

*The following text is a transcript from the book “The Passionate Politics of Shaughnessy Cohen” by Susan Delacourt. It takes you behind the closed doors of Parliament. It tells the story of the birth of Bill C-68.*

## **Law & Order**

Paul Martin’s draconian budget in February 1995 brought a final end to the dreams of the activities on the Human Resources Committee, but the futility of their attempt at social policy reform had been obvious for months before. Lloyd Axworthy’s social policy task force had fared no better. In May 1994, its members had gathered at the Government Conference Centre in downtown Ottawa - a site haunted by several doomed attempts at constitutional reforms in the ‘80s earlier ‘90s – and found they could not even agree on which chapter of their report to draft first.

Fortunately for the Liberal Left, there was consolation to be found right across the road at the Congress Center where, that same May week-end, thousands of Liberals had assembled for the party’s first post election convention. They basked in their first opportunity in the decade to hold a policy convention as the governing federal party. Though the mood of the gathering was triumphal, there were plenty of questions hanging in the air. What was the party supposed to do with its regained hold on the nation? Liberals, elected and otherwise, appeared to have resigned themselves to the cost – cutting government. The trick was to find ways to be liberal without spending money.

One possible answer landed on the floor of the convention, thanks to some high-level manoeuvring by backroom strategies and by the women’s contingent within the party. Labelled Resolution No.14, it was a 6 – point plan to severely limit gun ownership in Canada, and it was put before the delegates by the National Liberal Women’s Commission, an arm of the party designed to insure female representation in the ranks and in policy decisions. The gun control resolution called for increased penalties on the criminal use of firearms and their illegal importation, a ban on private ownership of military assault weapons, strict controls over ammunition sales and handgun ownership, and, most significant, a national system of gun registration.

No one missed the symbolic importance of the resolution of its sponsor: gun control was being flagged as a bona fide women’s issue for the Chrétien government. Women voters were crucial to the Liberal Party; in sheer numbers and motivation to vote, they were a powerful group. Moreover, women were not, by and large, Reform voters. A strong gun control policy would seal the gender advantage that the Liberals enjoyed. At

the same time, they could steal some of the Reform's thunder as the party of law and order. Canadians appeared to be in the mood to get tough on crime. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien took Resolution No. 14 and ran with it at the convention's close.

"Though talk is easy," Chrétien said, to loud applause from more than two thousand Liberals in the room. "What Canadians want and what we must provide is though action. There shouldn't be any more weapons in our streets or in our play grounds." He said that he wanted gun control legislation introduced in the Commons by the fall.

Chrétien knew it would be a hard sale, though. This government needed a white Knight or two to carry gun control to the Canadian people. The duty fell to Justice Minister Alan Rock, the idealistic novice who was quickly immersing as one of the stars of the Chrétien cabinet. A former corporate litigator, he was earnest, young, and attractive – especially to women voters; central casting couldn't have produced a finer champion for gun control. And he appreciated the political dividends of good timing. "It was a very difficult time for all of us because we were faced with a ruinous financial situation," Rock said. "We had to make some tough choices. But in the Justice Field there were things we'd undertaken in the Red Book that we could follow through on because they didn't depend on economic circumstances. They were issues of principle, or they were social policies that weren't costly in the economic sense but were important from the point of view of Liberal philosophy."

Chrétien said that his government believed fundamentally in the links between the old "Just Society" and a fiscally sound society. "Of course those great ideas for money from 1993 to 1998 were not encouraged, let's put it this way, because we had to balance the books. But it's all interrelated... It is the kind of society you want, and you cannot just settled problems through justice. You have to have an economy to sustain it, and you have to have the ideal of sharing among people."

The other benefit of this justice focus, said pollster Michael Marzolini, was that it allowed the party to put Alan Rock, and "asset" to be exploited, in the window. Rock didn't need to be conscripted to the anti-gun crusade. He was adamantly opposed to gun ownership. If allowed his own way, he would have taken guns out of the hands of all citizens, except police officers and military personnel. At the very least, he liked the idea of removing guns from all urban areas. He had the party's backing for that notion: Marzolini's firm had developed an ad campaign before the election for "gun-free zones in the three major urban centers." But the Liberals enthusiasm for the scheme was tempered in the end. First, rural MPs had pleaded with Chrétien in early 1993 to downplay gun control in the Red Book. Then Marzolini found in pre-election focus groups that, despite their fondness for gun control, women voters shared with men

voters the fixation on employment issues. “What has this got to do with jobs?” women asked Marzolini’s pollsters when they were showed the gun control proposal. After the election, Rock had been pulled aside by MPs such as Derek Lee who, although they represented urban areas, advocated a go-slow, incremental approach to gun control.

But by the spring of 1994, the pressure for anti-gun legislation was mounting, especially after a high-profile shooting death in Toronto in April, the killing of 23-year-old Georgina Leimonis at the Just Desserts Café. Shortly after the convention a Toronto police constable, Todd Baylis, was shot dead. The 1989 tragedy at the École Polytechnique in Montréal, where Marc Lépine shot and killed 14 young women before turning a weapon on himself; remain fixed in the public’s memory.

Bob Nault, a no-nonsense kind of Liberal from the Ontario riding of Kenora-Rainy River, was serving his second term. Not yet 40 years old, he saw himself as just a regular guy from a part of the country where, as he said, “guns are part of the furniture.” He fervently hopes that the Liberals would leave gun control alone, but he knew he was up against formidable opposition. Eddie Goldenberg, the prime minister’s right-hand man since the 1970s, had proved impervious to Nault’s pleas. In the midst of the 1993 campaign, when Nault was unpleasantly surprised to see a press release issued on the Liberals anti-gun position – even after he and others had managed to keep the stricter measures out of the Red Book - he placed an angry telephone call to Goldenberg. By way of reply, Nault simply received a fax, a poll showing that most Canadians were in favour of strong controls on guns. “I knew then that it was going to happen, that it was part of the agenda,” said Nault. “We all know who makes decisions around here.”

Most of the initial angst about gun control legislation surfaced at the newly established “rural caucus” of Liberal MPs. This group of about 30 members had come together soon after the 1993 election to form a unite front in the face of international pressure on Canada’s trading arrangements. Nations belonging to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade were rethinking the whole system of supply management, a re-evaluation that could have serious implications for Canada’s agricultural industry. But these mainly economic concerns soon gave way to more immediate alarm over gun control.

David Iftody, an MP from the rural riding of Provencher, Manitoba, was chair of the rural caucus. Just 37 years old when he was elected in 1993, Iftody was a rookie to politics and to the issue of guns. He wasn’t a sportsman or a hunter; he’d never handled a gun. He was somewhat mystified when the more experienced MPs at the Monday evening meetings – such as Bob Speller and Leonard Hopkins, both from rural Ontario – began to voice ominous warnings about the looming gun control debate. The rural MPs would be sacrificed for this urban obsession, they predicted. “If we don’t get up on this early, and do something about it, were going to be in trouble.”

In 1991, when Kim Campbell, then Justice Minister, had introduced far more modest gun control proposals, these MPs had been inundated with protests from their constituents. Combative voters had poked their chests in the heat of discussion; angry phone calls flooded their offices. Only their opposition status had saved them back then. Although the Federal Liberal caucus had taken an official position in favour of Campbell's gun control bill, these rural MPs could argue that their own government would never instigate such a thing. Now they were in government; now they couldn't blame anyone else for stricter gun control. They could only plead with their pro-gun control colleagues to back down.

The rural MPs were sure that the enthusiasm for this measure came directly from the Prime Minister's Office and that Rock had been picked to carry the brief for what they saw as a blinkered; politically suicidal policy. Women within the party were claiming this issue as their terrain too, especially the female MPs on the Justice Committee, such as Sue Barnes and Paddy Torsney. "To me, working on gun control was really important," said Barnes, who, in her role as vice-chair of the Justice Committee, put in long hours for over a year on the issue. "I thought it was specifically important to the women of this country." "It was a no brainer," said Torsney, 33 at the time and one of the Liberals strongest advocate for the interests of young women. "We'd talk about this in the women caucus and I would be the one saying, 'let's go, come on, let's get it done.'" "

Barnes and Torsney made it their mission to assemble everything they could about gun control – to seek out the expert, wade into the controversy, and separate the facts from the emotion. They talked to gun clubs and they met with key gun control advocates in victims' rights groups. They argued with their rural colleagues and they armed themselves with statistics about violent crime.

Jean Chrétien recognised the early sign of caucus dissension. He ordered that a special caucus committee be established to develop, away from the glare of media scrutiny, a collective stand on gun control. (The fact that this Committee had to be established was another indication that this really interesting divisions in this parliament were not between the government and other parties but within the Liberal caucus. It was the first of several such committees.) The choice of chairpersons was critical. Here especially the personal became the political. Who you are and where you come from telegraphs volumes about your views on the subject as divisive as gun control.

Shaughnessy was an ideal representative for those in favour of gun controls: she was from an urban riding, close to the gun-toting United States, she was a woman, and she was a lawyer. Herb Gray respected her hard earned smarts. "She knew justice issues from the street," Gray said. Furthermore, since being elected she had demonstrated unswerving loyalty to cabinet instructions, even if it meant rubbing the raw nerves of fellow caucus members. She like Alan Rock and had gone out of her way to back him

when he spoke in the caucus. At social events, she fluttered around him whenever she had the chance. Pointedly, she had told Reg Alcock, head of the social policy caucus, that she wanted to work more directly with the justice minister. These efforts paid off: Shaughnessy was named co-chair, representing the pro-gun control forces.

Bob Nault, on the other hand, was the perfect personification of the – gun control forces. Though he was also an Ontarian, his riding, on the border with Manitoba, shared more in common with the West than it did with southern Ontario. Nault was chosen as the other co-chair. Their committee was directed to listen to the MPs and cobble together a compromise position. The hope was that the basic elements of the gun control legislation would be developed by the caucus.

“We needed a male and a female, we needed an urban and a rural,” Nault said. “Shaughn was a lawyer – that’s a good thing - (but) she seemed very committed to the Minister.” That link to Rock was seen by some, especially Nault, as a liability. In their eyes, Rock was not much more than “some slick Bay Street lawyer who had never set foot on gravel.” Nault himself was a former trainman for CP Rail and a union man. Bay Street people set his teeth on edge.

“The perception from a lot of us was that Allan Rock was not a politician; he was very naive and thought that just because the party said this is the way it is going to be, there wouldn’t be a battle. He thought that we would just go quietly, like lambs to the slaughter,” Nault said.

Shaughnessy seemed more willing than Rock to listen to the views of the gun control foes. Indeed, she was getting lots of practice in her off-hours away from Ottawa. Everyone around her, from her father to her brother Richard to her next door neighbour gave her a hard time about the Liberals gun control stand. The biggest event on Bruce Murray’s calendar was his annual fall hunting trip. “We never could convince her, though,” Bruce said. “She would just walk away.”

Shaughnessy had her own reasons for arguing against guns. In 1990, she had served as Crown lawyer in a gun-detention hearing against a man named George Skrzydlewski. The part-time Chrysler worker had been amassing weapons in his Tecumseh Road apartment; a neighbour, Bill Clark, had complained to police. When the police went in to seize the guns at Skrzydlewski’s home, they found a rifle, three handguns, and seven thousand rounds of ammunition.

At the hearing into whether his guns should be seized and detained, however, no one could produce firm evidence that Skrzydlewski was mentally unstable or unfit to own guns. He was a member of a gun club, and his handguns had been certified with the

proper documentation from the Rondeau Rod and Gun Club. Fellow members there had found him “high strung” but not overly threatening. Police were ordered to return the weapons to him.

A year later, on November 21, 1991, Skrzydlewski confronted Bill Clark outside the apartment building and fired nine shots into him in retaliation for Clark’s complaint to the police. Clark died, leaving a wife and young daughter. Later it was learned that Skrzydlewski had declared to at least one other member of the gun club that he wanted to kill Clark. As well, he had a history of paranoid schizophrenia. But the law had no means to keep guns out of his hands.

Shaughnessy was sickened by Clark’s death. She believed that if she and the courts had had enough information and legal authority at the time, Skrzydlewski would never had been allowed to retain the gun that killed his neighbour. What this sad story taught her was that so-called “responsible gun owners” could turn out to be threats to society too. “The overwhelming sense I get is that people want to feel more secure in their communities and part of that is feeling that gun’s aren’t omnipresent,” she told the *Windsor Star*.

The Nault-Cohen caucus committee began meeting twice weekly in a large room in the Washington Building, across from Parliament Hill. At each gathering, a group of about 15 to 20 MPs sat around the table, hearing presentations from individual caucus members. David Iftody walked in the first day and saw Shaughnessy sitting in the chair at the head of the table, her arms folded, and a menacing scowl on her face.

“She didn’t smile. She didn’t acknowledge me,” Iftody said. “She was Allan’s agent on that committee. We all knew that going into the meeting.”

Then again, Paddy Tornsney would sometimes watch in amazement as Shaughnessy seemed to be agreeing with the foes of gun control. “Hey, whose side is she on, anyway?” Tornsney would ask herself, as Shaughnessy solemnly nodded and told gun control opponents that they were raising valuable concerns.

“She really did start to sympathize and see that this wasn’t easy,” Nault said. “Politically, she became very sensitive to the fact that we were going to get beat up badly. And we did, politically, get beat up badly.”

The committee members realized that they would get bogged down if they tried to sort out the complicate questions of how, when, and where to limit firearms. The important thing, they decided, was to focus on values and the big picture: what kind of society did Canadians want? They had to think in the long term; gun control legislation was not so much a chance to “clean up the streets” as an opportunity to shape a safer nation.

Organized opposition to gun control was building, however. On September 22, 1994, just as the Commons resumed after the summer break, more than 10,000 demonstrators converged on Parliament Hill for a massive rally. Allan Rock was worried that the public debate was dragging on too long. He told reporters on the eve of the protest that it was possible he was playing into the hands of the gun control foes by prolonging consultations. "But on the other hand, if I don't complete the process I'm engaged in now, I could be fairly accused of being arbitrary and not taking the views of others into account".

Perhaps as much to their own surprise as to that of their colleagues, Bob Nault and Shaughnessy were able to cobble together a consensus report. It was 10 pages long and began with three premises. First, any legislation would have to be directed at crime control while respecting the needs of legitimate gun owners. Second, public education should focus on a long-term goal of changing the view of firearms use in society. Finally, gun control had to go hand in hand with social programs devoted to crime prevention.

Through more than three dozen recommendations, the caucus committee struck a careful compromise between two opposing positions. Much was said about changing values and getting tough on gun crime, to please Shaughnessy's side. But important caveats were attached, including a recommendation not to ban handguns and to make registration of firearms an issue of crime prevention, not an element of the Criminal Code.

The committee's report was unveiled in caucus in the first week of November, to huge applause. Co-chairs Cohen and Nault were given a standing ovation. But that warm fuzzy feeling lasted less than a month.

On November 31, 1994, Rock came to the Commons with his proposed gun control package, called *The Government's Action Plan on Firearms Control*. It wasn't the final legislation that Chrétien had promised to present by the end of the year, but the announcement of the package served as a loose fulfillment of the commitment. Before he outlined the details in the chamber, Rock explained it in the lobby to the nervous rural Liberal MPs, who were watching every step in this process to gauge their chances of political survival. The package included a ban on short-barrelled handguns and military-style rifles (though anyone who owned such weapons legally as of January 1, 1995, would be permitted to keep them); restrictions on ammunition sales; and, most controversially, a national gun registry system to begin in 1996. Failure to register would be considered a criminal offence.

David Iftody was first shocked and then angry. The caucus committee report had urged the minister not to make failure to register a matter of criminal penalties; a summary

offence was sufficient. But Rock was insisting on the hard line: failure to register firearms would be an indictable offence.

“He stood there with that goofy smile,” Iftody said. “There was this odd, incredible silence. One by one the guys started walking away.”

Rock made no apologies to his fellow Liberals. As the gathering broke up, he moved to the foyer, where he told reporters he was immovable on the subject. “This is not an invitation for further discussion. This is final.”

The mood in caucus turned ugly; the rural MPs felt betrayed.

“There was a big debate about the fact that we had done this for nothing,” Nault said. “It didn’t reflect the report as well as we thought it should have, and that became a very difficult issue in the ensuing months in the caucus.”

Shaughnessy faced a tough decision. Should she side with the MPs who were defending the report she had co-signed, or should she accept what Allan Rock and the Prime Minister’s Office clearly wanted?

One of Nault’s allies in the cabinet was Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps. He had served as her campaign co-chair during the 1990 leadership contest. When it appeared that the rural MPs had been done in by the cabinet, he went to Copps to plead for high-level intervention. Copps was no friend of Rock’s. The rivalry between them had intensified as Rock, with Chrétien’s blessing, vaulted into a leading role at the cabinet table. Though technically lower in rank than Copps, he was deemed higher in stature because he was a favourite of Eddie Goldenberg’s and was unencumbered by affiliation with any leadership challenger before 1993.

Copps began to investigate what had happened between the delivery of the caucus committee report on November 3 and the unveiling of Rock’s proposal four weeks later. Rock had vetted the package with the cabinet while the prime minister was away on his first Team Canada trip to China, so Chrétien had not had the opportunity to state his position. With no prime-ministerial imprimatur on the package, Copps stepped into the vacuum and spread the word that Rock had both misrepresented its substance and misled ministers by saying it was consistent with the caucus committee report. Copps approached Shaughnessy and sought her help in establishing that there was a significant disconnect between the caucus consensus and the proposed legislation. Shaughnessy made a strategic calculation and concluded it was better to be with Rock than against him. If Rock was a rising star, Shaughnessy was ready to rise with him, and she could not overlook his influence on those coveted judicial appointments.

She told Copps she didn't see any major discrepancy. Then she warned Rock that Copps was agitating against him, backed by the rural MPs. She also, indiscreetly, flagged the simmering fight to at least one reporter in Ottawa. When word reached PMO ears that a story could appear, officials there cautioned Shaughnessy, in no uncertain terms, that she had breached a cardinal rule of team discretion. She shrugged off the reprimand. "I'm not going to shut up just because they tell me to," she told her reporter friend.

In deciding that she would be Rock's accomplice, Shaughnessy earned some valuable points with the justice minister. But the episode did nothing to build her friendships within the cliquey – and leaky – Liberal caucus.

"At the end of it all, a lot of people didn't have a positive feeling about Shaughnessy," Iftody said. Nault and Iftody began to steer clear of her. They and the other rural MPs decided that the only way to fight Rock and the prevailing forces on gun control was to keep talking about it.

"We kept this alive for six months," Nault said. "We kept at least six to ten MPs on their feet at each caucus." At every available opportunity, these MPs would stand up and accuse Rock of turning his back on the caucus consensus.

Shaughnessy was moonlighting on another justice issue that year, in the service of the minister to whom she remained most closely attached, Herb Gray. During the summer of 1994, news of a made-in-Canada "spy scandal" involving the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and right-wing groups in Canada made the headlines. Various media outlets, including the CBC's *fifth estate*, reported that a CSIS informant named Grant Bristow had infiltrated a white-supremacist organization known as the Heritage Front, and that he had gone on to spy on the Reform Party before the 1993 election. Other stories soon followed – that CSIS had infiltrated everything from Canada Post to the CBC. The opposition called for a royal commission to investigate the allegations. The Reform Party in particular wanted to know if it had been branded an "enemy of the state" by Canada's security service, acting on direction from its political masters. Gray was the "political master" in Reform's sights; as solicitor general, he was in charge of CSIS.

But once again, it wasn't the attack from the opposition benches that troubled the government as much as the hints of sabotage behind the lines. This time it was Scarborough MP Derek Lee who presented the greater challenge to the government's handling of the affair. Lee was chairman of the National Security Sub-committee, an offshoot of the Justice Committee, and he was ready to conduct a probing investigation of the so-called "Heritage Front affair." Lee had long been champion of Parliament's rights of investigation; in later years he would write a textbook on the broad-ranging

rights of committees to subpoena witnesses and evidence. Security issues were his particular passion.

Herb Gray and his department believed there was another completely adequate and proper way to investigate this matter. The Security Intelligence Review Committee is a government-appointed panel whose members include lay people and security specialists, designed to “spy on the spies” and monitor possible espionage excess. It reports directly to the solicitor general. Gray did not want the National Security Subcommittee to hijack the work of the SIRC, no matter how fervently the Scarborough MP believed in Parliament’s right of investigation. He couldn’t prevent Lee’s inquiry, but he could attempt to contain it.

The obvious candidate to do Gray’s bidding on Lee’s subcommittee would have been Gray’s parliamentary secretary, Patrick Gagnon. But the Quebec MP was consumed with the coming Quebec election and the referendum that would immediately follow if the Parti Québécois won, as it seemed destined to do. So the hobbling of Lee’s work was handed to Shaughnessy. She would again serve as the minister’s loyal deputy, putting down dissent within her own caucus and preventing renegade MPs from veering too far from the government’s agenda.

Her willingness to serve cabinet minister’s bidding was now emerging as her main strength. She had done it on the Human Resources Committee, she was doing on gun control, and now she would do it for the “spy scandal.” Happily for Gray and Rock, Shaughnessy was undisturbed by the enmity this earned her from some other Liberal colleagues. Her conditioning in the Murray family, where bold individuality was rewarded, made her almost impervious to antipathy from people “we don’t like.”

Shaughnessy thrived on this job. It appealed to her love of mystery and mischief and allowed her endless opportunities to annoy Derek Lee, whom she regarded as a humourless stuffed shirt. Lee was not amused to see Shaughnessy join his committee, as a full-fledged member, an appointment clearly made by the whip on Gray’s instructions. He knew immediately that she came with a mission. Her role, he said, amounted to issuing full reports to Gray’s office on the goings-on at committee and characterizing any threat to the government’s agenda as the work of traitors or enemies. Lee didn’t know whether to be more bitter about Shaughnessy’s presence or about the fact that Herb Gray had dispatched her. “I think there were probably other ways of communicating with me than sending in snipers from my own caucus,” he said.

Shaughnessy wanted backup – and a bit of fun. Roger Gallaway joined the subcommittee after Shaughnessy made her wishes known to Gray’s people. Roger was happy to help. Like Shaughnessy, he was clear on task: slow down Lee’s work, obfuscate when opposition members such as Reform’s Val Meredith became too

conspiratorial, and provoke delays by any method. They were told by Doug Kirkpatrick, Gray's executive assistant, as well as among others in Gray's office, that they should bury or delay the subcommittee's hearings until SIRC had a chance to report and the issue had cooled in the media.

Roger and Shaughnessy revelled in this devilry. It did not, obviously, represent their finest hours as principled parliamentarians, but they were observing a fundamental rule of politics: do a favour today for a cabinet minister, and tomorrow you may find it easier to get your own principled ideas through Parliament. They also trusted Gray's judgement. If the eminence grise of the Liberal government thought the subcommittee's work was harmful, who were they to challenge his view? They threw themselves, gleefully, into obstructionism. When Roger joined the committee, for instance, they asked for a delay in the hearings of a couple of weeks so the MP from Sarnia-Lambton could get up to speed.

"We got into absolutely crazy discussions," Roger said. "Sometime's we'd move for adjournment... We would demand sandwiches – free dinner! We'd get in there, eat the supper, and move for adjournment. When we didn't win, we'd get into arguments over certain words. We could go on for an hour about punctuation."

One of Shaughnessy's favourite delaying tactics was to promise to work on some clause for the report, in conjunction with the able lawyer and Library of Parliament researcher assigned to the committee, Paul Rosen. Shaughnessy would commit herself to producing material for a forthcoming committee meeting and then simply fail to deliver.

Lee was furious. "She didn't have any scruples about it. It was so obvious," he said." Almost all the meetings were held in secret and that made things worse. "If we weren't in camera, the public might well ask: 'What the hell is this? Ms. Cohen said she'd be prepared to deal with that issue on Tuesday and two weeks later, she's still not ready.' " Lee felt powerless to deal with her, not just because she was acting on Herb Gray's behalf but because of the loyalty culture among Liberals.

"She was a colleague, so on the record, I wasn't going to impugn her integrity," he said. Off the record, though, Lee denounced Shaughnessy as a minister's stooge.

The gun control debate moved from proposal to legislation in early 1995. On February 14, Rock introduced Bill C-68 in the Commons. The next few months would test the Liberals as nothing else had. This single issue moved them from soaring, 80-percent approval ratings to low 50's.

David Iftody, disgusted and exhausted, had stepped down as head of the rural caucus just as the bill was about to come to the House. He was not angry at the prime minister as much as he was annoyed with the people around his leader.

“I firmly believe that he got really bad advice,” Iftody said, “and it was too late for him to turn back. There were 25 or 30 of us who were stuck in the burning house. Nobody wanted to come in and get us, and worse yet, some of our colleagues were saying, ‘Shut the doors and bolt them because we don’t want them here anyway.’”

That was probably the worst of the controversy. Iftody said: facing allegations – and some of them whispered, some uttered directly - that the MPs who opposed gun control weren’t real Liberals anyway and the caucus would be better off without them. Neither Rock nor Shaughnessy said this aloud to the dissenters, but Iftody described the justice minister as “remarkably insensitive” to the political damage he was causing with gun control. He said Rock would regularly report to his caucus the accolades he was receiving in Toronto for his stand. The rural MPs would mutter in their seats, “How brave of you, when you’re not paying the price.”

The months of hearings on Bill C-68 were excruciating and difficult, said Sue Barnes, the Justice Committee vice-chair. Shaughnessy wasn’t officially on the committee; she attended the hearing as an associate member, a status reserved for MPs who sit on subcommittees but not larger than the committee itself. She started to “sub in,” as it’s called, to keep watch on developments for Rock. But in this role she was more a pair of eyes and served a function far beyond that of minister’s lackey. She would warn him about possible conflicts and advise him on where he had to back down, for the sake of caucus unity. While arguing in favour of the gun control measures as a strong statement of Liberal values and of her own abhorrence of violence and victimization, Shaughnessy never lost sight of the strategy. “She was very blunt with me and gave good but sometimes pointed advice,” Rock said.

Throughout that spring, the Justice Committee heard hours of testimony on the legislation. It toured the country; visiting gun clubs in rural areas. It heard from police officers and women’s groups and from Suzanne Laplante-Edward, the mother of one of the women killed at the École Polytechnique, who had taken up the cause of gun control to help deal with the tragedy that befell her family.

“We took the claims of the interested parties very seriously,” Sue Barnes remembered. “It was at the beginning of our careers in politics. . . We were given room to grow ... We worked as a team to make sure that was a great piece of legislation. I’m very proud of it – I felt like I did my job.”

Other MPs, less enthusiastic about the bill, felt they had to do their job too. As the committee moved into clause-by-clause consideration in the early days of June – an

excruciating process that stretched into the wee hours night after night – the tension became palpable. Once again, it wasn't the Reform Party or the Bloc Québécois whipping up the worst storms. The Liberal MPs were series of amendments that threatened to draw the process out even longer.

In particular, Lee wanted to introduce an amendment to make sure that firearms manufacturers didn't become tangled in the red tape of certificates when they were merely transporting goods to and from the factories. His Scarborough riding was home to a gun manufacturer, and he was looking out for the legitimate interests of his voters. But Sue Barnes and others believed that the raft of Liberal-sponsored amendments would gut the bill. However reasonable Lee's proposal may have seemed, the pro-gun control MPs were resisting any attempt to alter the legislation. One amendment, they figured, would open the door to a host of others.

As the House neared the summer break, the pressure was on to get the gun control bill into the Commons and passed – if only to avoid a long, hot summer of sustained anger in the country. Rock had had his fill of caucus dissent as well.

One June day, the Liberals on the Justice Committee were abruptly summoned out of their work on Bill C-68 and told to report to the office of the whip, Don Boudria, on the first floor of the Centre Block. They shuffled in and sat down, Shaughnessy among them. Boudria asked where they were headed with the bill. They all began to speak at once. Lee tried to explain his amendment.

Suddenly Allan Rock was in the room. Gone was the friendly and earnest minister – in his place stood the steely corporate litigator, facing down the MPs who were causing him such problems.

"I've just come from the Prime Minister's Office," he said. Lee was unimpressed. He didn't think Rock had spoken to Chrétien himself. If it was the prime minister ordering the MPs into line, Lee thought, then he would listen. But if Rock was acting on behalf of the prime minister's advisers, Lee wasn't interested. He was not the first to bridle at the prospect of taking orders from unelected individuals around the prime minister.

"Enough is enough," Rock said coldly. "No more fucking amendments. Do you hear me? No more fucking amendments." He turned on his heel and left the room. Off to the side, Shaughnessy smirked. "Now that's the way to treat these guys," she murmured. Later, she told Rock she liked this tough side of him. It was the kind of take-no-prisoners political behaviour she savoured.

The incident left a lasting if less favourable impression with her colleagues. Her friend and co-conspirator Roger Gallaway took a dim view of the episode. "To tell the truth,

that really jaundiced my view of the committee process,” he said. “I’ve never forgotten that.”

Lee was also livid, but he could see a victory in it, too. “It made me stronger. It showed me what a committee could do. It showed what could happen.”

Reflecting later on this striking departure from his usually conciliatory methods, Rock said he saw no other choice but to get tough with the committee. “That process had gone on too long, and there were issues being raised by the committee that were beyond its mandate,” he said. “And they were repeating various exercises, and just prolonging the whole examination of the bill at a point when the prime minister wanted the thing done. He wanted the bill through committee, back to the House, take your vote, and move on.”

Move on they did. On June 13, 1995, the gun control bill came to the Commons for the third and final reading. The days and hours before the vote were anguish for the rural MPs. Iftody had already gone to the prime minister’s office a few weeks earlier and notified him that he wouldn’t be voting in favour. For 45 minutes, Iftody sat in front of Chrétien and explained that it was the only way to preserve a valuable seat for the Liberals west of the Ontario border. The prime minister, alternately stern and exasperated, tried to persuade him to vote with the caucus. Iftody said he was ready to take his punishment.

“It’s the most difficult thing you can imagine,” Iftody said. Bucking the party line is a dangerous business: committee assignments can be withheld, promotions can be denied, reputations can be discreetly undermined. “I was elected at the age of 37, I’m a year and a half into my job and I find myself in the prime minister’s office, sitting face to face with him and knowing there’s a spear that’s going to come late in the night and kill me.”

The day of the vote, Bob Nault paced for hours up and down that Sparks Street Mall, debating what to do. If he voted against the bill, the immediate payoff would be great in his riding. He’d be praised as a rebel and a hero in the community. But in the long term, he thought, he’d be marginalized within his own party. And how would that serve the riding?

Shaughnessy was one of the final speakers on Bill C-68. She declared how proud she was of her caucus and the Liberal cabinet. She spoke of Windsor’s support for stricter gun control, because Windsorites could see from their border vantage point the ills of a society that didn’t restrict firearms.

When the time to vote came, Shaughnessy stood proudly with 192 other MPs in the House and said yes to gun control. So did Bob Nault. So did Bob Speller, David Iftody's roommate.

Iftody did not. He and eight other Liberal MPs, including Len Hopkins, voted no. While Shaughnessy, Mary, and Roger went out to celebrate, while Rock greeted reporters with relief, while Sue Barnes went back to her office to receive the congratulatory bouquets sent by friends and family, the dissenters made their way off the hill in despair.

The party would have the summer to recover and to put it all behind them. Shaughnessy, like the rest of her colleagues, happily left Ottawa and returned home. For her it was back to Windsor, Jerry, Pelee Island, and the ever-present dogs.