

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

May 24, 2018

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Typed summary of testimony of Wendy Cukier with slight edits to summarize key questions

Wendy Cukier – Coalition for Gun Control

- From our perspective, strong and effective gun control regulation is a critical part of a crime prevention strategy, but it's also a critical part of a suicide prevention strategy, and of any strategy that is attempting to address issues around violence against women, or indeed radicalization and political violence.
- Many Canadians take pride in the fact that the rates of gun injury, death, and crime in Canada are much lower than in the United States. It was ironic that we saw Canadians across the country join in solidarity with the March for Our Lives in the U.S. to ban the AR-15 there, yet we've just heard that in Canada it's sold as a restricted firearm. Many Canadians don't know a lot about how our gun laws actually compare to those in the United States. They certainly don't know that currently most U.S. states have better controls over the sales and traceability of rifles, shotguns, and unrestricted weapons than we now do in Canada.
- What's also interesting is that this is without question a gendered issue. While polls will show that the majority of gun owners may oppose certain kinds of firearms regulation, the majority of people living with gun owners support them. In those very rural communities where people are very concerned about the opinions of gun owners, it's important to underscore the fact that there are many people living with gun owners who actually support stronger gun laws. The gender splits on this issue are quite clear.
- The other thing that is important to emphasize is that in much of the discussion around firearms control, it has been presented as an urban issue, with the elites imposing their will on law-abiding gun owners in rural areas. However, if you actually look at the data, the rates of gun death and injury in rural communities in the west are much higher than in the cities. Rates of women and their children being threatened with guns in domestic violence are higher in rural areas. Rates of suicide, particularly among youth, are higher

in rural areas. The rates at which police officers are shot and killed are higher in rural areas and in the police services that operate there. The guns that are typically used in those environments are rifles and shotguns, which are currently sold as unrestricted weapons.

- The other piece that I think we need to be attentive to just as background to this issue is the sources of guns that are misused. When we look at rural communities, when we look at the west, when we look at, for example, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon, and so forth, what you will see is a predominance of unrestricted rifles and shotguns, especially in domestic violence, suicide and the murders of police officers, and many of those guns are legally owned.
- On the other hand, when we look at gang-related violence in big cities it's no surprise that handguns are the firearms most often used. One of the very troubling trends that we have seen in recent years, which we would say is a direct result of the relaxation of controls over the sales of firearms, and particularly restricted and prohibited weapons, is, first of all, a doubling of restricted and prohibited weapons. There are now more than a million in Canada. They're supposed to be restricted and prohibited because they're considered to represent a greater risk than other sorts of guns. But the other phenomenon, which you may have heard about from other witnesses, is that for the first time in 30 years more of the firearms recovered in crime in Toronto that were traced were traced back to Canadian sources, rather than smuggled in from the United States. That's largely a function of the fact that it's easier to get guns now in Canada and so there's less demand for smuggling.
- I think it's critically important to remind people, and I know you know this, that when the registry was dismantled, the registration of rifles and shotguns was dismantled, the 1977 legislation, which required restricted weapons to be tracked by dealers, was not reinstated, in spite of cries from police and particularly conservative witnesses who came before the committee.

What would the benefits of removing the five-year limit?

- The Supreme Court has said repeatedly there is no right to own guns. The United Nations has said we have a right to be safe, and states that do not properly exercise their responsibility to keep their citizens safe from firearms violence, particularly women and children, are not exercising their duty.

- I think it's really a question of where you're putting your priority. What is the downside of opening it up for 10 years? It doesn't mean that automatically because you had a marijuana conviction when you were 16 years old that you'll never own a firearm, but it signals that the police have the discretion that the opening clause of the licensing provisions wants them to have. It says, "A person is not eligible to hold a licence if it is desirable, in the interests of the safety of that or any other person, that the person not possess a firearm".

Amendments

There are three amendments that we are hoping you will consider.

- One is with respect to licensing, ensuring that the provisions are broad enough to address the intent, which is that a person is not eligible to hold a licence if it is desirable in the interests of the safety of that or any other person, meaning suicide prevention is supposed to be one of the measures considered in the licensing provision. We would like a (d) section added to the list that says, is considered a threat to themselves or any other person.
- The second revision is with respect to the record-keeping. I refer to the table at the back and the 1977 legislation. We would like to see added, "The business must produce the record and inventory for inspection at the request of any police officer or police constable or any other person authorized by regulations", etc.
- I think returning to the legislation from 40 years ago is a small price to pay. It would bring us in line with the legislation in the United States, and no matter what people say it is not a reinstatement of the registry.
- The final point is that previously the authorizations to transport were restrictive, in that they said you were authorized to take your firearm from two or more specified locations, i.e. your home, to a shooting range. The legislation that was introduced a few years ago changed that to require that you be authorized to take the firearm to any shooting club in the province where you're resident. There are shooting clubs in every community. That, in fact, is carte blanche to be transporting the firearm.