

Sterling Prize Address  
Gary A. Mauser

Thank you John.  
Thank you Barry.  
Thanks to everyone for coming.

### **Anti-gun/anti-male cartoon**

#### **Telling the Emperor he has no clothes**

It's not easy telling the Emperor he has no clothes.

Not many of my colleagues at SFU have supported me during the past 15 years that I have pursued my research into gun control. A few have though, and I cherish them.

The most common reaction to my interest is puzzlement. Why would a business professor study gun control? Must be his hobby?

### **Political marketing**

The core of my research interest is, and always has been, political marketing. In the first half of my career, I was interested in electoral politics. I wrote two books and several articles analyzing elections.

During the mid-1980s I began to be interested in political marketing between elections. Political scientists refer to this as propaganda.

### **Gun control**

I began to search for issues in Canadian and American politics that could illustrate how marketing was being used to

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shape public opinion. I did preliminary research into both abortion and gun control, before deciding to focus on gun control.

When I started, I knew little about guns. What I did know, I'd learned from television: guns were scary, and gun owners were dangerous. I remember thinking that tighter gun laws would probably help to reduce gun crime.

I was quite nervous when I visited a gun club first time. I was met with friendliness and openness. My own experience soon taught me that gun owners were ordinary people -- not dangerous psychopaths as I'd feared.

The results of my ground-breaking research, first, made a skeptic of me about the usefulness of gun control laws, and then, later, it convinced me that firearm ownership was a social 'good.' I soon purchased my first gun: a black powder replica Colt. Great fun!

### **Academic freedom**

Still the question remains. Why study guns as a business professor? It's certainly not the quickest route to academic success.

My answer is 'curiosity.' I became a professor not for the money, but for the freedom to study what interests me. Thanks to SFU, I have been able to do that.

Thanks to the generosity of Nora and Ted Sterling, we at SFU have a more encouraging environment than many other universities. Academic freedom is to be cherished. Particularly when we disagree with people.

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### **The NRA and methodology**

If you think getting research money from tobacco companies elicits criticism, try taking money from the National Rifle Association, as I did. Research studies should be judged by methodology, not the sponsor. If we let our prejudices dictate our findings, we can never learn anything new. More about this later.

Academics can have strong feelings about political issues. Witness the emotional reactions and the sharp denunciations of Sunera Thobani's recent speech. Anyone who dissents draws strong reactions. I too know what it's like to get hate mail and to suffer personal attacks because of my public statements. The gun control debate has divided the country like no other issue.

### **September 11<sup>th</sup>**

The treacherous attack on the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> opened our eyes. Many concerns evaporated; concerns that we had previously considered important.

New fears replaced old fears. Terrorists were frightening. Ordinary gun owners were not.

### **Misplaced priorities**

Canadians now realize that we haven't done much to fight violence. Worse: Our previous efforts had been badly misdirected. It was not wise to freeze the RCMP budget for a decade, slash CSIS, eliminate the Vancouver Port Police. And

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for what? To create a massive bureaucracy to register the guns of ordinary Canadian citizens.

Instead of focusing on organized criminals, we went after rural duck hunters.

Instead of trying to keep out terrorists, we tried to register ordinary firearms.

Now I will show you some of the facts that helped change my mind. Who knows. I may change yours as well.

### **Caveat**

I warn you -- what you are about to see contains statistics. Many people simply throw up their hands when they see statistics, saying, "Statistics can be used to prove anything; so let's just ignore all statistics."

That is irresponsible. Sure, statistics can be used to mislead, but they also can give you a comprehensive understanding of complex issues. If you ignore statistics, you abandon reason.

Your emotions are all too easily manipulated by media images. I beg of you, don't abandon your critical powers. If you lose faith in your intelligence, you allow the media, politicians, and special interests to control you.

Now, more than ever. We need you to be a responsible

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citizen. Just dive into statistical arguments. Insist that you understand what's being said. Have confidence in your judgement. Sure, you'll make mistakes, but you'll learn.

All of the data I'm going to show here are public and available on the web. Please check out anything you are not comfortable with.

Now, are you ready? A reminder: no exam afterwards!

**Myth #1: Criminal violence usually involves guns.**

**NSAID poster.**

Look at the facts. Media images blow the problem way out of proportion. Almost 10 times as many people are killed annually in Canada by aspirin-type products (1,500) than by homicides involving guns (160).

**Crimes 1994.**

Very few violent crimes (about six-percent) involve a firearm. Less than one-third of homicides involves firearms.

**Gun deaths.**

Most gun deaths (over three-quarters) are suicides.

**Suicides.**

Less than one-quarter of suicides involve firearms.

**Accidental deaths.**

Gun accidents pale when compared with car accidents, workplace accidents, and medical accidents. Owning a gun is far less hazardous than visiting a doctor or a hospital.

By focusing on the problems, hunters have cut in half the number of firearm accidents since the 1960s.

Firearms are just a “straw man.” Real problems exist, like terrorists, and criminal violence, that should be

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addressed. Resources should be targeted to solving problems, not wasted in PR exercises.

**Myth #2: The typical gun crime is a man using a gun to terrorize a woman.**

The image in the media is that murderers are normal and anyone could suddenly attack you. [An article appeared in the Post just this past weekend].

**Homicide statistics [1994]**

Consider the facts. Most (two-thirds) homicide victims are male, and less than one-third (30%) of homicides involve a firearm.

All homicides are tragedies. But we need to put the problem in perspective in order to develop the wisest social policy. In her testimony to the Supreme Court of Canada, Senator Ann Cools pointed out that in 1994 only 24 women are killed by their “conjugal intimates” out of the 198 women killed that year. Or, 24 of the 596 people killed in total. Spousal violence isn’t a gun problem; it’s a social problem.

**Homicide statistics [1999]**

In 1999, the same patterns. But this year, Stats Can asked about criminal records. A very important change.

Murderers are not normal people. Nor are murder victims. A typical homicide is a drunk or drugged criminal killing another criminal.

About two-thirds of those accused of homicide have criminal records. The majority also has a history of alcohol or drug abuse. Almost 3/4 of the spousal murderers had a history of spousal abuse prior to the killing.

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At the least, these statistics suggest that firearm registration won't be useful in stopping violent crime.

### **Myth #3: Gun ownership leads to crime or violence**

#### **Rural vs. urban firearm ownership.**

Gun ownership is higher in rural areas in Canada.

#### **Regional variation in gun crime.**

But gun crime is higher in urban areas.

#### **Homicide rates.**

Homicide rates are higher in urban areas.

There is one exception: very small areas. These are predominantly Native reserves. A well known – and unique - - problem.

Gun ownership patterns in Canada is not that much different from US.

About three-quarters of gun owners in both the US and Canada are hunters.

Crime rates are much higher in cities than they are in the rural areas – where the guns are.

Owning a gun does not predispose people to violence. Gun owners in the US and in Canada are normal people.

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### **Myth #4: Canadians do not use guns in self-protection.**

I've conducted three surveys of the public in Canada and my studies show that between 60,000 – 80,000 Canadians report using firearms annually to protect themselves, their families or their property. Between 19,000 and 35,500 of these cases involved defense against criminal violence; the rest (more than half) involved defense against dangerous animals. (See my 1996 paper in the Journal of Criminal Justice). As expected, most of the cases involving animals were in Western Canada.

My three surveys had different sponsors : the NRA, the Canadian government, and the Langley Symposium. All three found roughly the same results.

My surveys are the only empirical study of defensive gun use in Canada. My results are consistent with the General Social Survey that found 17% of women carry something routinely to protect themselves.

Canadians report using guns defensively about half as often as do Americans, per capita.

Some people envisage images of Hollywood-style shoot-outs when defensive gun use is mentioned. Again TV leads people astray. In terms of protection against violent criminals, research in the US shows that over 95% of the times a gun is used in self-protection, the gun is not fired but merely displayed. A violent crime is averted – without using violence. There is no victim.

Self-defense incidents are all but invisible to authorities.

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The participants have no motive to report them to the police,  
and indeed every reason to keep them quiet.

## **Myth #5: Canadian gun laws keep us safe.**

The Emperor has no clothes. Little empirical support can be mustered for such a claim. American criminologists widely admit that no solid empirical research can be found that shows that any gun law has had a significant effect on crime rates. Shocked? Many researchers are very disappointed.

### **Handgun homicide chart.**

Handguns have been registered for over 60 years in Canada, but handgun crime is increasing. At the same time that homicides have been declining, handgun homicides have increased from around 25% to over 50% of gun homicides. The Solicitor General admitted in Parliament that handgun registration has never been used to solve a crime.

### **History of Canadian gun laws**

Canada has long had strict gun laws. Nevertheless, each new law is introduced as if there had never been any previous firearm legislation.

Canadians have long had strict gun laws: Handguns were registered in 1935; police checks required for purchasing any firearm in 1977; the rules for legal owners were tightened in 1991 and again in 1995. In addition, a wide variety of firearms and weapons were banned in 1977, 1991, and 1995, as well as numerous other changes brought in, sometime with legislation, sometimes with police practices.

Ironically, crime rates were actually lower before the

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modern wave of gun laws.

**Registration cue cartoon.**

**Gun law table.**

A number of studies have evaluated Canadian gun laws. These researchers vary considerably in their position on gun control. My research is consistent with all other academic studies of Canadian firearm legislation. The only two exceptions are unpublished government studies with flawed methodologies.

**Econometric charts.**

I have conducted several studies (Mauser and Holmes 1992, Mauser and Maki, 1998, 1999) that empirically examined the effect of the 1977 and 1991 Canadian firearm laws on homicide and robbery. No significant effect was found for the gun law in either study.

**US-Canada comparison chart.**

We often hear that gun control in Canada keeps our crime rate down. Is this true?

If strict gun control laws were the primary determinant of criminal activity, then all Canadian provinces would have lower homicide rates than their neighboring states in the United States. Not so. Despite the lower homicide rate in Canada, four of the 9 contiguous Canadian provinces or territories have a higher homicide rate than the continuous state in the US. At the very least, it's clear that something else -- beside gun laws -- is going on.

**UK guns and crime chart. Draconian firearm laws in the**

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UK merely destroyed the shooting sports, but did nothing to reduce violent crime.

**UK-US crime comparison chart.** The UK now has higher rates of many violent crimes than the US.

## **Firearm registration clown.**

### **Conclusion**

I hope I have been able to debunk some of the “urban myths” about firearms and gun laws.

### **Ready, aim, fire**

Many people have warned us that, in fighting terrorism, we shouldn't wage war on Islam, but only on terrorists. Islam isn't the problem, terrorists are. It is particularly important to distinguish between the terrorist minority and the majority of Muslims – on the grounds of basic fairness. But also this distinction is important strategically. It is crucial to isolate the terrorists in order to get help from the rest of Islam

### **Fire, Aim, Ready**

Unfortunately, we have not been so thoughtful when fighting crime in Canada. Rather than aiming at violent criminals, the Canadian government launched a cultural war against traditional Canada. Gun owners aren't the problem, criminals are. Canadians have owned firearms for centuries; and done so responsibly.

Firearm registration fails the test of good police strategy. In order to stop violent criminals – society needs the support of the vast majority of gun owners.

Firearm registration may have won votes in Toronto and Montreal, but it certainly alienated the rest of the country.

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Opponents include most provincial governments, all territorial governments, and many aboriginal bands. At least one-quarter of all gun owners have decided not to comply.

Perhaps it would be wiser to beef up border security, keep terrorists and violent criminals in jail, instead of spending hundreds of millions of dollars on trying to register the firearms that have been used for decades by ordinary hunters.

**Side Note:** My talk is about gun control, not the new bill to fight terrorism. But I can't resist making a few points. It sure looks like déjà vu. But, the cost of all of the government's current proposals to fight terrorism are claimed to add up to only about half of what has already been spent on the useless firearm registration program.

### **Fear and freedom**

September 11<sup>th</sup> frightened and confused us all. Nevertheless, it is important not to panic. We shouldn't surrender our cherished individual freedoms in a rush to buy safety. The terrorists hate the individual freedoms we enjoy in North America. The terrorists are upset by the spectacle of a culture that honors diversity and individual freedom.

We need to fight terrorism, but we also need to retain what we rightfully pride ourselves about our Western Civilization: our individual liberties. The terrorists will win if they can get us to abandon our liberties and our freedoms.

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## **Cultural diversity**

As Canadians we are proud that we respect the variety of races and cultures that live among us. But, what about rural Canadians? It is time to remember that respect for cultural differences includes respect for them too.

### **Thanks to Nora and Ted Sterling**

There is a need to tell the Emperor he has no clothes.

Thanks to Nora and Ted Sterling, SFU has a more supportive environment for dissenters than is found at many other universities. That is no small accomplishment.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions and comments.

Word count: 2,500