

Government Orders

The most recent package of gun control measures is known collectively as Bill C-17. The process of putting the legal aspects of the bill into place has only now just begun. Unless the new law is successfully implemented the changes contained in the legislation run the risk of becoming little more than symbolic gestures by the government to satisfy public opinion.

Good policy development and the delivery of adequate laws also include effective implementation and enforcement. There has not been enough time for the regulations contained in Bill C-17 to be fully realized. Thus the effectiveness of the regulations is also not fully understood. One can therefore reason that if this is true it is also too early to impose or evaluate the effectiveness of further controls such as a national registration system that would require more time and would place further stress on the already sparse financial resources of the nation's taxpayer.

There are clear constraints in public funding when it comes to our police forces that are already responsible for protecting our citizens under other provisions of the Criminal Code. It has been estimated by the justice department that implementation of a registration system could cost up to \$85 million with an annual maintenance cost of \$10 million, not considering annual increases.

Public safety will only be endangered if we dilute our resources. As a result we as members of Parliament must take care in allocating the limited funds we have in this area to ensure they are spent in the most effective and practical way possible.

It must be reiterated that gun control only plays a small role in our overall criminal justice system. Other aspects of the Criminal Code need to be fortified to effectively combat violent criminal activities.

As a legitimate gun owner I am already subjected to a large number of controls. By law, to purchase a firearm I must complete a firearm acquisition certificate course, pass a formal examination and submit to a thorough police examination of my social, employment and psychological history. I must also provide the police with character references that they can investigate to ensure I will use my firearms in a responsible manner. In addition, there is a mandatory 28-day waiting period before I receive my FAC with picture identification.

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If I wish to hunt, I must first pass a mandatory hunting course which covers firearm handling and safety. I must then also submit to a provincially regulated test which further reiterates these points.

In addition to these regulations, the province of Ontario has strict ammunition purchasing regulations in effect. Once I have the gun and the legal ability to hunt, I must then adhere to stringent laws regarding separate storage of the firearm and the

ammunition under lock and key, rigid transportation standards and tough guidelines for using firearms.

This clearly demonstrates how heavily the legitimate gun owners are already regulated. These regulations, like all gun control regulations, are very difficult to enforce. The police simply cannot search each household to see if these rules are being observed.

The UN estimates that firearm owners represent approximately 27 per cent of the Canadian population or seven million people owning up to 27 million firearms which is considerably more than what people are telling us in most of this debate.

Perhaps the government should concentrate its efforts on implementing innovative and cost effective methods of enforcing the laws currently in place. One such example could be a community based group of gun owners checking the homes of other gun owners in their area. This would alleviate the suspicions that many Canadians have of government intrusion in their daily lives and would assist in the enforcement of the safe storage aspects of Bill C-17.

Third, I would argue that crime control would be a more effective method of obtaining further public security. We must punish the criminal element and leave the law-abiding citizens alone. Firearm owners possess and use their firearms in a safe and responsible manner and do not contribute to crime or violent death and injury statistics.

In addition, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reports that in 1991 two-thirds of all accused murderers were known to have criminal records, the majority for previous violent offences, and were already prohibited from legally owning or acquiring a firearm.

To further illustrate my point of the small number of firearms involved in deaths in this country, I would offer the fact that in 1991 only one person out of every 400,000 Canadians died as a result of a fatal gun accident compared to one person out of every 14,000 who died as a result of a fall. I am suggesting that we have adequate controls in place but we are simply not enforcing them.

Under Bill C-17 all firearms are required to be trigger locked in a locked cabinet separate from the ammunition. An analysis of fatal gun accidents in the United States could not locate even one instance where a child victim or shooter discovered a locked gun, unlocked it and shot themselves or someone else. Studies also indicate that at least one-half of all accidental shootings involved the consumption of alcohol just prior to the incident. How will the registration system prevent this from occurring?

Canadians must bear the responsibility of using their firearms in a responsible manner. The Government of Canada should not be asked to shoulder this burden. We must congratulate firearm owners in this nation for their initiatives into the area of the safe handling of firearms, not condemn them for their efforts. In