

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Ending the Long-gun Registry Act

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-19, an act to eliminate the long gun registry in Canada. Under Canadian federal law, the registry will cease to exist potentially after this week, that is, after the Senate has had its chance to deal with it, but it is pretty clear now that the Senate will deal with it in a very prompt fashion.

I represent a riding where firearms are very important, where firearms for many people represent a necessity for subsistence living, where firearms represent a cultural way of life, where firearms are used extensively and 99.9% of the time for the correct purposes, when hunting, trapping and carrying on an outdoor lifestyle.

When the gun registry was introduced years ago, there was very strong opposition to it, but there was strong opposition as well to the licensing provisions, to the educational provisions and to the safe storage provisions. There was a general feeling that gun owners, people who use their guns for legitimate purposes, were being hard done by. I agreed with that.

I agreed with the Fort McPherson elder who told me he did not want to become a criminal because he was continuing to do what he had done before. I agreed with that. We should not make criminals in Canada out of respectable citizens. We should do everything we can to avoid giving criminal records to Canadians for issues that are not that important, for issues that may be bureaucratic. For example, people may simply be unable to register a gun, unable to store it properly, all the different issues that surround the use of any kind of implement.

I was always in favour of getting the criminal charges out of the long gun registry. However, even in 2000 I said there is a value to any registry, whether we register dogs or cars or some other possession. Whatever we register has a value to the person registering it. That person has security in that his or her possession is filed in an appropriate fashion with an authority that can direct attention to that particular instrument, whether it be a car, a dog or a gun, whether it has been mislaid, has been stolen, or has been used by someone else in an inappropriate fashion. A registry is a useful tool for those people who want security with their possessions.

Over the last four months since my constituents have heard the argument about the data, the gun owners are starting to wake up to the fact that there is a reason they want their guns registered. There is a reason that a law-abiding citizen would like to know that his gun is identified in a legal registry, so that if it is stolen, if it is misplaced, if it is mishandled by someone else, that gun will not be put under his name, and that gun will be recognized for what it is. If that gun is sold to someone else, the legal gun owner has a way of tracking that record. People are coming to me with that issue.

I asked the government in June what it would do with the data. When the Conservatives proposed to take long guns out of the criminal registry, which is exactly what the government is doing, I asked what the government would do with the data it has collected which people have invested in giving to the government? That is what people do when they register their implements. They invest their time, their effort and their thoughts in putting it into a registry. What will the government provide for those people who want a registry?

Perhaps it will fall into the hands of the provinces, territories, municipalities, whatever government agency decides to provide a registry for guns. That makes sense. We have a great example of that. Quebec has said it wants to provide a registry and under the law there would be no criminality with a registry. There cannot be. The Criminal Code is driven by the federal government, this Parliament, not the Quebec legislature.

When the Quebec government establishes a registry in which its citizens can partake, it will have the opportunity to do what it wants with it. That is the way of this land. That is the way the law works. That is the way we take care of things in this land. Cars are registered with the provinces. Dogs are registered with municipalities. We have a process of registration at the provincial and territorial level. Since 2000 I have been an advocate of a provincial registry because there are more purposes to a registry than establishing criminality. There are many more purposes to a registry than that.

Safe storage is still covered under the existing Criminal Code. It will still be a criminal offence if people do not store their guns safely.

However, I am having trouble establishing what is considered ownership within the existing Criminal Code once the registry is removed. How do we determine what ownership is when we have removed the legal registry of guns? How do we determine which gun belongs to which person, and which person did not store the gun properly and should have a criminal record? If someone says that it is not his or her gun, will we say that because the gun is in that person's home, then that person must own the gun? Is that the way it is going to be? Did the Conservative government do any work on this legislation?

When the Conservatives started talking about the data, it was ministers of the government who said the information could not be shared because it would be against the Privacy Act. Does it go against the Privacy Act? Is that what the Privacy Commissioner said? The Privacy Commissioner said no and all of a sudden the government changed its tune and said now that it is ineffective, inefficient, does not work, is not correct and was not made up right. That is the direction the government took.

The government does not do legislation very well when it does not have the answers to start with. It is terrible in creating legislation. The government is not fit to legislate and that is the case with this bill. It has not looked at the issues. There is no document that shows how the Criminal Code will interact with other elements when the registry is removed. I ask government members to show me a document or any information that has been shared with members of Parliament on that issue.

I supported the bill introduced by the member for Portage—Lisgar. It was a blunt instrument but it was what my constituents wanted and it was not in the shape that this bill is in. This bill is a mess. The government has not done a good job with it. It is reacting. It is not doing it correctly. It has left out many important elements, which we have pointed out by way of many amendments and the government has chosen not to listen. This is a government that does not listen. It does not want to do things right. It does not want to do its homework. It is a government that acts emotionally and without regard for the due process of legislation. The government is not getting any more approbation from me on its legislation.