

Banning guns is not the solution

BY MARK PAVILONS

We've all heard the often-used expression, guns don't kill people, people kill people.

As cliché and trite as it may be, it's true.

Objects have no intentions or premeditation. They are cold and lifeless.

People have free will. We're free to choose, free to act, free to plan and free to commit crimes.

The recent shooting in Toronto has reignited calls for tougher gun control, with some suggesting that handguns be totally banned.

We already have some tough rules and regulations regarding firearms and particularly handguns. Not only do you have to pass both a written and practical test, but you have to apply for a PAL in order to own a gun. Part of this application and 45-day waiting period involves background checks. You also require a PAL to purchase ammunition. For handguns and other types of restricted weapons, you need an ATT to transport them. Carrying a concealed weapon is pretty much illegal in Canada.

We even have tough laws governing airsoft and bb guns.

Of course, strict laws aren't always enough.

According to Toronto Police data, the city has already had 58 homicides to date, more than double the total of 24 in 2017. So far this year, there have been 228 shootings, already surpassing the total of 205 in 2017.

Canada has the fourth-highest gun homicide rate, behind France, Germany, and Italy.

Even though smoking, alcohol and even fast foods kill more people than guns, gun violence is a real issue.

In October 2007, the federal government's Speech from the Throne identified tackling crime, particularly violent crime involving firearms, as one of its five key priorities. It looks like it will be on the agenda again, both nationally and provincially.

Data from Statistics Canada's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and Homicide Surveys, it's clear the vast majority of violent crime in Canada is not committed with a firearm. Most violent crime is committed by physical force or threats, without the use of any weapon. The most popular weapon is a knife.

According to research, there were 12.7 million guns in Canada last year, or roughly 35 guns for every 100 people. But, and this is a really big but, 10.6 million are estimated to be illegally owned. There are roughly 1 million handguns in public hands.

There were just under 900 gun-related deaths (intentional and accidental) in Canada in 2000 and it dropped to 730 in 2012.

Growing up in rural Caledon, I was exposed to small calibre rifles as a teenager. I remember buying ammunition for my dad at Canadian Tire. While they were always around the house, I don't think I shot anything other than a few targets or cans.

Despite the easy access to rifles, those of our generation would never think about using them for criminal purposes. It never entered our minds.

Law-abiding gun owners have never been the problem.

Every time a gun falls into the wrong hands, it erodes the rights of responsible gun owners.

After major incidents, law enforcement officials hold "gun amnesty" programs where gun owners can turn their weapons in for disposal. I imagine the whole point is to get guns out of circulation. Fewer guns translates to fewer gun-related crimes.

It doesn't always work.

In Australia, a year after a large, nation-wide de-arming program, homicides, assaults and armed robberies all increased.

Americans stand behind their Second Amendment rights, which they contend gives them the right to bear arms. The pro-gun lobby is a very strong one.

America's bloody history is filled with armed conflict and how guns ruled the land, won the west, and changed the landscape.

While weapons of all kinds fill the pages of humankind's history book, I would contend it all has to be put in perspective and considered in context.

Does it make sense to allow citizens to carry handguns in public? Not really.

According to Angela Wright with Zero Gun Violence, most offences, which include not just homicide, but any kind of gun violence, are committed with illegal guns. It is most common for a gun to be purchased through legal means, then be sold illegally or smuggled into Canada via the United States. Wright warns that border services need to be on a better look out for those coming into the country.

Wright says that the best way to combat gun violence in Canada is for the federal and provincial governments to support municipal programs. A lot of gun violence is committed by repeat offenders who have no prospects after being incarcerated. When a person has been arrested at a young age and has a criminal record, it is almost impossible for them to get a job, which leads them right back into a life of crime.

The pressure is on local governments to provide education programs, job training and community support for the victims of the criminal justice system to help them break that cycle. These local governments are going to need federal and provincial support to provide their citizens with what they need.

Will a total handgun ban eliminate gun violence? I doubt it. Where there's a will, there's a way.

No one wants our society turned into a police state. I believe that prevention, education and several checks and balances are all part of the overall strategy.