

*Government Orders*

Taxpayers want to know how much programs are costing and specifically who is paying for them.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, I intend to introduce a private member's bill early this spring, the subject of which will be a taxpayers' bill of rights. I note that if this legislation was in place, the current bill would have some additional and much needed information attached to it. Specifically the program would be costed fully during its implementation stage. It would detail the specific costs and would allocate them to the years during implementation. It would also show the anticipated revenues from registration charges to gun owners. Finally, the Auditor General would have certified the costing methods used as being reasonable.

The taxpayer is tired of discovering years after the implementation period of the waste of their money. I would like to quote from the Auditor General's report of 1993 concerning the previous gun registration system that is only a couple of years old: "We found several weaknesses in the methodology, which significantly reduce the extent to which the government, members of Parliament and the Canadian public can rely on the evaluation to be assured that the gun control program is effective".

I am afraid we are about to repeat the errors of the past. I note it has been stated that the proposed new registration system may cost \$85 million. However, there is great confusion. The current registration system for handguns costs \$60 million per year and includes only 560,000 handguns. There are a minimum of five to six million long guns in Canada.

I have a study here by Professor Gary Mauser at Simon Fraser University that states it could cost \$82 per firearm, \$496 million, or half a billion dollars. It has been suggested the first year be free to encourage registration. However the taxpayer knows that nothing is free. In studying budget projections, I can see no allocation of funding in the Department of Justice's budget for this program. We need a better fix on how much this program is going to cost.

• (1735)

The taxpayer has the right to know this now. Clearly we can no longer afford the luxury of introducing programs for which we do not know the cost. The taxpayer wants to see better fiscal responsibility and in some ways we have done that in the recent budget.

This leads me to the second part of my analysis, which is the study of the benefits of the system. Benefits would have to be clear and obvious. They would have to promote the common good. They would have to demonstrate that there was clear correlation between registration and the intended results.

At this point I found gun owners generally reasoned people. They have tried to understand why the registration system is thought to be needed and so important today. I would further like to point out that a democratic society is judged not on how it treats its majorities but rather how it treats its minorities.

It is clear to me that the opinions of the majority who do not know the facts are of questionable validity. Most surveys would indicate that the average person is more concerned about crime control than gun registration.

I further note that both gun owners and taxpayers generally are a minority in this debate. It is clear to me that without convincing a sizeable portion of their numbers of the effectiveness and affordability, the registration system will fail.

Here are the stated goals as I understand them of the registration system: that it will allow firearms removal from domestic violence situations; that it will afford law enforcement agents better information when approaching a household for investigation purposes; that it will lead to safer storage practices.

My time today will not let me deal with these issues at length, however the result is that it is totally unclear whether some of these objectives are not already available in the current law and are not being enforced or whether the objectives can be met at all with the registration system for long guns.

I can find no clear documentary evidence from the justice department that makes this case. If I cannot make this leap of faith, neither can long gun owners. This is the real danger of the legislation, that we are placing a sizeable group of people in the category of believing that the system is unwarranted. They see the imposition of fees as an unwarranted tax, the proceeds of which will be wasted on further bureaucracy with no tangible results.

I spoke earlier about the concerns of taxpayers. Needless to say gun owners are taxpayers. I said that they wanted to revisit their contract with government. Do we have examples of where people believe taxing systems exist without consent and how they have reacted? We have only to look at the dreaded goods and services tax, clearly a tax that lacked common consent.

A recent study by the accounting firm Peat Marwick concluded that over 50 per cent of taxpayers would avoid paying this tax if given the opportunity. Police officers in my riding have avoided giving minor speeding tickets because they believe that the three-price increase in one year is just an unwarranted form of taxation on the working class.

The conclusion is that we are developing a system of justice in Canada where people pick and choose the laws they are governed by. This is mainly because they do not feel that they consented to them in the first place.