

Dangerous mistake to scrap long gun registry

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The decision by a majority of Members of Parliament to scrap the long gun registry is a serious mistake that will return to haunt them.

They caved into the right-wing redneck element that has opposed the registry since Day 1. The result will weaken our police forces and make the country a more dangerous place.

Long guns basically are hunting rifles and they are more numerous and just as deadly as handguns. The registry now lists about seven million shotguns and rifle. The information contained in the registry will be destroyed if Bill C-391, the legislation to scrap the registry, goes ahead.

The registry has been a valuable tool for police. In the annual report from the Canadian Firearms Commissioner, police reported using the registry 2.5 million times in 2007.

Montreal Police Chief Yvan Delorme urged law makers to support the registry, citing the 20th anniversary of the École Polytechnique massacre that resulted in the deaths of 14 female students. He further pointed out another case where a person made similar threats. That offender was found to have registered firearms and they were seized.

Police use the registry to determine if firearms are present in a house when they attend a call. Police will tell you that domestic disputes are among the most dangerous calls they receive. They have to deal with highly emotional individuals and, if firearms are present, the danger is increased. Responding to domestic dispute calls have taken a serious toll on the lives of police officers.

A popular myth about gun control is that it costs the taxpayers billions every year. A study done in 2006 by the auditor general determined that the annual cost for the registry was about \$3 million. This is good value for money, when you consider its value to police forces.

A closer look reveals a serious dichotomy. The Tories want the public to believe that they are tough on crime, but by scrapping the gun registry they are removing an important tool from police. In this case, politics trumps public safety.

The FSIN issued a press release lauding the result of the vote to scrap the registry, indicating the legislation was an impediment to the exercise of our treaty rights. This has

been the argument from all the detractors of this legislation -- that somehow it will get in the way of their right to hunt.

In fact, if it's enforced equally across the board, then it's not a disadvantage or disability. All hunters, First Nations and otherwise, should register their firearms. They should all receive proper education in the handling and storage of guns, as currently required when one receives a firearms acquisition certificate.

Historically, guns have played an important role in Indian Country. Firearms combined with horses created the wealthy and powerful culture of the Plains.

Our people were able to travel danger-free from the wolf packs and plains grizzlies that hunted buffalo.

The custom continues today. In order to reduce the food bill and maintain a traditional way of life, many of our people hunt for their food. This means firearms are common on reserves and aboriginal communities. Statistics have shown that, over the years, accidental shootings have been a common cause of death and injury, second only to vehicle accidents. In Nunavut, where vehicles are scarce, guns are the main cause of accidental death.

Suicide is a serious and growing problem in Indian Country, with firearms widely used for that purpose, especially by males. Because of improper storage and availability, guns can be used before there's time for any intervention. The registry is not at fault in this case. It's the improper storage of the firearms and the ammunition.

Back in the 1980s, someone broke into our home and my hunting rifle was stolen. We reported it to the police. There was no gun registry at the time and I only had the basic information to provide the police. I doubt if the gun was ever found, and I wondered over the years if it was used in a crime or what happened to it. Had there been a gun registry at the time, that rifle might have been traced and recovered.

We only have to look south of our border to see what a gun culture can create. A constitutional clause that allowed colonists to arm themselves in case of a British invasion has been interpreted as universal right to bear arms. Gun ownership is sky high today and the United State has the highest homicide rate in the industrialized world.

If there is one thing that separates Canadians from Americans, it is in gun ownership. They have a dangerous gun culture and we have rules to control firearms and protect the public. Is the vote to scrap the long gun registry one more step down a slippery slope toward the American example?