

OPINION GUN CONTROL

Blaney weakening controls on assault weapons at behest of gun lobby

There is absolutely no doubt that the vast majority of Canadians oppose making it easier for private individuals to have access to military-style assault weapons, and that the only purpose behind reducing their control is to please the gun lobby.



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Since his appointment as public safety minister about a year ago, Steven Blaney was repeatedly notified of the RCMP's serious misgivings with respect to various weapons currently circulating in the hands of private citizens.

Last September, for example, senior officials invited the minister to a briefing in order to reiterate concerns previously raised by the RCMP and other police organizations regarding .50-calibre rifles classified as "non-restricted"—meaning that they can be legally purchased by anyone holding a simple possession permit intended for hunting rifles and shotguns.

Weapons of this calibre are so powerful that they can pierce military aircrafts and lightly armoured vehicles, and even more easily standard bulletproof vests worn by police officers.

They explained that, initially, the intent of the legislation was that the "the classification framework would be updated as more firearms came on to the Canadian market," but that this framework "has not been updated since its inception in 1995." As a result, these extremely dangerous weapons are, by default, falling into the same category as hunting rifles and shotguns. Controls on non-restricted guns are so weak that police don't even know who owns them (except in Quebec, where the long-gun registry survives thanks to a court injunction).

Meanwhile, the RCMP was also conducting an investigation into other semi-automatic weapons, such as the full range of "Swiss Arms" models and various versions of the "CZ 858" family—one of which was used in the 2012 attempted murder of Quebec's then newly elected premier, Pauline Marois.

Given their ability to "be converted into a full automatic firearm in a relatively short period of time with relative ease"—that is to say, capable of firing multiple projectiles in rapid succession by a single pull of the trigger—the RCMP, in late February, declared them prohibited.

This decision is entirely compliant with the law, which specifically prohibits automatic firearms, and with the 1993 Supreme Court ruling decreeing that semi-automatic weapons that can be converted to fully automatic mode are equally prohibited—these weapons being "designed to kill and maim a large number of people rapidly and effectively. They serve no other purpose. They are not designed for hunting any animal but man." Indeed, any self-respecting hunter knows that such weapons of war have no place in the woods.

After an uproar from gun-rights groups, Blaney made sure to reiterate which interests trump all others in the eyes of the Harper government, issuing a public statement addressed specifically to gun owners in order to condemn the RCMP's decision and to reassure them that "our Conservative government is on your side—and we will always stand up for the rights of law-abiding firearms owners"—even thanking them "for your years of loyal support."

Barely two weeks later, the government announced a two-year amnesty for individuals in possession of these prohibited weapons. The minister also promised an "urgent" review of the RCMP's decision

and, worst of all, a "permanent" solution to "protect all law-abiding firearms owners from these types of retroactive and unpredictable decisions."

So instead of applauding the RCMP for having properly acted in the public's interest, the government has once again displayed its contempt for honourable public servants who are only trying to do their job—in this case, enforcing a law whose goal is to "protect the public from these dangerous weapons that are designed specifically to kill or maim people."

Having witnessed the massacre at the École Polytechnique in December 1989, during which 14 young women were killed

with a legally-acquired weapon, and having since dedicated ourselves to prevent similar tragedies, families of the victims and fellow graduates condemn this blatant betrayal of our shared values of peace, order, and good government.

There is absolutely no doubt that the vast majority of Canadians oppose making it easier for private individuals to have access to military-style assault weapons, and that the only purpose behind reducing their control is to please the gun lobby.

Steven Blaney should immediately stop acting like he's the minister for gun enthusiasts and properly fulfill his duties as minister of public safety for all Canadians.



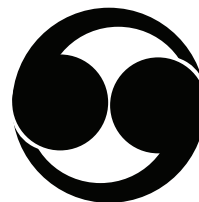
Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney, pictured in this file photo. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

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