

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 24, 2004**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2004/03/24

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

Bill 24 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've spent a considerable amount of time talking about appropriation, interim supply, but now we have the budget before us and the opportunity to get into Committee of Supply on the real estimates.

I'm not sure that we need a whole lot further debate, so I move third reading of Bill 24.

Ms Carlson: Oh, Mr. Speaker, you know, I was going to talk for just a very, very short amount of time, but the Government House Leader goads me into a longer speech.

It's the absolute travesty of having to deal with appropriations when we have the budget before us. How foolish can that be for a government that can't organize its time? Here they need more money again because they can't bring financial budgets before us in a timely fashion. They've only had three months, Mr. Speaker. How long does it take, when they start preparing for these budgets way back in November? It's hard to imagine, hard to believe, but year after year we go through the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I just throw up my hands in disgust, and I'm going to vote against them.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

head: **Government Motions**

14. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mrs. Nelson:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2004-05 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, the 2004-05 government and lottery fund estimates, and fiscal and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to the Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Gun Registration

15. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that since the mandatory registration of all nonrestricted firearms is an unnecessary intrusion on the property rights and cultural heritage of Albertans, fails to discourage criminal activity involving firearms, and has wasted an enormous amount of money, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta recommends that the government of Alberta urge the government of Canada to introduce amendments to the Firearms Act of Canada and the Criminal Code of Canada to remove the requirement for the registration of all nonrestricted firearms.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue about which many Albertans and, I'd suggest, many Canadians feel very, very strongly. I'd like to thank the members whose efforts led to the development of this resolution: the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmr, and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. Those three members since last fall have been tasked with the job of reviewing everything the government of Alberta has done with respect to opposition to the gun registry to find out, first of all, if we've done everything we can and, secondly, to offer new suggestions about how we might take this travesty off the table.

Put very simply, Mr. Speaker, the federal firearms regime does not work. It does not reduce crime, it does not enhance protection already in place for police, and it does not provide safer communities.

However, the mandatory registration of long guns has done some things that I'd also like to highlight today. Registration has cost the taxpayers of Canada nearly \$1 billion, and there's no sign that the bleeding is going to stop. The results achieved are not even remotely proportionate to the resources allocated. Registration has further alienated western Canadians and particularly those Albertans for whom firearms remain an important part of their traditional heritage.

Finally and probably most importantly, firearms registration has unnecessarily made criminals of those Albertans and those Canadians whose only offence is the failure to comply with an unnecessary, ridiculously expensive, and ineffective system to regulate firearms in Canada. This government has not and would never encourage Albertans to break the law. However, based on principle, otherwise law-abiding Albertans have not registered their firearms and, therefore, could face prosecution.

As the members of this Assembly and all Albertans should know by now, the provincial government has opposed the registry since Bill C-68 was first introduced into the House of Commons of Canada in 1995. This legislation created both the Firearms Act and amended the Criminal Code. With the Criminal Code changes certain offences if committed using a firearm received harsher penalties. This is something we clearly supported. This is something which has a direct and real impact on community safety.

Further, changes resulted in firearm licences replacing the former firearms acquisition certificate system. While many people don't support the concept of licensing, at least it involves screening and training and the requirement of mandatory courses and ensures that those who possess firearms will know their responsibility and handle them safely.

As well as licensing, however, Bill C-68 required all firearms to be registered. Unlike the old registration regime which was limited to restricted firearms, primarily handguns and some military weapons, this change required all long guns to be registered. Costs for the registration regime immediately began to rise, and because of a series of delays and changes in the system and retooling the system, registration only came into effect at the beginning of 2003. So you can see just in the time frame between 1995 and 2003 how much time and effort it's taken the federal government to bring in a totally useless system.

Under the old firearms acquisition certificate system Alberta and other provinces administered the firearms legislation by virtue of an agreement with the federal government. Because of our opposition to the registration regime being established under the Firearms Act, this province withdrew from the administration of the firearms legislation. The Firearms Act as federal legislation allowed the federal government to continue the administration directly in the event that any province – and other provinces have followed our suit – refused to do so.

In addition to this, the province also proceeded to challenge the constitutionality of the Firearms Act both at the Alberta Court of Appeal and subsequently at the Supreme Court of Canada. Unfortunately, on June 15, 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that the Firearms Act and the amendments to the Criminal Code were valid and within the mandate of the Parliament under the Constitution as part of the federal government's authority to make criminal law.

It was at this time, Mr. Speaker, that the government of Alberta established its long-standing policy on prosecutions as it relates to firearms, a policy that remains in effect today. Under this policy Crown prosecutors will continue to vigorously prosecute firearms offences that adversely affect community safety, such as the use of firearms in the commission of another offence, possession of a firearm for a purpose dangerous to the public peace, or possession of a prohibited or restricted weapon.

Alberta Justice will not prosecute the noncriminal offences contained in the Firearms Act, such as not having a registration certificate for a firearm. We've taken the position that this is not appropriate legislation. It is federal legislation, and we can legitimately say to the federal government: if you want to enforce that legislation, if you want to use the public's resources to that effect, enforce it yourself.

Finally and most importantly for our discussion today, on the direction of the Attorney General Alberta prosecutors will not prosecute anyone for possessing an unregistered firearm whether under the Firearms Act or the Criminal Code if that is the only offence with which they are charged, and there's an important distinction here. The federal government, if they want to prosecute, if they want to enforce firearms legislation, can do it under the Firearms Act. Then we don't have to choose to prosecute.

In our view, as the Premier reiterated a few weeks back, this government has no quarrel with the concept of gun control. We've had gun control in this country since the early 1900s. We've controlled access to and use of handguns, automatic weapons, and those sorts of weapons, but it must be effective gun control. It must be gun control which reduces crime, and the federal registry system has nothing to do with gun control or safer communities. It's simply not in the public interest for the provincial government to pursue charges in cases where an individual's only offence is the failure to comply with this bloated and ineffective registration system.

Some people might suggest that the Supreme Court case was years ago and that Alberta should move on to other issues. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. The costs continue to rise. The federal government has made little or no attempt to fix the problem. It's our position that the registry regime is beyond fixing. It's simply not possible to salvage this enormous waste of taxpayer dollars, and that's why today through this resolution I rise on behalf of Albertans to renew our call to abolish the firearms registry for nonrestricted weapons.

8:10

Albertans' views on this subject are very clear, and the government shares those views. Although the Supreme Court decision is in the past, through initiatives like this resolution our committee is exploring other ways to keep pressure on the federal government. For instance, the members of the committee and I met recently with the Member of Parliament and Minister of State Albina Guarnieri, who has been tasked with reviewing the registry on behalf of Prime Minister Martin. The members and I used that meeting to renew our call to abolish the registry.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank these members for their work on this issue, their commitment to this issue, and for representing the many voices of their constituents and many other Albertans, which has been outstanding, to say the least.

Apart from the waste of money, Mr. Speaker, some people may not be convinced that the registry is completely ineffective. For instance, some might be of the mindset that although it's ridiculously expensive, every bit done to prevent gun crime is a step in the right direction. Although that is the line that has been sold by the federal government for many years now, Albertans aren't buying it. Let's be realistic. Criminals, those who do harm to others, those who commit armed robberies, those who illegally possess weapons because they're involved in the drug trade, have not, will not register their firearms.

The very fact that thousands of illegal guns are on the streets in Canada this very minute amply demonstrates that the registry does absolutely nothing to keep firearms out of the hands of those who use them for criminal purposes. In many cities it's simply far too easy for a criminal to illegally purchase a firearm, and that's why greater efforts are needed to stop the illegal gun trade in Canada and especially the illegal trafficking of weapons from the United States.

It makes me absolutely apoplectic when I think of the impact that a billion dollars could have had on the illegal gun trade, the effect that a billion dollars could have had on making our communities safer, and the effect that a billion dollars could have had on reducing crime. A billion dollars has been spent on registering law-abiding Canadians rather than being invested in promoting safer communities.

As my colleague the hon. Solicitor General and all members of this House will agree, we need to do everything we possibly can do to protect our police officers in their line of duty, the people who truly make our communities safe, and this is one area that the federal government has tried to point to when discussing the merits of the registry system. If only it were true. Mandatory registration does absolutely nothing to enhance the protection offered to police.

All persons who have firearms must be licensed under law. When police go to a call, the essential information they need is that a firearm may be present at the scene. Licensing already provides this information. All registration provides is which particular firearms may be present. Again, because of the nature of the registry system, because of the boondoggle that it has been, and because of the ineffective process that they've undertaken, the registry itself provides no satisfaction, no cover for a police officer. In fact, I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that no self-respecting police officer would rely on the registry, when approaching a house or approaching an individual, to tell them whether or not guns were present.

As Alberta's Justice minister for the past four and a half years I've dealt with this issue since the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada came down. We've seen the federal government's cost projections rise from year to year. We've spoken out at federal/provincial/territorial ministers of justice meetings asking for the registry to be scrapped. But in recent months the frustration of Albertans has boiled over and in some cases led to fingers pointing back at the provincial government and at this minister. Some have voiced their concerns that Alberta has changed their position, that it has or could prosecute individuals charged with registry offences. Much of this problem, Mr. Speaker, lies in how the federal government drafted the legislation with registration charges existing under the federal Firearms Act and the Criminal Code.

Some of us have suggested that because prosecutions under the Criminal Code are within provincial jurisdiction, we should or could deny a federal prosecutor the authority to proceed or that Alberta should or could intervene to stop any prosecutions that could take place. I'd like to remind you that we're not talking about numerous cases, with obviously only one case of significance coming forward so far.

Interfering in any criminal case because we continue to dislike or

oppose federal legislation is simply not an option and would be highly inappropriate. For obvious reasons criminal prosecution decisions must not be made at a political level. The courts have strongly rejected instances when laws are applied to some and not others or ignored altogether because those in office choose to ignore them. Such actions would be contrary to our constitutional obligation to uphold Canadian law and contrary to the belief that most Albertans have in the equality of the law and the equality of individuals under the law.

To point a finger at Alberta is misguided when only the federal government can abolish the gun registry. Only the federal government can prevent licensed gun owners from being charged or prosecuted for possessing an unregistered gun. That's why the focus must remain on Ottawa. As we've done since day one, Alberta will lead the opposition to these laws and fight to have them abolished. That's what we're doing today with this resolution. This is but the next step in our government's efforts to have the firearms registry scrapped and those resources put to community safety rather than this crazy registry.

The Prime Minister has called for a review. The Minister of State is conducting the review. This Assembly should tell them in the strongest possible way that it should be an honest, effective review which does more than just review how the registry operates or is implemented but reviews the very rationale behind the registry and comes to an honest, direct conclusion: the registry should be scrapped.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise in the Assembly this evening to offer my comments to the debate and discussion of the firearms resolution introduced by the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution recognizes that the mandatory registration of all firearms interferes with the cultural heritage of Albertans and poses an unnecessary intrusion into property rights while failing to discourage criminal activity. Therefore, the resolution recommends that the Alberta government urge the federal government to introduce amendments to both the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code in an effort to remove the requirement that all firearms must be registered.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the resolution put forward by the Minister of Justice and believe it is an important initiative for all Albertans. This resolution is also consistent with the sentiment expressed by a number of citizens from across this province. As chair of the committee mandated to review the federal gun registry, I have thoroughly examined the issues surrounding Bill C-68 and the Firearms Act. Bill C-68 is the strictest gun control legislation in Canadian history as it requires all gun owners to be licensed and register their firearms.

There are many strong arguments from which to oppose the federal gun registry and support the resolution put forward today. Mr. Speaker, the federal gun registry makes the possession and ownership of a firearm a privilege rather than a right. The registry is an intrusion on the property rights of all Canadians. Registration under the Firearms Act modifies the ownership of firearms and shifts it from a right to a privilege because firearms are personal property.

The right to property is a fundamental right in Canadian history. The right to bear arms is an historical right of all Canadians and is affirmed by section 26 of the Charter, which states that "the guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed as denying the existence of any other rights or freedoms that exist in Canada."

Mr. Speaker, this resolution recognizes Alberta's historic use and possession of firearms. The gun registry threatens the important heritage of Canadians to own guns. The responsible and lawful use of firearms during settlement and currently by ranchers, farmers, hunters, and trappers is a significant part of Canada's multicultural heritage. Canadians have traditionally owned guns, and furthermore Canadians have used them responsibly. The use of firearms in activities such as hunting, trapping, recreational target shooting, and firearm collecting plays an important role in Alberta's cultural, social, and economic heritage.

8:20

The Firearms Act potentially violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms through various sections. However, it is section 27 of the Charter that expresses that "this Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians." The use of firearms has served to continue an integral component of our cultural heritage. Alberta residents should have the right to own, enjoy, and use firearms in a responsible manner. No law should infringe upon this heritage or the historical rights relating to the use of firearms.

Mr. Speaker, the gun registry has not served to control the criminal use of firearms in our communities. The Firearms Act has not saved lives as it promised. Essentially, registration introduced by the Firearms Act has criminalized a significant number of Canadians. The federal firearms legislation considers firearm owners as potential criminals. The possession of a firearm without a licence holds a Criminal Code offence. The gun registry regards law-abiding gun owners as more dangerous than violent criminals, who are prohibited from owning weapons.

The registry will not be effective in that criminals will not be compelled to register their guns. Therefore, police are only knowledgeable of where innocent gun owners live and not criminals. I then question how beneficial this registry will be in tracking criminals' weapons. Furthermore, there's no guarantee that the information reported on a registration is even accurate.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to question the perceived benefits of this program. The Firearms Act is not supported by any hard evidence that it will serve as a public safety measure or Criminal Code initiative. Crime rates have not decreased since the inception of the federal government's registry. Furthermore, there is no credible evidence that supports that this program will deter violent crime.

The costs of the gun registry have also escalated out of control. It is apparent that this program has exceeded its original cost expectations. The expense of the gun registry has continued to climb from the projected estimate at the introduction of the program in 1995. The program's initial costs were projected at less than \$2 million. However, in December of 2002 it was revealed that the program would cost at least \$1 billion by 2005, and while the present calculations remain incomplete, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the program has experienced drastic cost overruns through a number of unforeseen expenditures.

The funds allocated to the gun registry could be better served in other areas. Our communities would be safer if the money from the billion dollar registry was focused on fighting known criminals. This money could be put towards an increased presence of RCMP officers to fight real crime. This financial support could be afforded to any program that would assist Canadians instead of an unwarranted intrusion on the property rights of responsible firearms owners that makes them criminals.

Mr. Speaker, there is an inherent problem with the federal gun

registry in that it may not apply to all Canadians equally. The Firearms Act requires all Canadians, including aboriginal peoples, to obtain a licence and register their guns. However, we are now seeing problems come forward as aboriginal groups who are opposed to the registry have grounds to file lawsuits and seek exemptions from the federal program based on provisions outlined in their land claims agreements. In 2002 Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, a group overseeing the Nunavut land claims agreement, filed a lawsuit against the federal government. This lawsuit is based on the fact that the gun registry goes against an understanding that the Inuit are able to hunt, trap, and fish without being subject to licensing or fees. It is unclear how many cases may arise to challenge this program based on similar grounds.

Mr. Speaker, it is section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which mandates equality for all Canadians. Furthermore, the Criminal Code must apply to all citizens equally. Therefore, if the exemptions result through court rulings for specific aboriginal groups, then the gun registry would be extremely unfair in applying equally to all Canadians. For this reason, I believe that all Canadians should be exempt from the registry.

The federal Liberals themselves are unsure of the outcome of this program and are now backtracking their steps. The federal government is recognizing the flawed approach to the registry. The Liberals are attempting to make adjustments to the gun registry and have now launched a review of the firearms legislation. They are seeking feedback from Canadians across the country.

The government is searching for alternatives that would essentially reduce the costs while increasing the effectiveness of this initiative. I believe that the best solution would be to abandon this program and repeal the registry. Mr. Speaker, the federal government is already acknowledging some of the problems; however, reversing the course of action on this initiative would prove to be the best solution.

The Firearms Act is the strictest gun control legislation in Canadian history. It requires all gun owners to license and register their firearms. However, it is proven that the gun registry does not work, and no matter how much money is spent, it does not appear that it will have an impact on real criminals. Mr. Speaker, gun control programs need to be cost-effective and focused on reducing the criminal use of firearms. The federal gun registry has not proven to be an effective tool in discouraging criminal activity involving firearms. The registry has cost taxpayers an enormous amount of money and has not improved the public safety in our communities. Alberta needs the continuous leadership role in questioning the federal government and urging the elimination of the registry as the best solution to addressing the problems of this program.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. minister for bringing forth the firearms resolution. This initiative has my full support, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to stand behind this initiative. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to have an opportunity to rise and speak to this particular motion. Since this idea of a registration process was first introduced in 1995, my colleague from Lethbridge-East and I were the designated spokespeople for our caucus on this particular issue. Certainly, at the many, many forums and different arenas that I was asked to speak at, I was very pleased to say that I have always supported gun control, but I have never supported the gun registry.

Now, many of my constituents don't like that stand, and I'm sure that many in the future won't like it either, but I have always said to them that I will represent their views and vote my conscience, and that's what I expect to do this time too.

I have a very good reason, I believe, for truly believing that the registration process is a flawed process, and my greatest concern about it is that it gives police a false sense of security about what lies behind the next door when they face it. I remember vividly 17 years ago when an estranged husband came after his wife and two children and the police were called. The estranged husband was also a policeman, so they were able to go to his locker at work and see that his service revolver was locked away. So they told the wife that there should be no worries, that he didn't have a revolver with him. She said: it isn't the one that's locked in the locker that you have to be worried about; it's the one that he has at home that has never been registered.

So the good news about that story is that there were no serious outcomes, but since that day when my children and I safely escaped from what was a very tough situation, I've always believed that we can never have any police officer out there dealing with a situation where there's a false sense of security or mothers and their children, or anyone else for that matter, being in fear for their lives. Particularly now that my son is grown up and is himself going to be a police officer, I do not ever want him to go into a situation where he doesn't believe that there could be a dangerous weapon around the corner or behind the door.

So I believe that a registry gives a false sense of security in some circumstances and will never support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, and then Red Deer-North.

8:30

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to begin by thanking the hon. Minister of Justice, the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, for bringing this motion forward and especially for giving me the opportunity to sit on the gun registry committee. It's been a very educating and enlightening experience.

I echo the comments of my colleagues when I say that we need to put an end to the gun registry as soon as possible. Any initiative put forward by this House to do just that is one that I will support.

I want to say at the outset that I do not resent the motivation for a safer society that initially underlined the gun registry. What I do resent, however, is that in the realization that the gun registry has not worked, the federal government has continued to pump money into it instead of admitting it for what it is: a white elephant.

Today's provincial budget, Mr. Speaker, adding \$58 million to policing in Alberta: that will make safety communities. But wasting \$1 billion on a useless registry – imagine, just imagine how many RCMP we could hire to fight real crime. This registry survives for political reasons, not for practical reasons.

Just think about the gun registry. First it was to be a \$2 million – \$2 million – registry. Next we found out that the federal government allowed the cost to soar to more than \$1 billion. Now we hear that the cost could actually be closer to \$2 billion. I am beside myself, Mr. Speaker. So are most taxpaying Albertans. The only thing we can say is: what a waste. Just think about it. All the money that I and all of my family and friends and all of their families and friends will ever pay in tax in their entire lives wasted, wasted on a useless registry. It doesn't make me very happy when I see how much money I pay to the federal government in tax, to think that it's all been wasted on one useless program.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just a waste in terms of dollars spent, but I think it's a waste because of the aims. The aims of the program are not met. I further contend that the gun registry program will never meet the aims sought by the creators of the program. What are those aims? Well, the aim, it seems, was to curb gun-related violence. That's a worthy goal.

The program was born out of a very real public anger and grief over the shootings at l'école Polytechnique, which took place in Montreal on December 6, 1989. On that day, Marc Lepine walked into l'école Polytechnique and deliberately aimed fire on 14 young engineering students, all of whom were women. The shooter was angry at the perception that the women were stealing his opportunities at a successful career, and he obviously held some deep-seated resentments towards women in general as well as deep mental problems, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the public was justifiably horrified. The incident laid bare that gun violence does exist and that when mixed with an offensive and intolerable political stand like the one Marc Lepine held, the ramifications can be horrific, fatal, absolutely unacceptable.

But what happened afterwards is a classic story of what happens when politicians attempt to provide a political solution to a very real problem. Instead of taking a clear-eyed look at the problems of December 6, 1989, the federal government targeted one aspect; that is, that Marc Lepine used firearms. They made a sweeping law that put all of the duck hunters and farmers and law-abiding gun owners into the same category as a monster like Marc Lepine. Yes, they were all firearms owners, as if that in itself is a bad thing.

As you can imagine, a lot of resentment has grown amongst gun owners, especially rural owners like the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar. Mr. Speaker, most people are not criminals. They don't have severe mental problems, and they don't have an eternal hate for women. Most people are not using their guns for anything other than practical purposes. Most are using their firearms legally, or at least they were before January 1, 2003. Nobody likes to be branded a criminal. Nobody likes to be treated as though their government doesn't trust them, and that's what the very existence of the firearms registry does.

These Albertans who want the registry to end do not want to see an end to all firearms safety measures. No. They've talked about safe storage requirements. They agree with proper licensing and safety tests prior to allowing somebody to purchase a weapon. Mr. Speaker, we've had these kinds of things in place for years when it comes to restricted and prohibited weapons such as handguns.

What most people don't agree with is that the government needs to know in which closet the gun is held in their farmhouse. They resent the fact that they became criminals on January 1, 2003, simply by doing nothing. That's right, Mr. Speaker. If they had long guns that they did not register by that date, then they became criminals.

I know this personally because I happen to be one of those people. I can remember very early in the new year there was a certain protest going on in the Legislature, and myself and another hon. member from this Assembly attended that public gathering. What happened, Mr. Speaker, was that I became very inspired to fight the registry. I decided that I was going to stand with this group of Albertans and try to send the message to the federal government that this was wrong and that we were not going to take it, that we were not going to put up with it. I went public to my own local newspapers, and I told them that I didn't agree with the registry, and that because most of my constituents didn't register, I wouldn't either.

Well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker: I think it was about a week or two later that the local staff sergeant of the RCMP, who happens to be my next door neighbour, fully dressed in all of his uniform, came walking into my MLA office one Friday. He called me by name – I can't say it now – and he said: we have a problem. He said: if you don't register your firearms I have no choice but to charge you.

Now, had I known then what I know now, I would have said: and then what will you do with the other 10,000 of my constituents who we know have not registered their firearms?

Mr. Griffiths: Did you say that?

Rev. Abbott: I said that had I known that, I would have said that.

Instead, what I did, Mr. Speaker, is I did the right thing by my constituents so that I could be their voice in the Legislature, and I went and I registered my long guns. I registered them, and, really, what a silly, silly process.

If I explained to you some of the questions that were on that form in order to obtain the licence and to go through this whole registry hassle, you would be absolutely outraged at the invasion of privacy and at some of the questions that are asked. They want to know how many common-law partners or spouses you had in your entire history, people that you've lived with over a certain length of time. [interjections] The answer for me is one. They want to know about all of your mental history. They want to know things, Mr. Speaker, that nobody else could ever get away with asking other than these people with the gun registry power in their hands.

It's just an absolutely foolish process, but I went through it because I wanted to be able to be a voice of reason in the Legislature and to stand up for my constituents and to do the right thing. So here I am, Mr. Speaker. I'm on the gun registry committee. I'm hoping that we do more than just this resolution, that we find some ways to challenge this constitutionally, because that's what we need to do.

I want to share a little story, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good illustration of what happened on January 1, 2003. Imagine if you owned an automobile. Let's say you were licensed, you had that automobile registered, and you drove it around for, say, 20, 30 years, maybe even 40 years. I know one man that drove the same truck for 50 years. Let's say that you drove that automobile around for a certain length of time and then you decided: "I like that old automobile. That's become a real sentimental thing to me. In fact, it's become a collector's item in the eyes of many. I'm going to go park that on the back forty, and I'm going to save that and maybe give it to my grandchildren someday."

Well, Mr. Speaker, if you then became a certain age and allowed your licence to expire and you never bothered to renew your registration of that automobile and you had it sitting out on the back forty, no problem. You're allowed to do that; that's your property. The federal government can't say anything. They can't say: hey, you're now a criminal because you've got that automobile sitting out on the back forty that's not licensed or registered. No, they can't say that. But you know what? If that were a gun, they could say that.

That's right. The minute you let your licence and registration expire, if you don't hand that gun over to the federal authorities to be destroyed, then you have become a criminal. What kind of a law is that?

8:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Stupid.

Rev. Abbott: Well, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said the word that I was thinking, Mr. Speaker. It's not a good law.

I'll tell you this, Mr. Speaker, in closing. One of the great things that the current prime minister said when he was coming into office was: we are going to put an end to western alienation; we are going to start to listen to the west; we're going to include the west; the west wants in; well, they're going to be in under my leadership, under my regime.

Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? This is Paul Martin's chance to listen to the west and to begin to put an end to western alienation. In fact, I want to send a message along with the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the Member for Lethbridge-East. Take this

message to Ottawa: "Can the registry of nonrestricted firearms. All it does is cause western alienation. Don't try to fix it; just delete it."

One of the best buttons we have on our computer is the delete button. I wish that the Prime Minister and the minister of state responsible would use the delete button and can the registry and get rid of it. I know that I am speaking on behalf of the majority of my constituents and, in fact, the majority of Albertans.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, comments or questions?

Rev. Abbott: Uh-oh.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard that "uh-oh" over there, Drayton Valley-Calmar.

First of all, a comment, Mr. Speaker, and it's this. He nearly convinced me to change my vote. It's a good thing he stopped talking when he did.

And now my question: how does the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar ever in his wildest dreams think that he is a reasoned voice in this Legislature?

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, I don't speak very often in this Assembly and I don't say very much. But the odd time that I do speak up, I hope that it is with reason and I hope that it is on behalf of my constituents.

I must say as a compliment to the hon. member opposite that when she was giving her speech this evening, I was thinking: why did the Liberals push her into the backbenches? She is such an intelligent, bright person that she should be up there in the front benches, like she was previously.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker is the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like first of all to thank the committee that worked so hard on bringing this resolution forward, and I'd also like to thank the Minister of Justice. I think he read my speech. And I'd like to thank the speakers that have spoken so far.

Like the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie I am in full support of gun control. However, I do not support the ineffective, inefficient, and costly firearms registry. If anyone here was able to see the documentary by Michael Moore called *Bowling for Columbine*, they'll realize that he struggled to understand why with over 7 million guns in Canada we only registered in the year that he made his documentary 165 deaths by gun while the United States during the same time period registered over 11,000 deaths by gun.

I think that the answer is in the Canadian people themselves. They are the type of people that are nonviolent, and people who legally own their guns and now possibly illegally own their guns don't use them to kill people. That's not the purpose of guns for Canadians.

So with the two issues I'd like to talk about gun control for a few minutes, and that is to say that prior to the firearms registry the gun control laws of this country were excellent. They were the best in the world, and I support those fully. They required that every firearm have a trigger lock. So you had to have a key to unlock your trigger to begin with. Every firearm needed to be locked in a cabinet. So you had to have the key to the cabinet to get into the cabinet to get the gun and then have the key to unlock the trigger. Also, you had to have the ammunition locked in a separate compart-

ment in a separate room away from the firearms themselves.

I believe that those kinds of gun laws and the registration of handguns and semiautomatics and automatic weapons were also excellent laws in this country. No one in this country complained or argued about whether those guns laws were acceptable or not because they were, and we as Canadians accepted those gun laws.

However, the firearms registry is a separate topic, a separate issue. It's cost us billions of dollars, and as has been said in this House tonight, those billions of dollars could have been better spent on policing and crime control. We know that in Alberta alone we have 29 known gangs. I was very pleased to see today in the budget a 50 per cent increase in the policing budget. We need that here in Alberta because of the gangs that we have. We need that money to help us solve crimes here in Alberta more than we need to spend money on a firearms registry that does not work.

I think that the money could also be used for programs such as helping people in the areas of domestic violence and bullying. A lot of the deaths, especially the deaths that have happened in school, have happened because of bullying. If we had programs where we could help people deal with their anger and with their isolation, those are the programs that would make us better people, far better than a firearms registry makes us. In Red Deer we have something that's called the batterers' program. It's 75 per cent successful in changing a person who has been a batterer to being a better person.

Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that it's not guns that kill people; it's people who kill people. Criminals don't register their guns. Now, if I thought for one minute that the firearms registry could actually protect women and children, I would consider supporting it, but as has been said in this House this evening, there is nothing to prove that it has been efficient in any way. It hasn't stopped women and children from being killed. Other than making good citizens criminals, this registry has not achieved what it set out to do.

The other issue that was mentioned tonight that I think is really important is for police officers to know ahead of time, when they're going to the site of, say, a domestic violence complaint, whether or not there are guns in that home. I think that licensing the person, which was part of our gun control prior to the firearms registry, is very effective and far more effective and less costly and more efficient than a firearms registry. So I agree with the licensing of the gun owners that was in place before.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that if we really want to do something about crime, if we really want to protect the people of Canada, then I think we should have stronger penalties for the illegal use of weapons, firearms being one of them. Perhaps our justice system needs an overhaul. Perhaps the corrections system, the Canadian correctional system, needs an overhaul. Maybe those are some of the things that we should be looking at rather than a firearms registry.

To echo what my hon. colleagues have said this evening, I think the smartest, most logical, and best solution to the cost of the firearms registry is to eliminate it completely, and that's what I would support. I want to thank this House for supporting Motion 15.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion on the gun registry. I've listened to a number of the speakers, and I kind of wonder what I think at some times. When I went through this whole process starting almost 10 years ago, trying to discuss the relevance of gun control, the relevance of the components of gun control, you had to put into position a series of weights about what

is relevant. You know, when you start talking about gun control, there are all kinds of different aspects of it that have to be considered.

Now, we've heard discussions about a lot of it tonight, about whether or not we should be in effect prohibiting the absolute ownership of particular styles or particular kinds of guns. That, in effect, is in itself a degree of a registry where you say: we don't care; you can't have that one. So, you know, gun limitations.

I think most Canadians, most Albertans that I've talked to do support the idea that we don't really need weapons of war in our kitchen cabinets. With the assault weapons, these kinds of things, if you need to use them, if you want to experience them, the place to do that is at a gun club or at a facility. That, I think, has been pretty well accepted by a lot of Albertans that I've talked to.

8:50

Then you get into the idea of what constitutes the rationale behind dealing with gun control. Well, it's to reduce the threat or the possibility – possibility is better than threat – of death by accident or on purpose; you know, deliberate homicide. We have to look at those kinds of things, and here we see the idea that we want to in effect create a deterrent, so stiff penalties. I think every Albertan, every Canadian supports the idea that we have to have a deterrent for individuals who use guns in the commission of a crime, any kind of a crime, because no matter what you think, there is always the option and the possibility of an accident and, in effect, the crime going further than you thought, and we end up with a death or an injury. In that context, we have to look at it from the point of view of what constitutes reasonable aspects of gun control.

As I was going through the debate when we started all this in the early '90s, I began to think about what is reasonable and effective. I've lived in a number of other places in North America and around the world where they've had gun control, where they've had gun registration, where they've had stiff gun penalty laws. I guess that when I decided how I was going to approach gun control, I went out and I supported the whole idea that we have to make sure that we don't create an opportunity for automatic weapons that are war weapons to be commonly available in the community. That I didn't accept. I accepted very strongly that one of the best ways to deal with the reduction of crime, injury resulting from the use of a weapon, a gun, in crime was to in effect create a deterrent through stiffer penalties.

When we started talking about the federal proposal for a gun registration, I began to ask myself: well, is this cost-effective? I looked at all of the jurisdictions that I could find evidence from that had gun registries, gun ownership lists, whatever you want to call it, because they all call it a little bit different, and you couldn't see a real relationship between the identification of individuals who owned guns, the number of guns they owned, the kinds of guns they owned and any effective crime control.

So I questioned: how do we get a cost-effective system here that works? Under all of the investigation that I did, it became very clear to me that if we're going to put dollars into a program that relates to the reduction in the possibility of injury or crime with a gun, the best thing to do was the first two components because there's no evidence that registries really do provide us with a cost-effective mechanism under the larger umbrella of gun control.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Mr. Snelgrove: Just say it clearly, Ken. Spit it out clearly.

Dr. Nicol: I'm going to get there. The member over there says: spit

it out; say it clearly. I've got to put the rationale in. I want to explain to the House how I came to this.

I listened to some of the members tonight talk about: well, it's part of our culture; it's part of our heritage. Mr. Speaker, I've lived in enough different areas of the world, and I've lived almost 60 years in Alberta. I've seen our culture, I've seen our heritage, and I've seen our expectations as a society change. So I'm not going to say: because we did, we must. That to me is not enough of an explanation for why we shouldn't have a gun registry.

What's more important is: is this good public policy? Through the rational approach that I've described to you, I cannot through any means that I've been able to determine justify dollars in a gun registry, because it's not an effective mechanism to do what we want: reduce the use of guns in criminal activity.

So I don't think that we should be having a registry. I think that the federal government, as it goes through this review, should start to talk about what is a cost-effective use of our public dollars, and they'll all come to the same conclusion, that this is not a good use of public dollars because it doesn't lead to an effective reduction in the use of guns in the commission of crimes. That's what our objective is.

Let's do as the members across here have said. Let's put more money into policing. Let's put more money into the other deterrent programs. That's the way we'll be able to reduce the use of guns either willingly or unwillingly in the commission of a crime.

The registry hasn't proven to be effective, and I don't think we should have one in Canada. I'm going to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that I'm in favour of gun control, but I'm opposed to the registration of long guns. I believe that our public prosecutions of the use of firearms in the commission of a crime too often is waived. In talking with police officers when the debate was more fully and more broadly based in our land, they often said that.

I just want to give you an example of that, because people came out on both sides of the issue. A certain lady – and we don't want to identify her, but we'll call her Mrs. J. Mrs. J. went to the United States and bought two different handguns of different calibre and bought the appropriate ammunition for both of them and brought them back to our province without declaring them.

Now, we've had the registration – and I support it – of handguns for about 80 years. I think that's a good thing. There's no one in this country that needs, it seems to me anyway, an Uzi or a Bren gun or, for that matter, an AK47 that works. They don't need that. So those are restricted weapons along with Bazookas and so on, and they ought to be very much restricted to perhaps military museums or have them decommissioned so they can't be readily put in.

Anyway, back to Mrs. J. She was estranged from her husband, invited him over to her home, and as he was leaving, proceeded to put six shots into his back. He didn't die. Now, there were people that said, "Well, he deserved it," or "He didn't," that kind of thing. There was here the commission of a crime with a weapon. If any of us go out and take our gun, if we have one, and shoot it off within the urban limits, you can be charged with discharging a firearm in an urban area. She was charged, and they waived that. They waived the smuggling. They waived having two weapons, waived having the ammunition and all of the rest of it and shooting within the limits of a city. As the case would be, she was declared unfit to stand trial and so on.

All that I'm trying to get at is that you can have these wonderful rules for registration, and we do, but so often when it comes right

down to it, that gets plea bargained away. It's frustrating for police, and it's frustrating for a whole lot of other people. So it seems to me that one of the problems is not the registration but how we handle that whole issue.

Unlike the hon. member who spoke about having guns, I got my first gun, a beautiful gun, when I was 12 years old. I still have it, a Browning over-and-under skeet gun; it matched my father's gun. So you can see that that was over 50 years ago, and I still have it. In our home when I was growing up, the guns and ammunition were always locked. I never had the key. Even when I was 18 years old, I didn't have the key. All the guns that I have have been locked up and still are. They're registered. I thought that if I'm an MLA and I'm helping to make laws and voting on laws, I cannot break it even though I disagree with it. So like a Boy Scout I did get mine registered. I'm not sure what I can do with that registration.

9:00

I support this resolution. I feel that it hopefully will be an instrument of impressing the hon. members in Ottawa that maybe registration of long guns is not a good thing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter into this debate, and I'll try not to repeat too much of what has already been said, but I'll see if I can bring some new arguments to the table.

I, too, would like to speak in favour of this resolution and thank the minister for bringing it forward. I hope that it will be listened to by the federal government a little better than what most of our advice has been listened to by them in the past.

I've watched the evolution or attempts of gun control by previous federal governments of both stripes over the past number of years in an attempt to control violence regarding firearms or to basically register guns for whatever reasons they may have to register them. A lot of people I talk to don't necessarily trust the federal government, that they have only those interests of preventing crime or serious violence by firearms at heart when they're making this legislation.

I believe the federal government has failed to show Canadians where registration of firearms has worked in reducing crime or violence. That's been asked of every government that's tried to put this in, and really there's no place that it's worked. I don't know who to quote, but I understand that one of the papers quoted someone in the government about a year ago, after the registration was brought in: how many guns were registered? The answer was: well, we don't know how many are out there, but 75 per cent of them are registered. That didn't do a lot to help Canadians trust such a government that makes statements like that to bring in something that's good for them.

A question I have is: why are Albertans so opposed to this registration of long guns when they don't seem to be opposed to registration of handguns? I mean, you can have a handgun with a long barrel, that they refer to as a Buntline Special, in a .45 calibre single action or a 24-inch pistol-grip shotgun. What makes one more dangerous than the other because of an inch, maybe, in length? So why are Albertans so opposed to registration of long guns? In talking to Albertans I think it's because it's the registration of all guns when you include long guns.

In recent history, in the lifetime of a lot of people in here, other countries have tried this, and we say: oh, that could never happen in Canada. Other countries since World War II in Germany have said

that it could never happen in their countries either. What happened there after registration was brought in in Germany? As everybody knows, all guns were registered and subsequently all guns were confiscated, making a disarmed population. Some countries have often thought a deterrent to bring such a registration in place was some measure of protection against a tyrannical government trying to disarm the population. If you didn't have registration, that couldn't happen. I think this is what concerns a lot of Albertans, especially the ones that I've talked to. This is not ancient history; this is recent history.

The other thing is that in the last number of years since this whole thing has been brought into place, I've seen an overreaction by enforcement officers in dealing with anything regarding guns. I'll just give you a couple of examples.

Where a hotel was being built in Three Hills, there was an excavation on part of the property and the Richardson's ground squirrels, or gophers, came in, and they were making quite a mess and eating the grass up and digging holes. So the owners . . . [interjection] What's that?

Mr. Mason: Didn't you try reasoning with them first?

Mr. Marz: Yeah, right. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands would think that you would reason with gophers and ground squirrels. That doesn't surprise me. Perhaps he would be adept at that, but most people wouldn't be.

Anyway, the owners of the hotel, which was right on the edge of town, asked one of their friends to come in and see what he could do. They didn't want to spread poison in the area because of public access, and they didn't want a .22 because the range was too far. He said that he had a BB gun, so he took the BB gun out there and was plinking gophers with the BB gun to try to rid them of this. Before you know it, a peace officer had him at gunpoint to drop the gun and step away from it as if he was in the commission of some type of violent crime, you know, conducting himself like a SWAT team.

Another instance is people I know had their homes broken into and guns were stolen. The first thing they were concerned about was: must be unsafe storage. There's a bigger concern about the victim being treated like a criminal than worrying about how to get to the criminal that stole the property.

On a more personal note my own son, who was 17 years old, and his friend, who just turned 18, phoned me on my cellphone as they wanted to go shooting gophers. I said: well, I'll be home shortly. But being young guys like that, they took it upon themselves to go into the locked gun cabinet, where my guns are safely stored, and took out a couple of .22s. They're both trained in gun safety and were looking forward to taking their test to get their FAC, or firearms acquisition certificate, at the time. So they went to my neighbour's place and asked if they could shoot in that pasture, which they were always allowed to do, but they always asked permission each time just to make sure that they knew who was on their property if anybody heard gunshots.

As they were getting out of the vehicle on a highway pullout to cross the fence, an officer and a ride-along officer with him, not a real officer – some people refer to them as wannabes – pulled them over. These officers knew these boys from the time they were born, but they treated them like criminals. They told them to put the guns down, step away from them, spread their legs, and put their hands up against the vehicle. They suggested a whole bunch of charges, including driving with a loaded weapon, shooting from a public roadway, which they hadn't. They weren't loaded. They still had the bullets out.

They did everything they could to frighten these boys to a

ridiculous degree, and they ended up charging both of them with having a gun without a firearms acquisition certificate. That's the only thing they could actually charge them with because, in fact, they didn't. If I would have been with them, which I was shortly after that, because I got home, they would have been with me and my firearms acquisition certificate would have been okay. Most officers of the day probably would have said: you know, when your dad gets home, we're going to have a chat, and I'll take these home for you. But, no, it had to be to the letter of the law.

9:10

The 18-year-old boy was charged in adult court, and he received a three-year suspended sentence, which meant he couldn't travel out of the country for that time, and he had to apply to get these charges stayed after that. My son, because it was days before his 18th birthday, was charged in juvenile court and the charges were stayed.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

To this day my son doesn't have a firearms acquisition certificate or the new licence. He doesn't own a gun. He just doesn't want anything to do with it. His perception of the RCMP isn't as healthy as it should be because he thinks they were overreactive in the way he was treated at the time. I was so concerned about how distraught those two boys were at that particular time that I wasn't sure if they would even commit suicide. That's the degree of fear that was struck into those lads at the time, and this is all over this gun control.

I think it is absolutely wrong that we should be putting these laws into place that have this effect on enforcement officers that think it gives them a licence to go out and terrorize law-abiding people, people who have a law-abiding attitude, not a criminal attitude but a law-abiding attitude, because they're easy prey for the police instead of getting out there and going after the criminal attitude. Maybe that's where the billion dollars should be spent, on training enforcement officers so that they can go after the criminal attitude instead of the law-abiding attitude.

So I think this whole thing of just going after the long guns basically closes the circle where every gun a citizenry has is going to be registered and susceptible to the whim of the government that can disarm the public whenever they want. I can't support the law, although as my colleague that's now in the Speaker's chair said, we're bound by the law as long as it is the law.

Another thing this has done is it has caused neighbours and friends to be suspicious of one another. I suspect, as I quoted before, we don't know how many guns there are, but 75 per cent are registered. That tells me that nobody really knows how many guns there are, and nobody really knows how many are registered. By a lot of estimates some people think that only half of them are registered. So where are the other ones? Well, you know, if I go and visit a constituent and I see a .22 sitting in the corner of a machine shed, that makes me basically an accessory to a crime, and if I say nothing, am I breaking the law? Yes, I am because I have knowledge that it's not safely stored. That's against the law.

Am I to report every time I see something like this? How many of you have seen that? If you go to your neighbour's and he wants to show you something down in the basement and you see some guns hanging on a rack that aren't safely stored because they're not locked in a cabinet, you've just witnessed a crime according to the gun legislation. Are you supposed to report your neighbour for that? So it's making criminals out of a lot of people in different ways.

Mr. McFarland: That makes it hard to get a vote.

Mr. Marz: It does make it hard to get a vote, yeah. There are people out there that chose not to register, and they're not saying anything.

I've been a member of the Trochu Rifle & Pistol club for probably about 40 years. I don't get up there very often, usually about once or twice a year, but I keep my membership up. It's a great sport, although my gun control needing a steady hand isn't as steady as it used to be or my eyes can't line up the sights as good as they used to, so my winnings aren't as good as they used to be. But I still enjoy the camaraderie and the discussions and looking at different people's firearms and enjoy watching young people take up the sport and learn it, and a lot of young people are taking it up and learning this.

I'm absolutely in favour of a system that tests me so that I can show society that they can be comfortable knowing that I am a person who can safely own, operate, and possess a firearm. I can show that, and I'm comfortable with that.

I think I owe it to society if I'm going to own firearms, whether they're four inches long or four feet long, to know how to handle them safely and properly, how to store them safely, and how to use them in a proper and safe manner that's not going to be a danger to the public. I have taken every test that has been the law to take, and I've passed it. So has my wife; she even beat me on the one test by 1 per cent. I think that it's fair and reasonable to test the person to make sure that the person is responsible and safe to own a firearm.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Marz: You'll have your turn.

I see that my time is up, Mr. Speaker, so I'll sit down, unless I can have unanimous consent to continue. I'd be happy to.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: You don't have unanimous consent.

The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today, but I feel somewhat strange because to some extent I feel I should begin my speech by saying: I'm an Albertan, and I defied the registry. I feel like I'm at an AA meeting because there are so many Albertans around that have defied the registry.

There are only two people in this province that openly defied the registry and continue to do so. One of them is a decorated war veteran. He served in several peacekeeping missions for this province all around the globe, and he served as a Sergeant-at-Arms of this Legislature for several years. He also served as security for one of our Premiers for several years, Mr. Speaker. I also have to add that that individual, Mr. Oscar Lacombe, was at a rally last night in St. Paul to inquire of people what they thought about his defiance of the firearms registry. In St. Paul 400 people showed up. Four hundred people showed up in St. Paul to shake his hand. Over 300 waited in a line-up to shake his hand; 80 of them were youths. There were aboriginals, there were seniors, there were people of all stripes, there were children there to thank him for defying the registry.

I'm also an individual who defied the registry, for better or for worse, Mr. Speaker. I've had people who suggested that I shouldn't. I've had people from one end of this country to the other who have phoned to thank me for doing that. Whether or not that's good, I don't claim to be any sort of great leader, but I took my inspiration from Gandhi, who said two things: one, that every single individual, every single citizen, has not only the right but the duty to protest a law that they consider to be bad, but they can never once expect to be exempt from the consequences that they'll experience from defying that law until such time as that law is changed. The second

thing he said was to do it peacefully, not by demonstrations, not by violence, but to just say: I will not comply.

Mr. Speaker, I defied the registry because \$1 billion was used when \$2 million was the promise that it would cost. One billion dollars was used to create the registry – \$1 billion. Just to put that into perspective, if you spent \$1 million per day, it would take you almost three years to spend \$1 billion. We're not talking about a difference between \$1 million and \$10 million. We're talking about \$1 million and \$1 billion. If you spent \$1,000 a day, it would take you 3,000 years to spend \$1 billion. Those numbers are almost incomprehensible to the average Albertan.

Not only did I defy it for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, but in February or March of 2003 when the RCMP announced that they're aware of almost 1,000 people in this province that are producing child pornography and exchanging it over the Internet, they also announced at the same time that they do not have the manpower and resources to go after those 1,000 people, who I think anybody in this country would say are real criminals. One billion dollars would have paid for 2,500 police officers for four years that could have spent all of their time ending child pornography production in this country. It could have put at least two MRI machines, not counting operating fees, which could have lasted for a year or two years – two MRI machines – in each federal constituency in this country. That's what \$1 billion could have done.

9:20

I've heard the argument made a hundred times before that if it saves one child's life or one woman's life from somebody who's wild and crazy with a gun, the \$1 billion spent on the registry is worth it, Mr. Speaker. But think of the children's lives it could have saved: \$1 billion dollars to end child pornography. Think of the lives it could have saved to put two MRI machines in every federal riding in this country. That's worth \$1 billion.

It's just wrong. The issue should have dealt with real crime, Mr. Speaker. It should have dealt with real problems. The issue, when it was debated, when it was discussed, deceived Albertans into thinking that this was a crime bill, that this would have dealt with crime.

I am supportive of this motion. I've been supportive of this motion since I first heard about it, since it was introduced in this Legislature, and I've supported every single argument I've heard in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, but I think that this motion does lack one thing. It doesn't address licensing. There is no law in this country yet that forces any Canadian to have a licence to own property. I've heard people discuss how we have to have a licence to drive a vehicle, and we do have to have a licence to drive a vehicle, but we don't have to have a licence to own a vehicle. We have that vehicle. We can have any property that we want, but we have to have a licence to know how to use it.

I think that the licensing should have been addressed in this motion. It should have addressed having a licence to use a firearm, perhaps to some extent to own one, but the licensing strictly deals with whether or not you get to own a firearm. That's whether or not you get to own property. Whether people realize it or not, the removal of that licence suddenly removes from citizens the right to own that property because they have to have a licence to have the right to own it. Mr. Speaker, I think that's wrong. I think we need to address that more. I think that it needs to be considered more.

I still support this motion, Mr. Speaker, because as Confucius said, the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, and I think this is the first step to progress. So I encourage all members to support this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that last intervention, by the hon. Member for Wainwright, has caused me to rise to my feet and propose some changes to this motion. You know, the concept that someone would quote Mahatma Gandhi in favour of the right to own guns just absolutely is ludicrous, and the suggestion that the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi would be appealed to in this manner I think would make him turn over in his grave.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things about this motion that I believe are true. [interjections] I know you're enthusiastic. I said "some." You have to wait for it. The suggestion that the billion dollar expenditure was a waste of money is something I absolutely agree with. There's no doubt about it that a billion dollars is an enormous amount of money, far more than really should have been the case. It's an example of wasteful government spending. It's an example of mismanagement of public funds.

It's also an example of how people can drive up the costs of a program by a deliberate campaign to thwart the original intentions, and that is also true in this case. There was plenty of coverage over the past few years of organized groups deliberately trying to drive up the costs of this registry by flat out refusal to co-operate with it and attempts to thwart it, but that doesn't excuse the tremendous waste of money that has taken place on this registry. I tend to agree with those members that say that the money might have been better allocated at reducing violence in other ways. I think that's probably a fair statement.

I cannot resist, Mr. Speaker, drawing a comparison to the waste of money we've seen by this government in other areas. That makes this billion dollars pale in comparison. I wish that members that focus on the waste of the federal government and that Albertans and Canadians who focus so much on the waste of the federal government would also hold this provincial government to the same standard, because they often don't. If you look at the costs, for example, of electricity deregulation, you'll find that they are many times greater than the cost of this gun registry, and I believe that a good estimate right now is somewhere between \$6 billion to \$8 billion. Don't forget that before the last election . . .

Mr. Smith: A point of order. Under *Beauchesne* 333 I wonder if the member would entertain a question.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you just have to say yes or no.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you are allowed to ask questions at the end under this; are you not?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you are.

Mr. Mason: Then I would be happy to entertain questions from the hon. minister or other members at that time.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Mason: I wanted to indicate that just in the rebates alone for natural gas and electricity in the run-up to the last provincial election, it totalled according to the government's own figures \$4.2 billion. [interjections]

**Speaker's Ruling
Decorum**

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, just a reminder. We have one

person speaking at a time, and the only member that has been recognized is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. One of the other members who is wishing to speak again must be reminded that they just had the one shot at it and you've had it. To the other member who seemed to be engaged in it, wait your turn.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to anticipate some objections to that line of argument, I will indicate that about half of that went into various rebate programs for electricity. Yes, Albertans got the money, but it went right back to the power companies. The reason that the government brought in this series of programs was because of the outrageous jump in electricity prices which happened, unfortunately for the government, right before the election. So, yes, it went through the chequing accounts of Albertans, but it didn't stay there long. Had the government not meddled in the sensible electricity system we had, these would have been unnecessary.

Since that time, higher electricity prices have cumulatively cost Albertans and Alberta businesses billions of additional dollars, Mr. Speaker. For those members that are outraged by the billion dollar boondoggle of the federal government on the gun registry, I wish that they would turn their compassion for the taxpayer and the wallets of voters onto this government and hold it to the same standard that the federal government has been held to. None of this excuses the federal government at all for the boondoggle that this gun registry has become. It's outrageous, and I don't mean to minimize that or to suggest in any way that we should not be outraged by these costs.

Another question, that I'm less clear on, Mr. Speaker, is the question of whether or not this program has been in any way effective in reducing crime. I think that properly thought out, a registry might have been part of a good series of programs to control crime and the growth of firearms. But I also tend to agree with those who say that guns that are used primarily for hunting or for sport – that is, the long guns – are less of a problem than the flood of cheap handguns into this country from the United States. That is a very serious problem, that is ongoing now, and we have now in this country more handguns per capita than just about any country in the world except the United States.

9:30

Those members who support this nice, open border with the United States ought to consider what exactly we are getting for our money when it comes to this open arrangement with the United States. There are now millions of illegal handguns in this country, Mr. Speaker, and I do believe that the federal government and this government have a responsibility to do whatever they can to stem that flow.

I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that with the growth of gangs across this country, especially in major urban areas, these guns will soon be put to use. There's going to be a ripple effect from that, and more and more people will make use of the guns. It's not that the guns aren't here in Canada; it's that we tend not to use them. We've seen recently in the city of Toronto a significant jump in gun-related deaths, and much of that has to do with gang activity and organized crime. That is coming here as well. I think, quite frankly, that working to eliminate gangs and organized crime is a key element in any responsible government's crime-related strategy.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points with this resolution that I do not agree with, and those are in the suggestion that it "is an

unnecessary intrusion [into] the property rights and cultural heritage of Albertans." I don't know what some members think our cultural heritage is comprised of, but the right to have guns or to have guns that are in some way unlicensed, unregistered and so on has never been, in my view, part of our fundamental property rights or of our cultural heritage. It's certainly true that in rural areas guns form an important part of the economic activity, but to suggest that it's part of our cultural heritage is, in my view, a misrepresentation of the rich cultural heritage of western Canada and of Alberta. As a result, Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment to the resolution. I'll ask that it be distributed.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, would you move it, and then we'll wait a few minutes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Yes. Mr. Speaker, I move that Government Motion 15 be amended by striking out "is an unnecessary intrusion on the property rights and cultural heritage of Albertans."

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands, you may commence.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I indicated, I think that there are certain problems with the gun registry as it has evolved, but I don't believe that intrusion into property rights and the cultural heritage of Albertans is among them.

Certainly, New Democrats are very supportive of the efforts to reduce the number of firearms in society. I think that we need to give priority to the reduction of illegal handguns, which are flooding into the country from the United States, but we recognize that there are certain legitimate uses for firearms: protection of people, for example, who may be out in wild areas on seismic lines or something like that, or for hunting purposes, for shooting purposes in clubs, and so on. They certainly have important uses on the farm and so on. Those things need to be recognized and taken into account, and we don't support turning those people into criminals.

This language in the resolution, elevating guns into some sort of cultural icon or to suggest that property rights cannot be circumscribed in some way by the government in the interest of the public good, just doesn't stand up. It's not consistent, and it adds very little to the resolution. So we would propose that this section be struck from the resolution before we vote on it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On amendment A1, the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Hancock: Just a very brief comment with respect to this very essential section of the resolution. It speaks to very many people in Alberta and I think advisedly so, so I would encourage that we reject the amendment.

I'd like just to put on the record and quote some comments that were written in a judgment that was issued in the Provincial Court not too long ago with respect to a licensing application. The front page of the newspapers in our area and perhaps others took one portion of that judgment and blew it up, and it became quite a controversial statement for a day or two.

When I was asked to comment on it, I indicated that, first of all, I wouldn't comment on any of the merits of the case because it was still before the courts, and I won't tonight. But I also said that I couldn't comment in detail, although the language was flowery with respect to that particular section, and that I would hope that people wouldn't take it as a call to have to go out and buy guns to protect themselves. I wanted to read the judgment before I made any further comment.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have read the judgment, and I'd like to quote a couple of parts from the judgment because it's a very well-reasoned judgment. Again, I'm not commenting on the issue, which was a licensing issue with respect to a particular individual. The judgment says:

It merits judicial notice that the widespread ownership of firearms by ordinary Canadians for subsistence and sport hunting is a long-standing and economically important part of Canada's history and culture.

It also says:

First, one prominent if not fundamental characteristic of a free and democratic society – which s.1 the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms seemingly implies Canada to be – is that citizens of such society generally are “at liberty” or “free” to possess and acquire property without first having to obtain permission from a governmental bureaucrat or the judiciary. In a free and democratic society any exception or deviation from the general rule deserves close scrutiny even though mandated by law.

It goes on in other matters that deal more with the licensing aspect. But it says:

Casual or ambitious administration of the law's exceptions to the general rule could endanger substantially that prominent, socially important, and historically ingrained characteristic of Canadian society.

Mr. Speaker, it is something that may not be historically or culturally important to every single Canadian or every single Albertan, but I think it's well shown in the controversy that this particular registry has raised across this country over the years since it was brought in in 1995 that it is historically significant and culturally important to a great many Albertans, and for that reason we should leave the clause in.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Now, if I remember correctly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands had finished his speech.

Mr. Mason: Well, all except for questions, Mr. Speaker.

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: That's what I was getting to. Thank you.

We did have a certain member – it seems to me it was the Minister of Energy – who was interested in asking a question or making a comment. Are you going to waive that?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I will.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you will waive. Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments and then a question to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. It wasn't too long ago in this House where we heard about the unfortunate incident where an RCMP officer was shot by a person that I think perhaps all of us would agree should not have had a gun. We also had a case not long ago in Sundre where an estranged husband with a sawed-off shotgun murdered his ex-wife and her boyfriend. We also know that most women who are killed by their estranged spouses or partners are killed with guns.

We certainly all agree with the comments made by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East that society changes, and one of the things that has changed in our society is the way we deal with people with mental health issues. In Alberta we have many, many more people on the streets now because of the changes in our mental health policies. We also have a situation in the province and in the

country where there is an increasing use of handguns in crimes that are being committed.

So my question to the hon. member would be: what sort of impact do you think the changes in our mental health policies in this province have contributed to the unsafe use of firearms in the province?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. I think the hon. member raises a good point, and that is that if you're going to address the question of gun violence in society, you need to approach it from many angles at once. If I can allow myself this terrible pun, there's no silver bullet to solve this problem.

With respect to mental health issues, that's very important. You know, I remember that a couple of years ago a young mentally ill man was shot but not killed by police in Coronation park in Edmonton after he shot a police dog. I remember the outpouring of sympathy for the police dog, you know, and almost nothing about this poor young man with a tortured soul, and I just think that this reflects very badly on the attitudes that we have in our society towards mentally ill people.

I think that the government has deinstitutionalized lots of people for very good reasons and then failed to provide the necessary supports to make sure that they're able to function. I think this has also contributed not just to these instances but also to the growth of homelessness in our communities.

So I believe that if you're going to get at gun violence, you need to have a very comprehensive approach to the whole question. Gun control is a key element of that, but it has to be intelligent gun control.

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker is the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two points to my argument today, and one of them has to do with the registration itself. I'd like to enter some statistics that are not very good. The system has a 71 per cent error rate in licensing owners and a 91 per cent error rate in registering individual guns. The government admits that it has registered 718,414 guns without a serial number. A gun's federal registration certificate does not include or contain the name of the owner, the model, calibre, or the magazine capacity. There are known to be at least 222,911 unexplained duplications. The government spent \$29 million on advertising the gun registry, including \$4.5 million to Groupaction, which is now under investigation. Pistols have been federally registered since 1934, yet there is no case on record of a handgun being used in a crime by its registered owner. What's reasonable to suggest, Mr. Speaker, is that this has made criminals out of 1 million Canadians, unfortunately.

My argument goes a little bit deeper than the gun itself. My argument is with the bill. Mr. Speaker, this is a copy of the bill, page 1 of 59. The intent of the bill I believe, in all fairness to the government, was to protect Canadians. That would have been accomplished by a one-page bill that said: if you commit a crime and you use a firearm in Canada, you will go to jail for a minimum amount of time, no exceptions. I would think that all of the hon. colleagues here would agree. That should have been able to fit on one page, but we have 59 pages.

Some parts of the bill I find extremely troublesome. I don't believe the average Canadian understands what we're giving up when we allow this kind of legislation. I would like to just touch very briefly on some of the points. We'll start with the investigation. I want to read section 55.(2).

Without restricting the scope of the inquiries that may be made with respect to an application for a licence, a chief firearms officer may conduct an investigation of the applicant, which may consist of interviews with neighbours, community workers, social workers, individuals who work or live with the applicant, spouse or common-law partner, former spouse or former common-law partner, dependants or whomever in the opinion of the chief firearms officer may provide information pertaining to whether the applicant is eligible under section 5 to hold a licence.

I wonder how many of us would get a driver's licence if they had to ask our neighbours and anybody we ever knew. Section 5, for your information, Mr. Speaker, pretty well defines everybody. So if you want to get a licence, they have the right to talk to virtually anybody you have ever met, and I don't believe Canadians want that for this type of registration. This is a little bit scary.

I want to go a little further, to the burden of proof. I believe that it is absolutely fundamental in this society, in any just society, that you are innocent until you are proven guilty. That should be one of the cornerstones, and I believe most hon. members here would agree with that. But let's read this one, burden of proof, section (3) under 75. We're already on page 27.

At the hearing of the reference, the burden of proof is on the applicant or holder to satisfy the provincial court judge that the refusal to issue or revocation of the licence, registration certificate or authorization, the decision or the refusal to approve or revocation of the approval was not justified.

You are guilty if they say you're guilty, and it is up to you to prove to them that you're not. Whether it's a gun or whether it's your own grain or whether it's anything else that you deal with, that is simply not fair in my opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Now, let's talk about the failure to register. We've heard several hon. members talk about the connection between a car, between a gun, whatever. They're all good arguments, but let's talk about what happens when you don't register. Whoa. [interjection] That's what happens.

112.(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), every person commits an offence who, not having previously committed an offence under this subsection or subsection 91(1) or 92(1) of the Criminal Code, possesses a firearm that is neither a prohibited firearm nor a restricted firearm without being the holder of a registration certificate for the firearm.

Basically, if you've got a gun, you're a criminal.

9:50

You know what? I have a 16-year-old son who was told by his grandfather, who was diagnosed with liver cancer, that he wasn't going to live very long and would like to give him his shotgun. Now, that might not seem like much to most people. As a young child I grew up hunting continually. His grandfather still hunts to this day. Thank God for a heck of a health care system. He's still here, costing us more and more every day. But when he thought he was going, he wanted to give a very prized possession of his to his grandson.

Well, I don't have all the certificates you need to have a gun. Just a little bit too lazy, I guess, or for whatever reason. He couldn't accept that gun because I didn't have the right documentation in my household, him being a minor, for his grandfather to give him that gun. No. If his grandfather had died without my getting the proper documentation or my son getting to be 18, that gun was gone. Or if we had it in the house, we were criminals. Yes, that's the way it is, hon. members.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I will never be accused of being the voice of reason, so we don't need a question unless you want to.

But the fact is that the government should have never said: we

know what's best. [interjection] I'll be very quick. Let's talk about what the average Albertan or the average Canadian expects from the police or from people investigating them.

103. The owner or person in charge of a place that is inspected by an inspector under section 102 and every person found in the place shall

- (a) give the inspector all reasonable assistance to enable him or her to carry out the inspection and exercise any power conferred by section 102; and
- (b) provide the inspector with any information relevant to the enforcement of this Act or the regulations that he or she may reasonably require.

That is a novel idea. "Mr. Drug Dealer, will you tell us where your drugs are hidden?" "I don't have to." "Mr. Gun Owner, will you tell us where your guns are?" "I don't have to." Yes, you do, under this legislation.

I will end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that people expect us to do the right thing. They expect that in the position we are in, we will see through a lot of the complications of a system that sometimes seems to be run by people out of touch. I have to bring you back to an article in the *Calgary Herald*. We are expecting people to have to live under these rules of allowing them into whatever part of our house, and here's what the principal of a Calgary high school says: we would need just cause to use the canine services in the belief that a student had an illegal substance in their possession or in their locker. That is a tragedy, that we need to have just cause.

I don't know that that is the legal situation, but if the perception in the public is that we need to have just cause to put police dogs in the schools to find out that our students are using drugs and yet we're obligated to open our houses and buildings to people to come and inspect for guns, that's just wrong. It's not what the average Albertan and certainly the average Canadian wants. I would hope that we send a very strong message from here that says: "We all care about safety, and we all care about having lives that are free. We can move, and we can be safe to go to the store. But we're also free. We're also allowed to own things, to have things we've rightly acquired. And if we don't break the law, don't come looking for us."

Mr. Speaker, this is just a message to the federal government to say: "You made a little mistake here. Could you please fix it? Could you please give back gun owners their decency and their respect and get out of our lives, where we don't need it? Put criminals in jail, and put us back on the road to doing what we do best, which is work and raise our families."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a lively debate, and I want to join in here with a very short debate. I just want to say categorically that I'm against violence and killings, and I do not tolerate criminal and illegal activities. I am for tough, deterrent penalties. I'm for weapons control, being guns or otherwise. However, I'm against the current gun registry program, and I will tell you why in simple terms.

If the purpose of the current registry is to prevent death by gunshot, it is definitely not effective. If the purpose of the current registry is to prevent the criminal element from obtaining weapons, it is again not effective at all. On top of this ineffectiveness, the current gun registry program is costly. It's already wasted millions of hard-earned taxpayers' dollars, and if we do not stop it now, it will cost billions of taxpayers' dollars, which can be used for better, more high priority programs.

Mr. Speaker, I learned a lot of wisdom from my late father. He

was an educator and historical scholar. I remember that he told us as children that prevention is always the best solution. Our family residence was on a beautiful riverbank, and once he told us that the best way to remove things floating down the river is to go upstream and stop people from throwing them in. So I recommend that the hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars in the current gun registry be redeployed to prevention activities.

Mr. Speaker, it is also well understood that weapons do not kill, but people do. So the best way to prevent murder and criminal killing is to spend resources in education, in employment creation, in conflict mediation. Another way to deter potential criminals is by having a tough legal system. Let's improve our penalty system to make it a more effective deterrent. In these two ways I don't think it will cost billions and may even save billions.

To conclude, I support this motion in debate, and I recommend that all members vote for it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that everyone is getting rather tired and would like us to be short, and I will. But I want to be on record as representing our constituents, none of whom ever called in 12 years and asked for any type of legislation to do with registration, gun control, or anything that smells or breathes like this legislation that has been discussed tonight.

I do support the motion that the Government House Leader has brought forward. I do want to thank my colleagues for Cardston-Taber-Warner, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Vermilion-Lloydminster, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and especially Wainwright. They truly represent what the ordinary people in Little Bow actually say all the time, and I do want to honestly thank them.

There was a comment and a subsequent amendment made that dealt with culture and property rights. Just as an observation from somebody who doesn't stand up and speak an awful lot on a lot of government bills, sometimes it seems to me that people throw forward amendments to motions simply because they just don't want to say yes or no. They want to be politically correct, or they want to be a wordsmith and make it sound different.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a citation?

Point of Order

Reflections on a Decision of the Assembly

Mr. Mason: Basically, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the section, but I do know the rule, and that is that once the House has made a decision, you're not allowed to reflect on it. The hon. member had an opportunity to speak to the amendment and chose not to. He missed his chance.

The Deputy Speaker: Little Bow on the purported point of order.

Mr. McFarland: I'll hit him on another one.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, it is a perfect point of order in the sense that if you're going to reflect on it, it seems to me more in the breach than in the keeping.

Anyway, hon. Member for Little Bow, would you continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. McFarland: The point that I was trying to make is that there

were a couple of comments that took away from the actual motion we're discussing. One was on power deregulation, which I don't quite connect. But in hindsight I would like Albertans to remember that there's no way you should compare power deregulation to a fiasco. The way that my colleague from Wainwright brought the argument forward, I would remind Albertans that this was the government that took a \$23 billion debt and reduced it to a bit below \$3 billion, and that's a lot of MRIs.

10:00

Finally, on the mental health issue, I do have a lot of empathy for people who suffer from illness, but let's not forget to put ourselves in the shoes of the police officers and the RCMP officers out on the street who have to deal with people that have a problem. I'm sure that they've got loved ones at home that would rather they be using their gun as a precautionary measure than be a victim, as three of us who were involved with the mental health review a number of years ago found out, Mr. Speaker.

When we've taken over half of our hospital beds in mental health institutions and put them into communities, what more could you have expected? It wasn't because the government wanted to put the people in the communities. It was the people themselves who felt so inclined to have people that have a mental disability put into communities.

The point that I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that clearly the committee that looked at that issue a number of years ago identified that those people coming out into our communities needed anywhere from three to five core support services, and they are not being provided. That's a different issue altogether.

I do support this. I just wanted once again to thank the colleagues who brought all the good arguments forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and comment on Government Motion 15. This is when it's fun being an Alberta Liberal, because I get to disagree with my colleagues. We get to have a good debate on things, and we all have a free vote.

I believe in gun control. I believe in the gun registry. I don't believe in waste, I don't believe in poor management, and I don't believe in poor planning. Let me be clear about that. I think that the federal government may well have screwed up this gun registry, but I still believe in a gun registry, and I will continue to support it and support the idea of it.

On the idea that's captured in this motion that somehow guns are a part of cultural heritage, I'll challenge that and say that I'm an Albertan and it doesn't speak to my cultural heritage. If we want to speak about my cultural heritage, if we want to go far enough back and talk about weapons, then I'm talking about a broadsword, and I'm out there in the hills wearing a kilt. Really, what my cultural heritage is as an Albertan would be a plow or a spud wrench or a rig chain, but a gun is not part of my cultural heritage. I want a gun registry, I want gun control, and I want it to work.

Ms Calahasen: Actually, mine is bows and arrows.

Ms Blakeman: That's fine, Madam Minister. You're welcome to get up and speak to this if you'd like to.

There's been quite a bit of discussion that I've heard this evening as I've listened to the speakers about who are the real criminals and that it's not right that certain people are called criminals because of this legislation. I have less difficulty with that. People who break

the law are criminals. If a law was passed that says that you're not to do something and you do it and you break that law, then you're a criminal. So I have less conflict than some of my hon. colleagues in this Assembly about who is a criminal.

I think there are crimes committed by average people using guns who prior to committing that crime definitely would not have considered themselves a criminal or have said that they had any criminal intent. They definitely didn't see themselves as a criminal. They still took a gun and used it on someone. That made them a criminal.

On behalf of the women that are killed by their intimate partners, on behalf of others who believe in gun control – and there are Albertans who believe in gun control; there are Albertans who believe in a gun registry – I will not be supporting this government motion.

I wondered, when I first saw this government motion, whether it wasn't mischief-making on behalf of the government because there's been some talk about: well, all the money that's been wasted on this registry – and I think to a certain extent there has been money wasted on this registry – could've been spent on all of these other things. Really. Yes. And would the members in here have supported spending that money on other things: on mental health support, on domestic violence, on sexual assault programs?

Let's reach even further back if we want to talk about people who find themselves in a position where they're using a gun and they don't seem to have the education or the upbringing to help them make those choices that they wouldn't use a gun in a situation. Let's reach further back. Would there have been support for things like Head Start programs, for things like Success by Six programs, for early childhood education, for full-day kindergarten? Would that support have been from this Assembly? Let's reach even further back. Let's truly eradicate child poverty and any of the other things that we can trace to people who make poor life choices. But I don't think that we would have had that support. I don't think that those choices would have been made instead. I don't think that money would have been directed to these programs.

I've heard people say that the cost was terrible. Well, if that was true, then why did this provincial government make choices that increased the cost of this program nationally? That's a direct result of the choices that this government made, and that increased the cost of this program. So when people get up and go on and on about the cost of this program federally, Alberta made choices that contributed to that cost, deliberately so. And who is taking responsibility for that in this Assembly tonight? No one I've heard so far.

There's been some discussion about long guns and handguns. You know what, Mr. Speaker? I don't care. I really don't care. I don't want to see guns used in the commission of crimes. I don't want to see long guns, short guns, medium-range guns, or torpedoes. I don't care, and I don't think the length of the gun barrel is a distinguishing enough feature to somehow justify not registering the gun. Sorry. Doesn't count with me.

There's also been quite a bit of discussion here that somehow this gun registry program is going to stop people using guns for things they like to use those guns for, that they wouldn't be able to go out and participate in their local gun club, that they wouldn't be able to go out and shoot varmints in the backyard, that they wouldn't be able to go and shoot wildlife. That's absolutely ridiculous. Nothing in this legislation restricts that. It says that you need a firearms acquisition certificate and you're to register your gun. It doesn't say that you can't join a gun club. It doesn't say that you can't go out with a registered gun, with your firearms acquisition certificate in your back pocket, and shoot varmints in your backyard. Nothing stops you from doing those things, so a number of the arguments I've heard here tonight simply don't hold water.

I will go back to where I started. I believe in gun control. I believe in gun registration. I will not support this Motion 15 brought forward by the government. I suspect I'm the only person in here tonight that's probably going to vote against this, but I'm okay with that. I will stand here in support of those Albertans who do believe in gun control and do believe in gun registration, and I'm proud to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, I'd like to ask a question of the hon. member. Given that more people are killed by big knives than are by guns on an annual basis, should we also have a big knife registry? And given that people are killed by ropes and strings through strangulation, should we have a rope and string registry? Given that people are sometime suffocated by pillows, should we have a pillow registry? Given that some people are killed by poison, should we have a poison registry? Where does it end?

Ms Blakeman: I took this debate seriously. I wish you would give it the same respect.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have another question, Drayton Valley-Calmar?

10:10

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious question. This is the exact thing that Albertans are asking. They're saying: where does it end? Are we going to have to register the family dog because people have been killed by dogs in the past? Let's be realistic. The registry doesn't work.

Ms Blakeman: You have a licence for your dog.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the passion that's been exhibited in this Legislature this evening with respect to this issue indicates exactly how important it is to Albertans. It's not that there's any Albertan who believes that guns should be used in a criminal manner or that guns should be used for criminal purposes. It's not that Albertans believe that guns shouldn't be treated with respect and treated in a safe and careful manner. It's not that Albertans don't believe that the law should be followed.

I think we've heard from many Albertans and their representatives here tonight that Albertans do believe that gun control should be done properly, that it should be done with a purpose in mind, which is to create safe communities, to make Canada a safer place. Therefore, it should be done carefully and aimed at where it can do the most good, and that is by strengthening the criminal law to make the use of a gun in a criminal matter a strongly punished offence so that people know and understand that we don't put up with the use of guns in an improper way.

But there's also a need to respect the property rights of individuals, to respect the cultural heritage, and while it may not be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's cultural heritage – and I can say that it's not my cultural heritage. My ancestors, my father and grandfather, other than participating in a world war were not people who used guns for their livelihood or for their cultural heritage. But the fact that it's not my cultural heritage doesn't mean that it's not an

important part of the cultural heritage of the province and of many people of the province.

The fact that I don't own a gun doesn't mean that owning a gun isn't important to someone else. By basically having been a person who moved to the city, although I grew up in a rural area and did hunt when I was younger, and don't have a gun now, it doesn't mean that there aren't many people who do still want to have guns either for subsistence or for sport or for some other rationale as has been explained in this House, even the rationale that that gun might be an important family heirloom to them, having been passed down from a grandfather or from someone else.

In my own family I'm aware of a situation where, for example, an individual was a chief of police and had a gun that was important to him in terms of his role as the chief of police and passed that down through the family. It's probably not registered, and it's probably not capable of being registered, but it is a family heirloom.

The fact of the matter is that it doesn't impact each of us in the same way, Mr. Speaker; it doesn't mean that it's not important to some people, many people in this country. We ought to urge, and I would hope unanimously, the federal government to revisit the concept of the registry, to take it out of the Criminal Code, to take all registering and licensing out of the Criminal Code, to leave in the Criminal Code those things which are criminal, which is using guns in an inappropriate manner for criminal purposes.

Take the control of guns and the licensing, put that in the Firearms Act, and take the registry and delete, as this motion refers to, the concept of the registry of nonrestricted weapons because that does not serve a purpose. That's what's wasting money. That's what's offending Albertans and Canadians. That money could be used to help create safety in our communities, to help deal with some of the issues that ought to be dealt with and that we ought to be applying our laws usefully to do.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 15 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Goudreau	Mar
Amery	Graham	Marz
Bonner	Griffiths	Maskell
Calahasen	Hancock	McClellan
Cao	Hutton	McFarland
Cardinal	Jablonski	Melchin
Carlson	Jacobs	Nicol
Coutts	Johnson	Oberg
DeLong	Klapstein	Pham
Doerksen	Knight	Smith
Ducharme	Kryczka	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lougheed	Yankowsky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Blakeman

Totals: For – 37 Against – 1

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]