

Give Canadians right to use arms in self-defence

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In a recent Windsor Star article ("Cops see spike in number of crime-fighting do-gooders," June 25), it was reported that there has been a rise in private citizens defending themselves or others against criminals.

Whether it was a veterinarian fighting an armed robber off with a garbage can, or a bystander chasing a violent mugger who beat a man for his prescription medications, it is clear that Canadians are responsible enough to use defensive force in a reasonable and legal fashion.

That said, it's time that Canadians be permitted to carry weapons for defence against criminals.

This wouldn't be such a drastic change in law. It's already legal under Section 34 of the Criminal Code for Canadians to use necessary force to protect their life, up to and including the use of deadly force.

It's also legal to own a firearm.

Canada even has a permitting process in place for people to carry firearms at the discretion of their provincial Chief Firearms Officer (CFO).

The only thing Canada would have to do to enable Canadians to better protect themselves is change the issuing process for an Authorization to Carry (ATC) from "may-issue"-- a permit issued at the discretion of the CFO --to "shall-issue," a permit which must be issued to anybody who meets clearly defined, reasonable training and background check requirements.

Such a change in the ATC-issuing process would make it more accountable, in that the CFO would have no arbitrary authority to withhold or grant the right to defend oneself. That kind of authority should never be held by any one office.

The change would also ensure that every similarly qualified and screened Canadian has an equal right under the law to defend themselves, their families, and their neighbors, regardless of whether they have any political ties that would grease the wheels for a carry permit.

Now, some of the more sensationalist politicians out there may suggest that allowing Canadians the suitable means to defend themselves would result in shootouts every day in the streets at high noon.

This kind of Chicken Little approach to the right of one to preserve his or her own life has been proven wrong time and time again south of the border. Michigan switched from "may issue" to "shall issue" permits in 2002, and yet thousands of Canadians manage to travel across the border daily without witnessing any bloodshed.

Vermont, which has no laws regulating the possession or carrying of arms by non-criminal adults, has the third lowest violent crime rate per capita in the USA. (In fairness, that could be accredited to the similarly lax regulation of public nudity in the state combined with the aging baby boomer population scaring off all of the potential

muggers.)

Overall, over thirty states have gone the route of shall-issue permits since the early nineties, and none have seen fit to go back to the days of may-issue. The U.S. experiment has shown that there would be no bloodbath resulting from Canadians being allowed to protect their lives.

Not only has there been no public safety crisis as the result of Americans being able to pack heat, but there have actually been numerous potentially large-scale massacres stopped in progress by those authorized to carry a weapon.

In 2002, a shooter on a rampage at the Appalachian School of Law in Virginia was stopped after not one, but two students in different locations heard his shots and retrieved their weapons from their cars, returned, and placed him under arrest until the police arrived.

In February 2007, an off-duty out-of-area police officer who was carrying his weapon at the Trolley Square mall in Salt Lake City managed to keep an armed madman under fire until Salt Lake City police officers arrived to assist.

This last December, an armed man went to the New Life Church in Colorado after having left a suicide note saying he intended to kill as many people as possible.

He only managed to kill two people at the church before a parishioner shot him.

One can only imagine how these massacres would have turned out, if, like Canada, off-duty police and private citizens were not allowed to carry guns for self-defence. Certainly the murderers in each case, who were intent on committing capital crimes, would be unlikely to care whether or not any law forbade them from carrying a gun.

Both the American example and the recent case of Canadians defending themselves and others in a responsible fashion have proven that private citizens and should be trusted to carry arms without any resulting chaos.

Hopefully our legislators will, in the near future, acknowledge that Canadians have the right to defend themselves guaranteed by the Criminal Code, and modify our weapons laws so that we may have a realistic chance of exercising that right.

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