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Selective Posturing on Guns

by Scott McPherson

I was recently in the Passport Agency in Washington, D.C., and while standing in line I noticed a number of fliers published by the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs providing travel tips for those going to the Middle East, China, Mexico, and Canada.

Tips for travelers in China or the Middle East or even Mexico made some sense, but Canada? My wife, who is not even a U.S. citizen, often travels to Canada for business and boasts of how easy it is to travel to, within, and back from that country. Warnings about overfriendliness and bad beer, maybe? Curious, I grabbed a flier to look at later.

Thumbing through it that afternoon, I was astonished to discover the following statement on page 10, under the heading "Firearms": "Canada's firearms laws make Canada safer for residents and visitors."

Really? No footnote led me to any study citing empirical support for this claim. Just a blanket statement about a country with strict gun-control laws — that these laws make Canada a safer place to be.

This was a U.S. government document. The United States is a nation founded on the principle of individual rights. The right to bear arms — to own guns — was considered so essential to this end that the Framers of the Constitution prohibited any laws restricting that right. Not because they wanted frontiersmen to be able to hunt bears, but because bearing arms — owning guns — was in their opinion a means of ensuring a freer and safer America.

Then I turned to "Tips for Travelers to Mexico." No doubt, I surmised, there would be a similar assertion that "Mexico's firearms laws make Mexico safer for residents and visitors." Looking through the document, I found this instead, under the heading "Crime":

In Mexico City, crime has reached critical levels.... Metropolitan areas other than the capital are considered to have lower but still serious levels of crime activity.... The most frequently reported crimes involve taxi robberies, armed robbery, pickpocketing and purse snatching.

Odd that in a country where there are approximately 20 homicides per 100,000 people (compared with around 2 homicides per 100,000 people in Canada), “murder” was not mentioned as a frequently reported crime.

Now, anyone who has studied the gun-control issue knows that Mexico, like Canada, has very restrictive gun-control laws. In his book *Guns, Crime, and Freedom*, the NRA’s Wayne LaPierre described Mexico as a country where it is “virtually impossible for an honest citizen to own a gun.”

If strict gun laws make Canada safer, Mexico ought to be a crime-free paradise rather than a “critical crime” zone. But we all know that is not the case.

So why the inconsistency in these State Department travel documents?

There is no evidence that Canadians are safer because of their gun-control laws. In the fall 2004 issue of *Journal on Firearms & Public Policy*, Gary Mauser had the following to say in an essay entitled “The Failed Experiment: Gun Control and Public Safety in Canada, Australia, England and Wales”:

The homicide rate has been falling as fast or faster in the United States [compared with Canada].... The homicide rate in the United States has fallen from 10.5 per 100,000 in 1991 to 6.1 per 100,000, while the Canadian rate has fallen from 2.7 per 100,000 to 1.8.

The contrast between the rate of criminal violence in the United States and that in Canada is much more dramatic. Over the past decade, the Canadian rate of violent crime has increased while, in the United States during the same time period, the rate of violent crime has slid from 600 per 100,000 to 500 per 100,000.

Though the number of homicides has fallen slightly in Canada recently, it has not fallen nearly as dramatically as it has in the United States, where the federal and state governments have been *loosening* gun laws. Even the Center for Disease Control, which is notoriously anti-gun, must have been surprised when a report issued by the National Academy of Sciences in 2003, which was co-sponsored by the CDC, found after years of study that there was *no* evidence to support the view that *any* gun-control laws have achieved their purported goal of lowering crime or making people safer in the United States. Why should it be any different for Canada?

Imagine my surprise, then, when the very next day, December 9, the following appeared in the *Washington Times*:

Canada’s ruling Liberals, under pressure to clamp down on gun violence in big cities, will move to ban all handguns if they win the Jan. 23 election.

If, as the State Department claims, “Canada’s firearms laws make Canada safer for residents and visitors,” it should have told the Canadians, because apparently *more* laws are now needed to do the trick. The Canadian national government has passed two major gun-control measures in the last 15 years — C-17 in 1991 and C-68 in 1995 — and both times it was claimed Canada would be safer. The fact that the Canadian people were sold a lie both times is no excuse for them to buy another one. The Liberal Party in Canada should be put out of a job — and come to think of it, so too should those deceptive bureaucrats at the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

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This article was originally published in January 2005.