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Police support long gun registry

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BLAIR ANDREWS

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The Chatham-Kent Police Services Board strongly opposes the move to scrap the long gun registry.

Conservative MP Candice Heoppner's private member's bill to abolish the registry is coming up for a third and final vote.

At Tuesday's board meeting, Chief Dennis Poole said that although the registry had a controversial beginning and was criticized for significant cost overruns, it has become a valuable tool for police to track firearms in Canada.

"In most cases, guns that are used in crimes come from law-abiding citizens who have had their homes broken into or had their weapons stolen," Poole said. "And it certainly allows us to trace those weapons back or account for them, even years later when they show up, either in a pawn shop or in the hands of a criminal."

In his report to the board, Poole said the registry is used thousands of times each day by police when answering calls such as domestic disputes.

The board accepted a recommendation to outline its position to Chatham-Kent MP Dave Van Kesteren.

Board member Uly Bondy suggested a firm message should be sent.

"We hear about rifles not being used (in crimes). Most of the incidences that you can see on television in the past few years have involved long rifles," Bondy said. "I think a very strong message should be sent to the government, which we will do."

Van Kesteren said he "respectfully disagrees" with the board's position to keep the long gun registry. Despite the official positions stated by associations of police chiefs and officers, he countered that there are many in the law enforcement community that agree with government's position to abolish the registry.

Van Kesteren believes the gun registry has been wasteful and has accomplished very little.

"There are thousands upon thousands of guns that are not listed in the registry. When I talk to police officers, they tell me that any time that they would make an inquiry (to the registry), they still treat it as a situation as they don't know what is on the other end," he said.

Van Kesteren also claimed that most gun crimes are committed with guns that are smuggled into Canada from the United States.

A parliamentary committee is studying the private member's bill - Bill C-391 - before it receives third and final reading.

While the timing is uncertain, Van Kesteren said MPs could vote on the legislation within a few weeks.

"I think it could very well be out of committee before we (the House) rise. That would be in the summer. If not, then the fall."