

Private Members' Business

The information is currently available from people who sell firearms and that data could be reported to a central source, also with the requirement that all sales, losses or theft be reported to that same source.

By collecting this data from gun sellers on a regular basis, such a system would minimize the administrative burden and the inconvenience to firearms owners. It could be submitted to local, provincial or federal authorities and the cost would be associated with organizing and storing the data.

Data base technology would allow records to be accessed by owner name even if they were entered by seller, and with scanning equipment can be done very efficiently and inexpensively. This would allow the registration of all guns when they were purchased from a dealer or if they were sold by an individual to another person. It would be a relatively efficient way to begin firearms registration.

The registration of firearms is supported by quite a number of groups which include the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. It would allow police to track the source—

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the minister could be asked to leave the House as he is talking extremely loudly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The hon. minister, please, the hon. member cannot speak over the sound of your voice.

Ms. Greene: Thank you. The registration of firearms would allow police to track the source of lost or stolen firearms, as well as those used in the commission of a crime. This would mean that illegal traffic would be more difficult and it would encourage legitimate owners to respect safe storage guidelines.

It would allow the more effective enforcement of prohibition orders. It would allow police to be forewarned of the possible presence of a gun while investigating potentially violent situations such as domestic disputes. It would allow the confiscation of firearms during potentially dangerous domestic disputes.

A single national registry for all firearms would give us very useful data concerning the actual numbers and uses of firearms in this country and about the people who possess them. At the present time estimates are derived through various surveys but we really do not know how many guns are out there.

Recent studies demonstrate a decline in the use of firearms in violent crime in general, including homicides, but those same studies show that almost half the firearm assaults and homicide victims faced assailants armed with rifles or shotguns. The high proportion of long guns, ordinarily unregistered, used in those crimes suggests the need to further restrict their use and availability. If the decline in the use of firearms in violent crimes is even partially attributable to the 1977 legislation, it seems logical to expect that additional restrictions could further their illegitimate use.

• (1715)

If one expects that registration of hand-guns as restricted weapons has kept their numbers low, similar requirements for all weapons should restrict their numbers as well. The rationale that lowering levels of gun ownership reduces their availability and therefore use in violent crimes has found favour in hand-gun control. I believe the same argument would apply to other kinds of firearms.

An Angus Reid survey revealed that firearms in 50 per cent of households surveyed had not been used in the previous year. If gun ownership were made more inconvenient through registration requirements, a great many people might not bother to keep them at home.

Considering the large numbers of weapons in private households in Canada, the fact that firearm homicides occur should come as no surprise. Since less than one-quarter of 1988 homicides suspects were strangers to their victims, and about one-third of the victims and suspects were domestically related, fewer firearms in Canadian households could reduce their availability for use in those types of crimes.

Simply requiring registration of all firearms could reduce the numbers available. Requiring some indication or proof of intended use, like hunting, could reduce these numbers even further.