and registered their guns, to 60 per cent. That means there are literally millions of guns out there that are not in the system, by so-called honest people, and we have not even gotten to criminal guns, which are, of course, smuggled and have no intention of being included. That is one reason why the statistics that I reported about the number of guns used in homicide that the police recover is not registered.

This is a high error rate. I have been told by police officers and trainers of police officers that young constables actually believe the registry; that when they go to a home, if the registry says there is no gun, there is no gun; if the registry says there are three guns, there are three guns. That does not seem at all reasonable. The person could have registered three and kept two unregistered. The person could have registered none. That strikes me as perfectly plausible.

People should not trust the registry. Constables should not trust the registry. Judges who want to sequester guns from people who should not have them should not trust the registry. The police should check and see if there are others there, if that is the goal. The registry is simply erroneous. Therefore, on the basis of its quality, it should be destroyed.

Senator Lang: An observation that I think has to be reiterated for the record is the fact that the vast majority of front-line policemen feel the same way, and that is very interesting, because they are the ones who are supposed to be enforcing that law.

There is another area of concern. Ms. Silas, if I could direct this question to you and to whomever else might want to respond, and that is the question of registration, the licensing procedure that is in place. I am sure you are well aware of how rigid it is and that when one applies, one just does not get a licence when they walk in. They have to apply, they have to take a course, and they must have at least two references. You take a course and you have to get 80 per cent in that course. There are a number of stringent

steps that you have to take in order to be licensed, and of course that legislative provision will remain in the legislation.

Do you think that particular process is rigid enough and meets the concerns you have expressed in your particular paper in the area of licensing and the requirements for licensing?

Ms. Silas: Yes. I do know a bit about licensing. My son is in law enforcement, is licensed, has a gun, and his gun is registered. As mother, fighting for this since 1995, I guarantee you that I made sure his education was thorough.

The registration and licensing are just process; they are pieces of the puzzle to ensure our community is safe. I look at my son's education. He does not see the registry as obsolete. It is part of his assessment of whether the house or the community he would be going in is safe. It is just part of the process, and that is how I see it, as a nurse.

When I look at the registration and licensing, I bring it back to my experience. I do not have all the degrees that my colleagues have here.

If we look at the precautionary principle, and if we look at 2003, when SARS hit Toronto, 44 people died, including two nurses and one doctor. Justice Archie Campbell came out with a report because health care workers were saying, "What happened? Why were there no safety measures?"

As committee members, your heads must be spinning with numbers. The numbers that Professor Mauser gave today I never heard before. The numbers and data are overwhelming. Justice Campbell said we cannot wait for all the research and all the data to say the same thing. We have to base our decision on the precautionary principle that if we do not know, we go the safe way.

That is the argument we gave to Health Canada when the H1N1 pandemic came. They were saying you do not need protective equipment such as the N95. We were saying if the firefighter needs equipment from head to toe, if the police officer needs a bullet proof vest, health care workers need that precautionary principle. We ask politicians to ensure we have laws in our land that are based on precautionary, not on the reasonable hunter in Alberta or in New Brunswick that will follow all the rules.

There are some that are not, and just like Professor Mauser said, some lie. It was law and it is still law. Some are lying and are not telling how many guns are hidden underneath their beds. They are not following the law. Most are following the law, just like I follow the law when I drive and register my car.

The only thing we are asking is let us follow the law and go on the safety aspect of laws and implementation of laws. That is all.

The Chair: I would remind our colleagues to look at the end of the table and let us not forget Professor Foote, who has been useful with his comments.

Senator Jaffer: Professor Jackman, you are a constitutional lawyer so I am very interested, and you talking about the Charter. Can you expand? Will this bill stand the Charter test? I am interested. You talked about public safety and have done the comparison and I appreciate your response.

Ms. Jackman: In my view this bill is unconstitutional. There are two provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that are infringed by this bill in my view. As I mentioned, section 7 of the Charter guarantees the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof, except in accordance with principles of fundamental justice.

In the evidence that the House of Commons heard, the evidence that you have had before this committee — and I would prefer to defer to the experts, who I would say would be the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Police Boards rather than of anecdotal evidence of front line police officers which I have not found in any way stands as evidence in a legal sense — this bill compromises the public safety objectives of the gun control regime, of which this is half.

It is particularly so for women who are vulnerable to domestic violence and domestic gun violence.

As I argued, the bill is arbitrary. The objective of the gun control regime is to protect and promote public safety including the safety of vulnerable women and this bill undermines that.

In my view it also violates equality guarantees of the Charter because of its disparate impact on women. This is exacerbated by the international human rights aspects of the bill. Canada has an obligation to comply with its international treaty obligations. The Charter is meant to be interpreted in a manner consistent with those obligations and this bill is clearly incompatible with a number of treaty obligations Canada has undertaken and international human rights principles in this area.

Senator Jaffer: This brings me to my next question for Ms. Silas. You spoke passionately and articulately in your presentation. In answer to my colleague, Senator Lang, you said something very profound that I would like you to expand on: As a woman, I am against this bill.

Ms. Silas: It is hard to explain, but it goes back to when I was an emergency room nurse. When we talk about domestic violence, there is a fear of the woman that is unexplainable. This bill, or the image of this bill, is offloading the responsibility to the family member, as Professor Jackman said. In a domestic violence, the fear is there. In mental illness, the fear, the shame is there. You cannot ask family members to take on that responsibility. I do not know any family member that would call up and say, "I am scared that my brother, who I love dearly, is going to beat his wife or kill his wife. I know he has a gun." I do not know anybody that would make that call because of the loyalty, shame and fear.

It is that fear in domestic violence. The reality is accidents happen, especially without the proper training. That goes into the licence and Senator Lang talked about the training and licensing. However, it also goes with knowing who has that gun.

When you have it registered, it is in your name and you are a lot more careful than if it is under your bed or hidden in your truck.

Senator Jaffer: You will also state that this bill should have a gender aspect to it. Can you expand on that?

Ms. Silas: I was in New York at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Minister Ambrose was asked at an international panel if we have done a gender analysis because other countries look at Canada as a gender safety issue, and there was no response. As labour, we were very proud because we did not ask that question. It was an individual woman coming from a minority group in Canada going there on her own

asking that question. We were well recognized and it is saddening to see it might be threatened.

Senator Runciman: Ms. Silas, we have a witness appearing after you who is a physician, resident physician, an emergency physician and I wanted to read something that he has said:

I believe the gun registry has killed people by diverting billions of dollars to create and maintain itself, while real mental health issues go unfunded.

When I see patients with severe depression and suicidal ideation who are requesting help, I often have to tell them that I cannot refer them to a psychiatrist in six months — that is a significant disgrace to our profession.

I have the same experience with women's shelters that are badly underfunded.

How do you react? This is someone who is also an emergency room individual and has a different perspective from yours.

Ms. Silas: When you speak as an individual, it is an individual point of view and is based on experience.

As I mentioned in my presentation — and I have listed and copied the brief or your reference — in April 2010 health care professionals including the Canadian association of emergency physicians who came and did the press conference with us, we had a statement supporting gun control as health care professionals.

He is absolutely right in mental health. Do not get me wrong. We are hoping the Kirby Commission will come out by the end of June, with a strong recommendation to all governments that we need to do something on mental health illness and cures. They are two separate issues and to mix them together is not—

Senator Runciman: It is \$2 billion and if you have concrete evidence that the registry has had an impact in terms of prevention of—

Ms. Silas: We could also talk about homelessness and how we approach that.

Senator Runciman: We are talking about \$2 billion that I think we could argue was essentially flushed down the toilet.

Professor Mauser, you talked in your submission about spending at least \$2 billion in keeping tabs on some of Canada's least dangerous citizens and people who are only one third as likely as others to commit murder. Again, as this doctor indicated, it has diverted money away from things that could truly make a difference in crime and suicide rates.

Could you elaborate on that? You talked about Statistics Canada. Were you looking at people convicted of homicide and if they were registered gun owners? How did you arrive at those conclusions?

Mr. Mauser: These numbers that I presented are StatsCan numbers that the Canadian police forces report to StatsCan as a matter of "accused." None of the people accused of homicide are as yet convicted or have gone to court. These are accused figures. Court figures are much more difficult to get a hold of. That is why these are what is available.

Senator Runciman: How do they break that down, though? They do not break it down in the way you have broken it down.

Mr. Mauser: Statistics Canada collects homicides. Homicide is one of the most well-documented kinds of events in our society. StatsCan requires the police to fill out a questionnaire pertaining to each homicide. If a firearm is involved in the homicide then they want to know what type of firearm, whether the firearm is registered, and whether the accused has a licence. They collect all this.

It is reported by StatsCan in their irregularly-reported studies. They pick various themes and report them as they wish. There is nothing untoward with these numbers. I just asked them to collect these numbers and give them to me. Does that answer your question?

The Chair: Thank you. We have three senators remaining on the first round and time is moving.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Ms. Jackman, thank you for informing us on the whole legislative matter because this is important for me.

If we pass this bill — and I agree with you that it is not constitutional — what would be the recourse of a parent or a spouse who loses a member of their family? They would never track down the gun and there would be no way to find the person who committed the crime. Could they sue the federal government?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jackman: That is quite a complex question. The Supreme Court of Canada has held that the relationship between a parent and child is an interest protected under section 7 of the charter. Consequently, when the state makes a decision that jeopardizes that relationship, it has to comply with principles of fundamental justice; the state must not behave in an arbitrary manner.

However, what makes that complicated, particularly in Quebec, is that a decision was rendered in Montreal in the 1990s, when the mother of a young man killed by police for no reason tried to sue the government on the basis of the Civil Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She did not win her case under the Civil Code. There was very little analysis based on the Charter and the court did not really discuss the matter.

However, the Supreme Court definitely acknowledges this interest as being fundamentally important, particularly the evidence presented in the House of Commons and here in the Senate with respect to the effects of the act. I do not think we can say that the government was unaware of the risk incurred, as Ms. Silas just said, in passing this legislation. It runs counter to the recommendations of all the experts.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: I have one final legal question. There is a clause in the bill that nullifies operational provisions respecting the Archives of Canada concerning the destruction of all records.

When you are the government, you are entitled to do whatever you want. The executive can nullify the application of all rights. However, as you said, there nevertheless remains the Charter, the matter of the Supreme Court judgments and the international agreements.

In the balance, there is Quebec that wants to protect these records, on the ground that Quebec's citizens have paid for this registry and that it belongs

to them. Could a Quebec citizen not say that, since he has paid for the registry, it belongs to him, and simply threaten to challenge its application to Quebec?

Ms. Jackman: The Supreme Court has definitely held that the registry is a shared jurisdiction. The provincial government has the necessary jurisdiction with regard to prevention; there is no question about that. The most serious legal problem in my mind is the international aspect. Canada has made clear commitments in international law and has signed covenants to maintain that documentation. And as I mentioned, I find it incredible that the Minister of Justice has said he wants to repeal the registry and destroy the records, since that covenant requires us, as a country, to be able to provide that information. So we destroy the records and then we recover them in order to meet requirements in international law? I do not understand what the minister had in mind when he said that.

[English]

The Chair: Senator, we have to move along here; we have other senators who wish to ask questions.

Senator Frum: When you said earlier that you considered the gun registry, you said it was half of our gun control regime. I am a strong supporter of gun control as well as you are, but I have a hard time describing a database as gun control. We have our licensing regime and, as Professor Mauser said, the criminal check is the biggest part of that. We have mental health checks, domestic arrangement checks, education requirements, and storage requirements. Once people get past all that, they are allowed to register the guns they choose.

As one witness put it, this is Canada's largest data bank of law-abiding citizens. That is what the registry is. How is that half of our gun control regime?

Ms. Jackman: I would like to quote the Supreme Court of Canada. They said:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting

safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.

The Supreme Court of Canada heard and weighed the evidence in the case and this is the conclusion they came to. I cannot disagree with them.

Senator Frum: Some of us can.

Mr. Mauser, I have a question for you. You have said that the data that exists now should be destroyed. Can you explain why you feel that way?

Mr. Mauser: There are two reasons. First, it is of such poor quality that it is of no use to people. In that lack of quality, it endangers police lives and engenders accidents where police will go to the wrong place for the wrong reasons. Quality is the reason.

The second reason is that the gun registry is really data collected on law-abiding people, by definition. It is not clear that it is a good idea to collect such information on law-abiding people. If there were an ethnic or religious nature and we decided to collect information on people who were law-abiding of a particular ethnic group or religion, we would all be righteously shocked, but, because this is a behavioural or even a rural, white group, we are not shocked. We destroyed the data after World War II on Italian, German and Japanese Canadians. It was good that we destroyed that data. We destroyed the long gun registry data after World War II that we collected. It was good that we destroyed this. This is not only useless, it is immoral.

[*Translation*]

Senator Dagenais: My question is for Ms. Silas. You said that it was your duty to intervene because you felt that the long-gun registry must continue in order to protect the lives of women. You have no doubt worked in emergency rooms as a nurse, a tough job with hard realities that are not that often linked to cases of death by firearms. You have no doubt observed that, despite the infallible registration systems for licences to drive motorcycles and cars, among other things, those devices can also kill human beings, and perhaps more so than hunting weapons. That obviously depends on who is driving the motorcycle or car.

I would like to understand why we do not see that same emotion when we consider car accident victims? The registry does not rule out the possibility of having weapons in the home. I must tell you that I was a police officer. When women are the victims of family violence, they can arrive in a hospital, and it is noted that they have not always been assaulted with firearms. I do not know whether you can qualify your position a little because you seem to be focusing quite a bit on the registry.

Ms. Silas: Yes, because we are here to talk about the registry. However, I also mentioned that it was one piece of a puzzle, one of the means used to guarantee the safety of our communities and families.

The passion I bring here is the same as I had in New Brunswick in the 1980s. Back home, it's snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles. We have worked very hard with the medical community to ensure that all those people who are on snowmobiles, who ski or cycle, wear protective helmets. In our emergency rooms, we saw the impact and dangers involved in not wearing them. I still feel the same passion.

This is one piece in the prevention puzzle. As I mentioned, it is a precautionary principle. That does not mean that it will be the solution to everything, but it is a precaution.

[English]

The Chair: Before we conclude, Professor Foote has suffered from being with us by video conference and not at this table. I want to give you an opportunity, Professor Foote. I notice you have been taking notes. Our time is limited, but are there one or two key points that you would care to comment on? If not, that is fine, but I want to give you that opportunity because you have gotten somewhat short-changed by not being in the room.

Mr. Foote: I am struck by the passion people bring to this, and I am very impressed. My compliments on the very lucid points.

I return to my experience, which is formidable, as an outdoorsman. The police checks, the witnesses' signatures, the requirements for storage, the requirements for training, the mental health checks, the transportation requirements, the safety training, the periodic licensing, the specification limitations on types of firearms and the registration for transport accumulate

in a snowball to be a sizeable, inconvenient barrier to people who want to use their firearms for beneficial, legal, honourable reasons.

There tends to be a focus on the glass half empty throughout these discussions. The small number of exceptional and very unfortunate cases seems to get disproportionate attention. Let us not forget the valuable, wonderful, vivifying and culturally relevant activities that firearms have brought to Canada and continue to bring. It does not get enough shrift, in my opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, professor.

Colleagues, that concludes our time with this panel. We have heard evidence from different panels and their different viewpoints, as has certainly been illustrated clearly from the opinions given from the four qualified and impressive individuals that we have had here today. It has given us much to think about and reflect upon.

I wish to thank you. Your thoughts were not easily given and not quickly given, but they were well thought out. We appreciate that.

We will now continue with what is our sixth panel and the last panel of the day in our consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act. This particular bill is referred to as An Act Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

I am pleased to have with us today the three members of this particular panel. We have Dr. Langmann from McMaster University, who is a resident physician. From the Directeurs de santé publique du Québec, we have the regional director, Dr. Jean-Pierre Trépanier and the planning officer of programs and research, Claude Bégin. Welcome.

We will proceed with opening statements. Dr. Trépanier, I would ask you to proceed first.

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-Pierre Trépanier, Regional Director, Directeurs de santé publique du Québec (Lanaudière): Mr. Chair, Madam Deputy Chair, distinguished members of the Senate committee, good evening. Allow me to introduce myself: I am Dr. Jean-Pierre Trépanier, director of public health

at the Lanaudière health and social services agency. Today, I am acting as the spokesperson for the Directeurs de santé publique du Québec.

I am here with Dr. Hélène Dupont, Director of public health in the Outaouais, who is here in the room, and Mr. Claude Bégin, our professional officer responsible for the firearms file at the Lanaudière agency, who is here beside me.

I want to thank the members of the Senate committee for allowing us to express the point of view of the Directeurs de santé publique du Québec on Bill C-19.

The Directeurs de santé publique du Québec are aware of the stages that Bill C-19 has gone through for the purpose of its final passage in the Senate. We have tried to influence this process in recent months. In February, we sent a letter to the honourable senators from Quebec reaffirming the importance of keeping the current Firearms Act, Bill C-68, which was passed in 1995, intact. In November 2011, we sent a letter to the leaders of the parties sitting in the House of Commons, and we also submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today we wish to reiterate three principal elements from that brief, with further emphasis on the public health perspective.

First, we maintain that the present Firearms Act is effective legislation. The effect of enacting Bill C-19 would be to dismantle an effective system that saves lives and averts serious injuries. In addition to abolishing the long-gun registry, the bill proposes to destroy the data concerning approximately 7.1 million non-restricted firearms, specifically rifles and shotguns, for which a possession licence and registration are currently required. This could result in a loss of ability to trace firearms in the distribution chain linking licence holder, owner, merchant and weapons manufacturers or importers.

It should be noted that, throughout Canada, unlike in the United States, possession of a firearm is a privilege and not a right. The possession licence and mandatory registration of firearms are measures designed to protect the public, without restricting access to or legal uses of firearms, such as hunting or shooting.

As in the case of a driver's licence and motor vehicle registration, which are well accepted by the public, a non-restricted firearms possession licence and the obligation to register each firearm a person possesses are two measures that cannot be severed. They make it possible to connect each firearm with its owner and to hold firearms owners personally accountable, thus providing an incentive for them to obey the regulations in force, regarding, for example, storage, selling, lending and giving a firearm. In the same respect, no one in Canada can lease a motor vehicle without providing the lessor with evidence of a valid driver's licence and a certificate of liability insurance for material harm or bodily injury. Why would it be otherwise for the holders of unrestricted firearms licences?

In those cases, as for the firearms registry, the data gathered by this traceability system provide information on products, make it possible to stop illegal sales, receipt of stolen property between owners, and to monitor developments over time and implement preventive measures.

Second, we want to emphasize that the coming into force of Bill C-68 is associated with a reduction of 300 deaths per year.

First, approximately 70 per cent of firearm-related deaths are caused by long guns, which are considered to be non-restricted firearms. In addition, suicides account for the majority of firearm-related deaths. More specifically, from 2004 to 2008, they represented 73 per cent of those deaths.

Although it cannot be claimed that Bill C-68 alone can eliminate all suicides, homicides and firearm-related accidents, Quebec's Institut national de santé publique estimates that, from 1998 to 2004, its coming into force has been associated with a decline of approximately 250 suicides and 50 homicides a year on average across Canada.

That number represents roughly one death prevented per day, year over year.

A recent study found that stricter firearms controls introduced since 1977 were followed by significant reductions in the number of firearm-related homicides in the order of 5 per cent to 10 per cent, depending on the province. The authors attribute the effectiveness of firearms control legislation to a reduction in the accessibility and availability of firearms, rather than to harsher sentences provided for under law.

Third and last, we want to restate that firearms are dangerous for everyone. It has been established that firearm- related deaths mainly involve people who have personal, marital or mental health problems, rather than criminals, and that in most cases the deaths occur at the victim's home. It is therefore important to make this type of weapon less accessible to people who are likely to misuse them.

In short, the presence of a firearm in a home presents more of a danger of injury than it provides a means of protection for family members.

In conclusion, given that the current firearms control act continues to be effective legislation and an essential lever for preventing suicides, homicides and accidental deaths, the public health directors of Quebec consider it to be crucial to preserve it in its entirety, along with the long-gun registry, which is an inseverable component of the present act.

The whole system guarantees traceability of firearms through the distribution chain linking licence holders, owners, merchants and weapons manufacturers or importers.

We thank you for your consideration of our comments, and speaking from the standpoint of the health and safety of the Canadian public, we strongly urge this committee to recommend that the Senate abandon Bill C-19, recalling that the present act and the long-gun registry established under it have been valuable and useful.

Thank you for your consideration.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Trépanier.

Dr. Caillin Langmann, Resident Physician, McMaster University, as an individual: Thank you for letting me be here. I would like to ask all of you to turn to the brief that I gave to you. If you do not have those figures, I will pass them around.

I am emergency physician in a busy city in Canada. I see trauma and suicide issues on a daily basis.

During these next five minutes, I will summarize research that I have recently published, in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, regarding Canadian firearms legislation and its effects on homicide from 1974 to 2008. I will focus on the long-gun registry as that is the issue at hand, and I will go into brief detail on the association between the long-gun registry and suicide, as it pertains to Canada.

Briefly, three statistical methods were used during my research to attempt to find an association between firearms legislation enacted in 1977, 1991, and 1995. It is particularly important to note that the long-gun registry was implemented in 1998, and full, mandatory registration was required by 2003.

If you consult the Attorney General's report on that, you will find that most long guns were registered around 2002.

This study is significant as it is the only peer reviewed study examining 1974-2008 and as three methods were used to confirm the results.

A search for a gradual effect was also conducted as some of this legislation was enacted over a period of years.

To summarize these results, no statistically significant beneficial associations between firearms legislation in Canada and homicide by firearms — by subcategory long gun — spousal homicide, or the criminal charge of discharge of firearm with intent were found.

Figure 1, if you will turn to that, is a graphical, fictional depiction of a homicide regression analysis, as performed in this paper.

The homicide rate, prior to the intervention, is marked as Beta One. The time of the intervention is Beta Two. There was a sudden impact-shift effect, shifting the homicide rate markedly lower in this fictional depiction.

The trend of the decline of the homicide after the intervention — Beta Three — continues, post intervention, over time. As you can see, it is different.

Statistical effects are then analyzed.

Figure 2 shows the firearms homicide rate minus the effects of contributing variables, such as aging population, poverty, et cetera, on the bottom of this graph.

As can be seen visually, there is not the sudden shift or decline in homicide that one might expect from effects explained by legislation.

Rather, other associated economic factors were found to be statistically associated with homicide by firearms.

For example, when median age of the population increases by one year, the homicide rate drops by 8 per cent. This is nothing remarkable as it has been shown in prior criminal research that, as a population ages, criminals tend to burn out.

Figure 3 depicts a two-dimensional interpretation of multiple regression factors associated with firearms homicide. This is not the standard way of doing this in science, but I have done this for you so that you can interpret this.

Post long-gun registry, as marked in 1999, there is no significant immediate decrease over time or immediate decrease after the long-gun registry comes into effect for firearms homicide.

Figure 4 depicts the same thing for homicide by long gun. Once again, there is no statistically significant decrease.

Figure 5 depicts the same thing for spousal homicide. Once again, there is no statistically significant decrease in either impact or trend effects.

Similar analysis is applied to suicide rates, as per the methodology of Gagne et. al., post 1991. This is to account for any background effects, such as prior legislation, so 1991 is our start date as Bill C-17 came into effect at that time.

Figure 6 depicts total suicide. In 1999, there is no significant immediate impact or impact over time as affected by the long-gun registry or probably by PALs for that matter.

Figure 7 demonstrates, in regard to suicide by firearm, that no significant immediate or trend effect is seen in 1999 as associated with the long-gun

registry. I have blown up the scale here. It looks rather flat if you look at it on a smaller scale, but you can see that the rate of suicide by firearm is depreciating over time. It continues that depreciation, at a slower rate, after the long-gun registry comes into effect.

I would like to close by stating that, in my humble opinion, the money that has been spent on the long-gun registry is, unfortunately, wasted. However, we can prevent further waste by taking this money that we currently focus towards the long-gun registry and focusing on this issue and addressing other issues, such as lack of women's shelters and the lack of suicide prevention and treatment, all of which I see every day.

We also need more training for police in spousal abuse. Psychiatric care is sadly lacking in this country. Every day, I turn away patients who come to see me for help. These are average Canadians who contribute to this country through their tax dollars to whom I have to say, "No, I cannot send you to a psychiatrist because there are none available."

I will end this with a quote from an emergency chief of a department of emergency medicine, "In a town where we have over 15,000 registered and probably just as many unregistered firearms and where 22 trains travel through this town every 24 hours, the trains get used for suicide more often.

What we need, from my point of view, is more resources to fund mental health access and treatment, rather than registering inanimate objects in our rural community. Psychiatrists and outreach workers offer tangible results. They are saving Canadian lives, something no gun registry on earth can provide." That was from Dr. Oscar Ramirez, Chief of Emergency Medicine at Stevenson Memorial Hospital.

My results are by no means astounding. They have been demonstrated by other meta-analysis, done by the National Academy of Sciences and the Centres for Disease Control, that looked at all papers — not just a selective, biased analysis — and come to the conclusion that, in terms of registration of firearms, storage of firearms, and licensing, that there is no demonstrable beneficial effect from these laws.

The Chair: Thank you. I see that the source of your data for the statistical analysis that you provided us with is, at least in part, Statistics Canada information. Is that correct?

Dr. Langmann: That is correct. All data is from Statistics Canada. There were over 300 data points used in this study.

The Chair: Are there any other sources?

Dr. Langmann: No.

Senator Fraser: Thank you all for being here.

[*Translation*]

We really appreciate your involvement in our proceedings.

[*English*]

Dr. Langmann, this was Statistics Canada data, which you then subjected to various statistical manipulations. I am a little puzzled. What I have in front of me is two things from you, and the first one says that you are prohibited, by publication agreement, from submitting your original study to this committee. Then, the second half seems to consist of the article.

Dr. Langmann: The second half was submitted by Solomon Friedman. I did not submit my actual article.

Senator Fraser: Why can you not do that?

Dr. Langmann: This happens with all scientific journals. During the initial one-year printing process of all scientific journals, they require you to obtain the articles by either paying money or having an agreement with some of the providers, such as Sage, which provide publication. This is not anything unusual.

Senator Fraser: You have answered. I do not have much time, so now I have another question for you. I get the point, of which I was not previously aware.

I take from your concluding remarks that you think that even licensing is irrelevant and that registration is irrelevant. Are you therefore saying we should not even register handguns or the weapons now in the prohibited classification? Are you saying we should not even bother licensing the gun owners? I am not sure how to interpret your remarks.

Dr. Langmann: You have asked three questions. I will address them individually.

First, it is not my opinion. I am basing my information today on scientific fact.

Senator Fraser: I asked for your opinion.

Dr. Langmann: My opinion would be based on scientific fact. Scientific fact, in terms of meta-analysis done by the National Academy of Sciences — this is by no means a biased institution funded by the NRA or something like that, as well as the Centers for Disease Control, both in 2004 and 2005 in their publications determined that there is no beneficial proven effects, that the evidence is equivocal in terms of licensing.

Those same groups can show that blood alcohol .08 has a beneficial effect so it is not like they are incompetent. You might want to ask yourself why these groups have difficulty finding beneficial effects from legislation.

To go into that detail, that confused me as well as to why licensing would not have a beneficial effect in terms of the numbers we looked at.

Gary Mauser was also able to obtain the same result, and several other publications did as well in 1977 when licensing first came into effect in terms of the firearms acquisition certificate.

The suggestion is that there is a significant substitution effect where criminals or people wishing to perform malicious activities will obtain firearms in another manner.

It has been studied in Canada, and you can read in the back of the publication that I did not provide but Solomon Freedman did, a study that looked at how criminals were obtaining the firearms in Toronto and where they were obtaining them from.

They found that criminals tend to trade firearms amongst themselves. They tend to borrow firearms for whatever particular use they have. They do not tend to go to the store to buy them.

Senator Fraser: I am not trying to cut you off. It is all pertinent information, but if it is in the study, it is in the study.

I asked about your personal opinion on licensing and on the registration of handguns and prohibited weapons. I know the chair will cut me off. That is why I am cutting you off.

Dr. Langmann: What I am telling you is that in science, personal opinion is not a factor. Personal opinion might matter for something where you have qualitative data or experience. I have experience in emergency medicine; if you want to address that issue, you can.

In science, you have to look at the facts and make your decisions based on the facts. I do this all the time in emergency medicine as well.

According to the facts, in Canada there has been no study on the registration of pistols. Pistols were registered in 1934 so I cannot say anything on that. In the United States as well as other countries according to, once again, the CDC and the National Academy of Sciences, their meta-analysis shows that the results were equivocal. In other words, they could not demonstrate there was a beneficial effect.

In terms of registration of prohibited firearms, which include pistols as well as certain firearms based simply on looks as well as restricted firearms, which I believe they are talking about, prohibited firearms require a 12(6) licence, which few people have, but based on looks and barrel length, a lot of the firearms that are included in the restricted category were probably put in there simply based on looks so there would probably be no effect if you were to unlicence those.

Registration of those came into effect in 1977 partly, and then in 1991. As my study shows, there were no beneficial effects associated with that legislation.

The Chair: Senator, as you predicted, we will have to move along.

Senator Chaput: It is a supplementary question to Senator Fraser's question.

What is the scientific definition of beneficial effects? Seeing that what you are saying is based on science, what is the scientific definition?

Dr. Langmann: In medical science, economic science and socio-economic science, you choose a statistical value where something would be found to

be 95 per cent of the time effective, or different from what else would have occurred. That benchmark is generally accepted.

In my study, the values of statistical difference were even better than that, to put it in layman's terms. That is what it is based on.

Senator Chaput: Different being what?

Dr. Langmann: You can apply it to something like the use of a drug. Does Aspirin have a beneficial effect in preventing heart disease?

Senator Chaput: For this registry here, the difference is what, if you are saying that there was no significant beneficial effect?

Dr. Langmann: The P value is less than .05. That is what it means. If you want me to go into more detail, I can.

Senator Chaput: That is okay. Whether I understand it or not is another thing.

Dr. Langmann: It is peer-reviewed, so scientists understand.

Senator Lang: I think it is important for the record. We have had evidence today and I believe a number of times before where the question of suicide has come up. I appreciate you doing the work you have done. I do not think I fundamentally understand how you got to where you got, but it is interesting to see the interest that you have taken, and this has been peer reviewed obviously from what you have indicated very rigidly along the guidelines that are established by the science community. I think that is important to point out.

I would like you to expand more on your figure 7. Suicide by firearm rate per 100,000, it shows a very marked decline, significantly. It coordinates with some other information entitled "gun control advocates play disingenuous game with suicide stats," the fact that the suicide rate has been reduced and the registry really is not a factor in respect of that.

Can you expand on that? It would help clarify it for all members here before we make a decision.

Dr. Langmann: If you look at the graph, I have tried to make it simple so that people can understand.

You see suicide rate declining. Then the year 1999 is indicated by a straight line going up. Then you see after that firearm suicide declining, in less of a manner. You do not see a big step shift of the decline either. If you did see a shift or if you did see a significant trend or increase in the decline afterward, that would suggest that the firearms long-gun registry has had an effect in preventing suicide as it increases the rate of decline of suicide.

Obviously, a statistical analysis is done. This is just a depiction of that on a graph.

The interesting thing is that in 1991, SSRIs, which are antidepressant medications, were introduced in both Canada and the United States. We saw, in the United States as well, a marked decline in suicide especially by teenagers, not associated with any legislation that I am aware of at that time as well, which matches what we are seeing in Canada in terms of firearm suicide.

As well, you see a shift and that is called the substitution effect, where people choose another method to kill themselves. In particular, that is hanging in Canada and the United States. It has been shown in several studies that firearms suicide is about 83 or 84 per cent effective at ending a life and hanging is about 82 per cent effective at ending a life. They are pretty significant. Obviously we cannot ban rope.

There have been a large number of studies, which are covered by the meta-analyses that I talked about.

In Canada, as well, I would like to read one by Dr. Caron done for Canada's highest suicide area, the Abitibi area in the Northern Quebec on the Indian reservation. They looked at the rate of suicide by firearms after Bill C-17 when background checks came into effect. They found that, while the rate of gun ownership dropped and the rate of suicide by firearm dropped, the overall rate of suicide increased by about 11 per cent, mostly by hanging and by other forms, such as poisoning.

What we are really concerned about is whether any of our legislation has any effect on the overall suicide rate. It will have an effect, as has been demonstrated, on firearm suicide but does it cause people to hurt

themselves less? The peer analysis appears to be that there is a significant substitution effect. That is what I am concerned about mostly, because that is what I see.

I do not have anywhere to send people and that is a big problem.

Senator Lang: Just for the record, Mr. Chair, what Dr. Langmann has just basically stated here is what this other information I have here that basically says that, while suicide has stayed consistent, the method of suicide has changed.

Dr. Langmann: We are not sure why that method has changed.

Senator Lang: I want to follow up with the other witnesses on another area. I think it is important because we are talking about a registry for which we are getting a lot of evidence and testimony as being inaccurate. The majority of frontline law enforcement officers do not support the long-gun registry because they feel that the information, in good part, is erroneous and puts them in a situation of false security.

I want to direct Dr. Trépanier to the area of licensing itself. You are very knowledgeable on the legislation. I wonder what your thoughts are in view of the fact that licensing of the individual is staying in place — the requirement to apply for a licence, the requirement to have to take the test for the licence, the requirement to have references, the requirement to have 80 per cent plus for the purposes of passing the exam. There are a number of steps that are rigorous and rigid to ensure that those who have a firearm licence meet the qualifications. I cannot forget and I impress upon everyone that you need to have not only the reference checks by the police but you also need to have references from the community to prove you are a bona fide applicant for such a licence.

Do you feel that licensing is working, and is working as a screen for those individuals who should not be getting a licence — that this is in place and it is working to some degree? Perhaps you could tell us something on that.

[Translation]

Dr. Trépanier: In fact, I believe that what is important and the message we want to transmit today is that our mandate as public health directors is to look at the issue from a public, not an individual standpoint, and in that

respect, we have a very specific mandate that has been conferred on us by law and that is to protect public health. In that respect, if we want to carry out our mandate, we have to ensure that we conduct a thorough analysis of the problem in order to find solutions that can improve and protect public health. And to that end, of course, there is no single measure that can do that, if we are talking about suicide prevention, but rather a set of measures directed at individuals, but also environments.

When we talk about acting on environments, we are not just talking about the physical environment, but also about the legislative environment, and thus the entire set of acts and regulations that a society adopts in order to live together in harmony, and, in that respect, we consider it fair to regulate a number of consumer goods and to ensure that they are used in the fairest way possible.

Earlier I cited driving as an example. That is an example very similar to that of firearms to the extent that we require drivers to have registration and a licence. In addition, when we talk about all the measures concerning driving, we also mean taking courses and several other measures.

Of course, in the case of a firearm, as is the case of a motor vehicle, we understand that the vast majority of users will use those items legally and diligently, apart from the intrinsically dangerous nature of that consumer good, just as a car can become a weapon in itself through the simple laws of physics. So in that respect, we consider it entirely reasonable to require weapons control similar to that required for motor vehicles.

Claude Bégin, Planning Officer, Programs and Research, Directeurs de santé publique du Québec (Lanaudière): In fact, legislation subsequent to a registry reinforces measures put forward such as licences and registration, for example. When the licensing and motor vehicle registration system were established in Canada, it took years to develop it. I cannot tell you how much that cost, but there were costs to governments, even Transport Canada, associated with registering vehicles imported or sold here.

Over the years, that registry has been improved along with the quality of the information. The same is true of the firearms registry. We have heard statements about the quality of the information from the registry. Without denying that fact, however, it is possible for public and government organizations to improve the data quality system. We are doing it in other

fields, such as public health and safety. We can draw the same parallel with cars as well and the legislation that subsequently flows from those registries. A registry cannot just accumulate information on licence holders, weapons or vehicles, it also enables people who engage in research or, like us, public health prevention, to look at those files, to extract data and to draw comparisons in order to determine whether groups of individuals are more affected by that product, for example, motor vehicles, and to conduct other research that will subsequently enable us to propose policies and programs that will lead to other legislation. For cars, for example, we have had impaired driving, dangerous driving, speeding, vehicle safety, our entire road system. A number of acts have been put forward to ensure that we ultimately have a road system.

[English]

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt but if you can tighten it up, we have a number of others that wish to ask questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Bégin: I will stop for the moment.

[English]

The Chair: Again, colleagues, we must tighten questions and responses. I realize there is a lot to be said and we want to hear from you but we must keep it as concise as possible.

[Translation]

Senator Hervieux-Payette: First, I want to congratulate the 16 health directors. You have conducted excellent research with references to experts. With whom did you prepare this document? Was it within your office or did you associate with researchers in order to prepare this document?

Dr. Trépanier: Well, of course, we referred to research that had been conducted mainly by the Institut national de santé publique, which did that as part of a brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on a previous bill, Bill C-391.

The Institut national de santé publique is an agency that advises Quebec's health minister and the public health directors. So it is an independent agency which, in turn, does business with a number of researchers. One of them, Étienne Blais, testified before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security last fall. That is part of the information we have at our disposal. We therefore based our brief mainly on that information and we worked with Mr. Bégin to write it.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: It really gives us the source, that is to say that it is not a personal opinion, but the opinion of a well-established institution in Quebec.

I would like to read a brief note from which we can deduce the entire issue of statistics. A woman, Barbara Weil, of the Suicide Prevention Initiative in Switzerland, is convinced that restricting access to firearms would help reduce the number of suicides. She says:

We are able to prove that the suicide rates of countries with stricter legislation, Finland and Great Britain, have changed considerably.

Earlier this afternoon, I cited the number of firearms circulating in the United States and in Switzerland. In both cases, it is much higher than in other countries, and there appears to be a correlation between suicide rates, the rate of use to commit murders and the availability or liberalization of firearms in a country.

Does this issue of knowing that when you liberalize and there is no longer any control — because there is virtually no control — jeopardize public health?

Mr. Bégin: It probably does. And, in 2010, the Institut national de santé publique published a study on suicide in Quebec in the journal *Injury Prevention*, which is quite well recognized in its field, and it concluded that the suicide rate among young men was closely related to the introduction of Bill C-17. It provided an important note stating that it had taken some time for firearms legislation to have an effect in Canada. You know as well as I do that it took a number of years for all the measures of that act, based on Bill C-17 and Bill C-68, to really take effect.

For example, the average rate of suicide by hanging among Quebec men also declined starting in the 2000s. No substitution effect was observed

starting in the 2000s along with the decline in the rate of suicide by firearms in Quebec.

[*English*]

Dr. Langmann: First, that study, as mentioned, did not show any effect at Bill C-19. That is incorrect.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: What study?

Dr. Langmann: It showed an effect in 1995, and that was the legislation Bill C-68.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: We do not know what you are talking about.

The Chair: I think the senator was asking which study. You referred to a study.

Dr. Langmann: The Gagne study that was on the general prevention of violence.

The other point I would like to make is that there is no inclusion of any other dependent variables in that study. In other words, they did not look at income, poverty rate or the invention of new treatments such as SSRIs, which have had a significant impact in treating suicide and also in terms of affecting impulsivity with regard to people who are thinking about committing suicide, and preventing that.

Also, many other studies have shown that while if you limit the number of firearms, it does reduce suicide by firearms, but there is a significant substitution effect. There are several in Canada. Caron et. al. in 2008, and Carrington and Moyer in 1994, also showed that there is no correlation between the number of firearms and firearm suicide rates in Canadian provinces. In other words, provinces with high firearms ownership did not have an increase in overall suicide rates.

I would also like to point out another study done by Sloan et. al. in 1990, which compared Seattle and Vancouver. Seattle has a higher firearm ownership rate. Their gun laws are much more progressive than they are in British Columbia in terms of people being allowed to own firearms. They showed that while there was a greater rate of suicide by firearm in Seattle,

the overall suicide rate between the two cities was equal. This compares two rather equivalent cities in Canada and the United States that I am well familiar with.

It is important to look at large meta-analyses done that look at all studies. The CDC and the National Academy of Science does that, and it is peer reviewed.

I would also like to address the 250 number that my colleagues here have presented, which I have never seen published in any peer-reviewed journal. I would like to know how they came up with those figures.

They are suggesting there are 250 fewer suicides every year since the introduction in 1998 of the long-gun registry and the PAL. I will read out the numbers so we can look at that. This is Statistics Canada data. In 1996, the reduction in suicide was by 33, so 33 fewer suicides; in 1997 there were 65 fewer suicides; in 1998 there were zero fewer suicides; in 1999 there were 11 fewer suicides; in 2000 there were 122 fewer suicides, but it also correlates with 209 fewer suicides by other methods in that year. I am not sure why; there must have been something going on at that point of time.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Mr. Chair, if they want to have a debate about their statistics, we have several other studies. Are we going to go through each study? I think I have enough.

The Chair: Fair enough. I thought it was in response to an issue you raised. If you have heard enough, that is fine. Thank you.

We have four senators left on first round.

[Translation]

Senator Boisvenu: Thank you very much for your briefs. This is very instructive and interesting because we are moving a little outside strictly subjective debate and we are getting figures that give us a slightly more objective view of the registry.

In my former life, I worked for the Government of Quebec, in economic and social development. We went through three major economic crises: 1982 to 1983, 1988 and 1993 to 1995. When I look at the suicide curve in Quebec, I see it rose in 1983, 1988 and 1993. Based on your experience as a

physician, can the economic situation have a greater impact on the number of suicides among men, as, for example, when a father goes 24 or 30 months without work, then the fact that they have a hunting weapon in the home?

Dr. Trépanier: You are asking me whether that can have a greater impact? I won't say whether that can have a greater impact. However, does it have an impact? For the major economic cycles and suicide rates observed, there is very definitely an impact. There is even an excellent correlation between the two, which however does not mean that measures designed to reduce suicide, including measures to restrict access to means, are not effective.

As I mentioned in my speech, no measure alone can claim to eliminate suicide, and suicide is indeed a major public health problem linked to economic cycles. If we take measures to counter suicide, we must therefore have a significant range. We of course must have measures addressing the individual, but also measures aimed at the environment. We very definitely have to act by providing better treatment and better screening for mental illnesses. However, we have to ensure that people are not tempted to use means in order to act out. Based on the figures at our disposal, the registry has made a contribution to that.

Senator Boisvenu: That is obvious.

[English]

The Chair: I know that nothing fits specifically into a neat box in all of this, but it is Bill C-19 what we are talking about.

[Translation]

Senator Boisvenu: We have received two documents, one a summary and the other an elaborate document, and it was signed by a lot of scientists, including Dr. Réal Lacombe, with whom I did my scientific studies.

You are saying that there is a direct link between the firearms registry and the decline in homicides and suicides. How can such a direct connection be made between the registry and the decline in homicides and suicides when, during the same period, from 1979 to 1995, when the registry was

not in existence, homicides and suicides declined at a faster rate than when the registry had been in existence for 15 years?

As a scientist, I am trying to understand what your analysis is based on. Is it based strictly on statistics from Statistics Canada, or is it a scientific study conducted in a lab by independent people?

Dr. Trépanier: Our understanding is that the suicide trend has been on the decline for many years, even a few decades. It is obviously not easy to determine the marginal effect of a measure, even more so of an act, when the trend is downward.

However, we have to have a methodology that enables us to demonstrate this and we have to measure it at the right time. It is definitely not easy to develop that kind of methodology. Moreover, it took a number of years before we had data on the impact of legislation since 1977, and the work done by the Institut de santé publique and Étienne Blais has enabled us to shed light on the issue for the first time.

I do not know whether my colleague has something to add on the more accurate data on the phenomenon.

Mr. Bégin: I would simply like to say that there has been a trend since the 1970s. It does not undermine the validity of the results to observe that there has been a declining trend in the number of deaths.

That is a general trend in suicides and the same is true for homicides. There is a general trend in Canada, but, through the methods they have used, our colleagues have determined that, starting with the implementation of Bill C- 68, effects have really been observed, having regard to certain variables related to age, alcohol consumption and the provinces, because that study was based on all the Canadian provinces as a whole. So this data is by province and cumulative for Canada as a whole.

Dr. Trépanier: Incidentally, we observed the same trends in road deaths, a sharp decline since the 1970s. That does not mean that the measures put in place since then have had no impact on overall road deaths. On the contrary, we are still seeing a reduction that is definitely due to this entire set of measures. It is not one measure in itself, but rather the entire environment of legislative measures and other preventive measures put in place.

[English]

Senator Jaffer: I have a question for you, Dr. Trépanier. I apologize; I do not know Quebec as well as I should. When you say that you are from Health Quebec, is that the Department of Health like we have Health Canada? In British Columbia, we have the Department of Health. Is that what it is?

[Translation]

Dr. Trépanier: Health is a provincial jurisdiction. In the area of public health, there is the Public Health Agency of Canada, which spearheads all the activities. In Quebec, there is the health department, and within the health department, there is the public health branch. However, the regional public health authorities also have mandates within the health agencies.

[English]

Senator Jaffer: The point I want to make is that you had a pretty big sample when you were doing your research; is that not correct?

[Translation]

Dr. Trépanier: We did not do the research ourselves; it was done by a researcher, Étienne Blais, with the assistance of the Institut national de santé publique. The data used — once again, these are technical terms that I do not want to go into, but an analysis was done by province, which yielded more observations than if we had looked at the data for Canada as a whole.

That, I believe, is the strong point of this study, but I did not conduct it, so I cannot tell you about it in detail, but we trust the institute's work.

[English]

Senator Jaffer: Sitting here listening to the three of you talk about the different research, what goes through my ears is what Ms. Silas said about being precautionary; take the precautions rather than the number of people that die. I would like your comment on that. To keep the gun registry is to be precautionar — to prevent death. It does not matter if it is one death or 100 deaths. It is to prevent death. Is that not what we are talking about?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Trépanier: You have to be able to look at this phenomenon in order to be able to assess the impact of the measure, but this is not the first time we have had scientific data that point in one direction, whereas certain studies may head in another direction. Of course, we cannot wait to get all the data before decisions are made; we have to act so as to protect public health.

In this case, we have data that I consider reliable and that show that the registry is effective. If the data are contradictory, I definitely do not think that is an indication that the registry should be abolished, but rather an indication that it should be maintained and that we should continue compiling the data that are provided to us through the registration of weapons so that we can better assess the phenomenon in order to determine whether we have recognized effectiveness. Is that for the entire population? Are there population subgroups that benefit from it to a greater degree?

It is essential to have the data; otherwise we are unable to state a view on the subject. Unfortunately, once it is abolished, it will be too late.

[*English*]

Dr. Langmann: I have a few brief comments. If I practiced medicine on a precautionary basis, I would admit every patient to the hospital and you guys would be bankrupt.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: No, that is not the same.

Dr. Langmann: We have to make decisions based on evidence. Every now and then, I send home a patient who dies. Based on the evidence, they should not have been admitted to the hospital; they pass away.

That is what we have to do here. We have to decide what is financially and safely beneficial. There are a lot of studies that show that the long-gun registry has had no effect. The Blais study only used two dependent variables; I used seven or eight, depending on which one I was looking at. If you read the footnotes of their study, you see most of them were taken out.

The Chair: Thank you, senator. We have two senators remaining. We are running over time, but it is the final panel, so they will have their opportunity.

Senator Runciman: I cannot help but respond to something Dr. Trépanier said: We need more time on this. It has been 17 years and over \$2 billion of taxpayers' money with no end in sight.

I want to congratulate Dr. Langmann. I guess CPAC could entitle this segment "Battle of the Docs." I appreciate the work you have done here with respect to the study. You are a bit of a voice in the wilderness in the medical community. We have people appearing before us and we have heard over the years with respect to suggestions of impacts here, but nothing to back it up in terms of significance the way you have looked at this issue. You are pricking some balloons — you can see that here tonight. People get upset when they see these facts before them.

I want to ask the other witnesses here if they are suggesting that they are disputing the findings and conclusions of the peer-reviewed study that Dr. Langmann has undertaken? Is that what you are telling us here today?

[Translation]

Dr. Trépanier: I am making no claim whatever to contradict the data of another study. I simply mentioned that the study we based our work on is reliable. The researcher is credible and his figures have also been published in journals. However, I do not intend to conduct an expert debate here.

I represent the Directeurs de la santé publique du Québec. Our mandate is to protect public health, and the registry's effectiveness in suicide prevention is one of the factors that we are bringing to your attention today.

We should not overlook the importance of having traceable data to enable us to continue to understand the phenomenon and to be able to make good decisions based on facts.

[English]

Senator Runciman: I have one quick question I would like to get your response to with regard to the World Health Organization, and this is the

most recent year available, 2011. It indicates that the United States has lower suicide rates, and this is by country, by year and sex. We all know that it has much looser gun controls, if you will, than Canada does. How do you explain something like that?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Trépanier: As I mentioned earlier, weapons control is one of the tools in our suicide prevention arsenal. However, it is not the only one and we cannot establish a correlation like that to see whether the registry is effective.

[*English*]

Senator Runciman: We are talking about gun laws here and the impact they have on suicide rates. Here we have, perhaps, the loosest gun control laws in the world, and they have lower suicide rates, so I think there is a correlation here. I do not think you can ignore that. You should not, anyway.

Mr. Bégin: Can I comment?

The Chair: I think it was directed toward Dr. Trépanier.

Do you wish to comment on that, doctor?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Trépanier: The idea is not to ignore it, but we could think that, if we did not have the registry here, that gap would be even greater. We are not denying that suicide is a public health problem; we admit that, and we believe that it has to be taken into account. That is why we are presenting it to you today as a major issue, to show that Bill C-19 goes far beyond crime.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will move to our last senator, and the last question of the day. It goes to Senator White.

Senator White: I will be brief. You left a commentary in the air, Dr. Trépanier, that our knowing the vehicle identification number on the car makes the driver safer and would actually reduce deaths.

I cannot make the correlation between knowing a vehicle identification number and knowing a serial number of a weapon. It is about the driver as it is about the person that has the weapon. It is about the regulations around training, testing and psychological well-being and all of those things in both cases. However, knowing the VIN number does not reduce the number of accidents. In fact, the VIN number is collected for sales tax, insurance purposes and many other things but not to make the driver a safer driver. I guess I have to put this in the form of a question. I guess you would agree that it was not your intent to suggest that knowing the VIN number makes for safer drivers, Dr. Trépanier?

[Translation]

Dr. Trépanier: What we said earlier is that we can draw a parallel between two consumer goods which are definitely not ordinary consumer goods, firearms and motor vehicles, which are subject to a legislative framework.

In this case, once again, registering a car and having a driver's licence make the drivers accountable, and the aim is the same with regard to the registration of firearms and possession of a firearms licence. These create accountability.

We are also sending a message to the community as a whole, that this is not an ordinary consumer good and that we are concerned about public safety and the impact that it can have on public health. As a result of all that, we have a safer environment, people will abide by the law and all that will have an effect on health.

[English]

The Chair: Colleagues, that concludes our time with this panel.

As we have heard from many of our witnesses, and I think it was no more clearly illustrated than by the three excellent witnesses before us on this panel that there are different thoughts and viewpoints, and thoughts that have been well considered, but people do have different views of it. That is exactly why we go through this process, so that at the end of it, we have considered everything that we believe is relevant.

You have been extremely helpful to us in a very learned way, all three of you. We deeply appreciate the time and detailed attention you have given us. Thank you so much.

Colleagues, we will adjourn until 9:30 tomorrow morning.

(The committee adjourned.)