

Day tries to quell gun storm

Pro-gun advocates are 'a few voices in a large crowd,' he says, but critics concerned minister has cited them

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OTTAWA-Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day is playing down the influence of his own firearms advisory panel, saying that the staunch group of pro-gun advocates represents merely a few voices in a large, 500-member crowd he consults about government policies on guns.

But at Dawson College in Montreal, scene of a fatal school shooting last fall, a spokesperson for a gun-control group said Day has been urging people to read the views of at least one of his advisory-committee members as a rebuttal to calls for stricter gun laws.

Brian Rahilly of the Dawson College Committee for Gun Control said he's upset that Day would be looking for advice on firearms policy from Gary Mauser, a Simon Fraser University professor who argues against strict gun laws.

Mauser is one of a dozen people on Day's firearms-advisory committee, a panel almost entirely composed of strong proponents of gun use and ownership.

But Rahilly was even more distressed when Day cited Mauser's work as a reply to Dawson College's concerns about gun control in the wake of the Sept. 13, 2006 shooting that killed one student and wounded 19 others.

In a letter sent to the college shortly after he visited the school several months ago, Day attached some research from Mauser and urged that it be read.

"I was very disturbed to see that the minister who is supposedly responsible for public security would be quoting the name of such an individual in this fashion," Rahilly said. "Gary Mauser is very vocal in his support for the carrying of concealed weapons by citizenry. "

Mauser's arguments in favour of concealed weapons are contained in a 2002 paper he wrote for the Fraser Institute, titled "More Guns, Less Crime."

The Star took a detailed look at the membership of Day's firearms advisory committee, appointed and operating in secrecy for nearly a year now, and found that almost all members are opposed to the federal gun registry.

It has bypassed two large national police organizations that are in favour of the registry and found lone officers who have been vocally opposed to the program.

The program was instituted about 10 years ago by the previous Liberal government.

It's not clear whether this panel had any influence on Day's decision this month to extend an amnesty for long-gun owners to register their weapons.

Yesterday in the Commons, the public safety minister was minimizing their clout.

When Liberal MP Sue Barnes asked Day to be more open about the membership and views of his panel, he replied: "Is she asking that we put the names out of all the 500 different organizations and individuals with whom we consult?"

"We could do that. It is not an issue; we have nothing to hide."

Barnes described the firearms panel as a "secret society" and called it "the latest salvo in the Conservative plan to eviscerate gun control laws."