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Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to debate Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

Many of my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House have spoken on this topic. I am glad there has been such robust debate happening over this important issue. In fact, we know this is a topic that evokes strong emotions in the hearts and minds of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. For my part, it was certainly an issue that I heard a great deal about as I went door to door during the most recent election campaign. I am very glad, therefore, to have the opportunity to speak about it today. This is a very important issue in my riding in British Columbia, where many farmers and hunters live.

As members know, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to deliver on our law and order agenda. We have been clear that we will pursue tough on crime measures that work and that protect law-abiding Canadian families.

We were also clear, completely clear, about our government's position on ending the failed long gun registry. For many years now, we have said that we disagree with it on principle, that it is wasteful and ineffective, and that there is no evidence that it prevents crime or protects front-line police officers.

Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill, is the manifestation of an ongoing promise on which, as Conservatives, we have been working to deliver for many years now. We have been working to end the registry because it simply is not working. For example, the registry is quite incomplete and the information is inaccurate. We have heard from many front-line police officers who are simply not confident in this information. This means that as a tool, it could do more harm than good.

In addition to being incomplete and inaccurate, we do not have any statistical evidence that the long gun registry has made a difference to crime rates. We hear from some hon. members that there is a decline in the crime rate as a result of the long gun registry. In fact, when we look at the numbers, the long-term trend in firearm-related homicide has nothing to do with the long gun registry. In fact, it has been in steady decline since the 1970s.

In addition, the overall rate of firearm-related violent crime was driven primarily by the use of handguns. Long guns do not factor heavily into crimes. In the instances where they do, there is absolutely no evidence that the registration of a long gun as part of the registry program has any impact on combatting crime.

In terms of how police officers use the data, for too long, all Canadians were led to believe that the long gun registry would help make us safer. We were told that it is a tool our police depend upon. This is simply not accurate. For example, we have heard numbers quoted that police use the long gun registry up to 11,000 times a day. The reality is that when a police officer accesses the Canadian Police Information Centre, or CPIC, for any reason, including a simple address check, an automatic hit to the registry is generated. This hit will always be generated whether the information from it is desired or not.

In addition, the long gun registry does not enhance public safety because it does not put the focus on stopping real crime. The emphasis is not placed on stopping criminals from using firearms to commit crimes. In fact, the emphasis is placed on ensuring we have a list of law-abiding long gun owners. This does not prevent criminals from obtaining firearms.

In Canada a person should not be deemed a criminal if he or she owns a long gun. Bill C-19 would end this unfortunate episode of penalizing law-abiding hunters and farmers, such as those I have come to know in my riding, and would help us continue our government's focus on action that would actually help to prevent crime.

On that note, let me take a moment to review what Bill C-19 would actually do, as we have seen a lot of hysteria from the members of the opposition which does not accurately reflect what this legislation would accomplish.

First, the ending the long gun registry bill would do just what it says it would do. It would end the failed long gun registry.

(1200)

In ending the registry, the bill would also make provisions for the destruction of the records that were collected as part of the long gun registry. That means the names and information collected from law-abiding long gun owners would not be shared, stored or sealed. The information would be destroyed and would not be held in the event that a new registry or a renewed registry could be created at any time, either soon or years down the road.

We have certainly heard a great deal from the opposition on this issue. Hon. members want to know why we will not share this information with the provinces. As the Minister of Public Safety quite rightly pointed out, we made a commitment to Canadians that we would scrap the long gun registry. This means that in destroying the registry, we would destroy the data as well. Ending the registry but then sharing the data would be akin to selling the farm but keeping the land. We will fulfill the promise that we made and that includes doing the right thing and ensuring that no other government could use the information to resurrect the failed long gun registry.

I also want to note, as several of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House have noted as well, that Bill C-19 would not alter existing registration rules for restricted and prohibited firearms. The same rules and regulations would apply concerning handguns, semi-automatic or any other currently restricted and prohibited firearms. The application for ownership of these types of firearms is much more vigorous, even more so for those which are prohibited. Police would still have access to all of this information to ensure they know who owns a handgun or a semi-automatic firearm, as well as where they live. Police would still have access to the licensing data of any type of firearm should this bill pass.

However, Bill C-19 would finally put an end to an expensive bureaucracy that criminalizes the honest, that does nothing to deter those who commit gun crime, and that simply does not do what it was supposed to do.

I have heard from countless Canadians especially in my riding of Delta—Richmond East that the long gun registry is simply not worth it. It has always been the focus of this government to take concrete action for the safety of Canadians. That is always uppermost in our minds. We have a proven record of delivering measures that not only crack down on criminals but also protect victims and give law enforcement the tools it needs to get its very important job done.

From our Tackling Violent Crime Act in 2006, which created longer mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and drive-by shootings, to delivering initiatives that help prevent crime before it happens, such as the youth gang prevention fund, this government is serious about tackling gun crime the right way.

A government's job is to enact policy that works. As we stand here today, for far too long it has been clear that the long gun registry does not work. It is time to end this registry once and for all.

(1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, if I understood correctly, if someone buys or is in possession of a restricted weapon, a collector's gun, a semi-automatic weapon, etc., a licence is required. But if someone wants to buy a shotgun or a long gun, a hunting rifle, no licence is required. Is that correct? Have I understood correctly?

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:

Mr. Speaker, no, that is not correct. There are still licensing provisions. We are not tampering with those. What we are changing and what we are committed to doing is to end the long gun registry and the data associated with it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I just need to make a comment on the last question from the other side. A common mistake that people make is they confuse licensing with the registry.

I want to point out that 92% of front-line officers had no use for the gun registry. That is from a survey which was done only a couple of years ago. I often hear people on the other side say that the police support this. That is not true.

My main comment is in regard to the quotation from the other side that somehow all these people who represent victim groups support the registry. In conversation with them, they do not understand that the registry is simply a piece of paper lying beside a gun. It has no connection to preventing crime from occurring.

I ask the member, if we had used that billion dollars or the tens of millions of dollars that are now being spent on the registry to target the root causes of crime and violence in our society, would that be a better and more effective use of our resources?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:

Mr. Speaker, our approach to crime in Canada has always been holistic. We do look at crime prevention in all aspects. As I mentioned in my speech, we have a youth crime prevention fund and other initiatives.

There are many areas in which this money could have been put to better use to deal with victims of crime, to help those who perhaps at an early age get involved in crime and to prevent them from becoming more serious criminals. There are so many ways this money could have been better spent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.

Past government bills regarding the elimination of the gun registry required owners who wished to sell their guns or give them away to ensure that the new owner actually held a hunting or owner's licence. But this bill does not contain a similar measure.

How can the government be sure that weapons will be transferred solely to people who possess a valid licence?

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:

Mr. Speaker, I am not entirely sure I understood my colleague's question. What I can say is that we made a commitment, our commitment was clear, and we are following through on that commitment.

In terms of being sure as to what weapons may be part of this, there is not going to be a registry, and whether a gun was part of that will no longer be relevant. The licensing portions are still in place. There are still checks and balances. This is very targeted legislation, thoroughly thought out. It will go a long way toward decriminalizing law-abiding Canadians and making sure we go after those who hurt law-abiding Canadians.

(1210)