

Government Orders

• (1605)

Although similar to Seattle in many ways, Vancouver has adopted a much more restrictive approach to the regulation of handguns. During the study period, it is quite relevant that both cities had similar rates of burglary and robbery.

In Seattle, the annual rate of assault was modestly higher than that in Vancouver. However, the rate of assaults involving firearms was seven times higher in Seattle than in Vancouver. That sends a very good message. Despite similar overall rates of assault the relative risk of death from homicide was significantly higher in Seattle than in Vancouver. Virtually all of this excess risk was explained by a 4.8 fold higher risk of being murdered with a gun in Seattle as compared with Vancouver. That is very revealing.

The conclusion of this study was that restricting access to handguns will reduce the rate of homicide in a community. That is the basic premise I started from. It is logical that if we have more guns on the street, we will have more crime. If we have fewer guns on the street, it is logical that we will have less crime.

That is a very simple way to look at it. Unfortunately the members of the Reform Party still do not see that. It is very simple. The average person should understand that. If we let people buy a gun whenever they want with no restrictions or rules, we will have higher crime. If we restrict firearms, we will reduce the crime.

Another example is Indianapolis. Its police wanted to stop vehicles to have a real, active approach on gun control, like our drinking program. They said they would stop cars in a certain area where they had problems; they would search cars, looking for guns. They set up a proactive approach to this.

The police actively sought out and confiscated illegal firearms in high crime neighbourhoods. The result was that gun related crimes were reduced by almost 50 per cent in the relevant areas. Homicides and drive-by shootings also went down significantly. This is a very good message.

Even with this information, the Americans have been unable to put forward stricter gun controls because of the national riflemen's lobby association. Strangely enough, we hear members of the Reform Party talking about lobby groups. They say their favourite subject is lobby groups and how they are against lobbyists and lobby groups. However, when the lobby groups support their position, they are holding hands. They do not mind going to bed with the lobby groups that support their position, as they have done with the gun lobby group.

We always get the argument that we should punish those people who cause the crime. Here is another statistic that will interest people. Eighty per cent of all homicides in Canada occur between people who know each other. Most homicides occur as a result of assaults during arguments or altercations. A small

minority occur during the commission of a robbery or other felony.

If there are more guns in the homes, there will be more homicides. If there are fewer guns in the home, there will be fewer homicides. It is very simple.

• (1610)

What is the cost of this program? Prove that it will reduce crime. If everything we did to prevent crime had to be proven first, we would not have very many crime prevention programs.

We have heard from major groups that have said that this bill will reduce crime. Common sense tells us that it will reduce crime. However, members of the Reform Party want evidence, proof now, on crime prevention programs. The proof is already there if we look at past legislation and at the gun control bill of 1977. It shows that stricter gun control reduces crime. We do not need any more proof. The government will take action whenever a crime prevention program shows it reduces crime and helps public safety.

Once a crime is committed there are incredible costs. I know members of the Reform Party have mentioned costs. But what does it cost once a crime is committed? What is the cost to a family? What is the cost to society? What is the cost of losing a family member? There are huge financial costs, for the courts, for the legal system, for the pleas. To keep someone in jail costs \$60,000 a year.

Yes, the program will cost something. The registry system will cost approximately \$85 million. But it is not a cost, it is an investment because it is going to reduce crime. It is an investment because it will ensure there are fewer tragedies, whether it be a suicide or a murder. Hopefully as parliamentarians we can attempt to reduce those kinds tragedies. That is why I am supporting this bill.

The Reform Party strongly opposes any preventive gun control measures. Its arguments are primarily based on defending the interests of gun owners, not in public safety. Reformers ignore the facts about the use of firearms in domestic violence, suicides and accidental deaths. Although Reform claims to put a high priority on crime prevention, the only action it advocates is to deal with criminals after lives have been lost. We want to prevent the loss of lives. That is our goal.

The costs of registration have been exaggerated by the Reform Party with allegations that the registration system will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Concerns about the design and the cost of the system are being dealt with by taking time to develop it carefully.

I have to congratulate the Minister of Justice who had the courage to tackle this issue and to make sure that it is done right. Too often politicians do not want to tackle tough issues. They do not want to tackle issues where there is some resistance. The