

The Case Against Ottawa's Gun Ban and Buyback

Canadian
Taxpayers
Federation



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DEEP DIVE

Trudeau's flawed gun ban and buyback policy

Todd MacKay

(Vice-President, Communications, for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

It's time for our Deep Dive.

This is when we get deeper into important issues. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation's federal director, Aaron Wudrick, is here to talk about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's recently announced gun ban and buyback.

And Aaron, this is a tough topic to talk about because it's connected to tragedy.

It's heartbreaking to think about the 22 people who were murdered in Nova Scotia. In 2006, I was at the funeral for one of the RCMP officers shot and killed in the line of duty near Spiritwood, Saskatchewan.

Aaron Wudrick

(Federal Director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

This is a tough issue. I don't hunt or own guns, but guns are just part of life for a lot of hunters and farmers. When I put myself in their shoes, it's easy to see why law-abiding gun owners feel like they're getting smeared because of crimes other people have committed.

Todd:

I grew up in rural Saskatchewan and enjoy hunting so I certainly see that side of it. But we want to talk this through and bring up points we're not seeing in other places.

Aaron:

Here's what's happening. On May 1, the federal government issued an Order in Council, which is just a decision made by cabinet.

That Order in Council made it illegal to buy, sell or use any of the so-called military-style assault rifles it listed. In two years, the prime minister says he'll pass legislation to buy those guns back with taxpayers' money. This applies to licenced gun owners.

Todd:

There's a lot that goes into getting a gun licence. You have to pass the course and the criminal record check. You also need to get your spouse to sign off. And, if you've had mental health issues, they can check on that too.

Obviously, criminals don't generally get a gun licence.

Aaron:

In fact, the murder responsible for the tragedy in Nova Scotia didn't have a gun licence and got at least some of his guns illegally from the United States. The lack of data in this debate is frustrating, so here's some. [Statistics Canada](#) reports that there were 249 gun murders in Canada in 2018.

Handguns were used in 143 of those murders, and the prime minister's ban and proposed buyback doesn't include handguns.

Here's another key point. [CBC reporter John Paul Tasker](#) looked into the numbers. He reports that between 70 and 99 per cent of guns used in crimes come from the U.S. Taking guns from licenced gun owners won't stop criminals from smuggling guns across the border illegally.

So, most gun murders are committed with handguns and illegal guns so, at most, Ottawa's gun ban and buyback has no chance of stopping the majority of gun murders.

Todd:

Then there are questions about the definition of the term assault rifle. Ottawa's Order in Council doesn't define the term, it just lists guns that are now banned. It seems arbitrary.

I'll use two guns to illustrate the issue.

The government is now banning a gun called a Ruger Mini-14. It's a semi-automatic rifle, which means you have to pull the trigger for each shot, you can't just hold the trigger down and fire. That was the gun used in the Polytechnique murders in 1989.

The other gun I'll mention is the SKS. The Soviet Union developed the SKS for its military so it could be called an assault rifle. However, it's a

semi-automatic, so you have to pull the trigger for each shot, which was made obsolete by the AK-47 that is fully automatic. Now, fully automatic rifles like the AK-47 haven't been allowed in Canada for a long time.

But you can buy a surplus SKS in Canada for \$300 or \$400. The two murderers who killed three people in Northern B.C. in 2019 used SKSs. But the prime minister's ban and buyback plan doesn't include the SKS.

Here's another odd point of comparison. The Mini-14 uses bullets that are generally [75 grains](#) at most – that's a little less than five grams. The SKS uses bullets that are about [twice](#) as big.

So is hard to see the logic in this gun ban.

Aaron:

OK, but let me play devil's advocate. Based on that logic, maybe Ottawa should just ban the SKS as well. Maybe it should just draw the line at all semi-automatics. Would that make more sense?

Todd:

That would cause a few big problems.

First, the SKS is a pretty common gun. It's impossible to know exactly how much that would cost buy them all back, but it would be millions and millions. If Ottawa extends it to all semi-automatics, the bill would get exponentially bigger.

And dealing with that logical problem just raises another one. The prime minister is right when he says you don't need an AR-15 to bring down a deer, but not for the reason he thinks. For example, the Ruger Mini-14 and many other so-called assault rifles fire relatively small .223 caliber bullets.

Every single deer hunter I know uses rounds that are significantly more powerful than a .223, including my buddy's 12-year-old daughter. If the goal is to ban all dangerous guns, it's a problem because all guns are dangerous if they're not used properly.

The gun used in the Spiritwood tragedy was a 30-30. That's the same gun a murderer used to kill Corporal Nathan Cirillo and storm Parliament in 2014.

Aaron:

Help me out. I don't know what a 30-30 looks like. Is there a movie reference you can give me?

Todd:

If you've ever seen an old Western, you've probably seen John Wayne carrying an old 30-30. So, it doesn't look like the guns being banned. But if it isn't used safely, it can be dangerous.

Aaron:

I'm trying to think of an analogy that makes sense to me as someone who doesn't shoot guns.

Is this policy a bit like trying to stop drunk drivers by banning vodka, but not whisky?

Todd:

Honestly, it's probably more like banning highball glasses, but not shot glasses or beer mugs.

Aaron:

That takes us to an important point.

At this point, Ottawa just banned these guns with an order in council, but the prime minister says

he's going to bring legislation to compensate law abiding gun owners who have to give up their guns.

The Liberal [election platform](#) included \$200 million to buy these guns. But it could be much more.

The long gun registry was only supposed to cost \$2 million, but the actual cost went up to more than \$2 billion. And it doesn't seem like this money will actually get the guns used by criminals.

Todd:

[Back in 2018](#), the federal government announced it would spend \$86 million over five years to stop illegal guns from coming into Canada.

That makes a lot of sense: most gun crimes are committed with smuggled guns. If the prime minister took the money he's earmarked for the gun buyback and redirected it toward border security, he could more that double that funding.

Aaron:

An RCMP officer's salary tops out at about [\\$86,000 per year](#). That means for \$200 million, you could hire about 460 Mounties dedicated to stopping gun crime for five years.

Todd:

Here's what Ontario Premier Doug Ford told the Canadian Press about those choices, [quote](#): "I can't help but think that money could be put at a much better use hunting down the violent criminals and stopping the illegal guns at our borders."

Aaron:

Here at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, we push hard for government accountability and accountability is all about choices.

Perhaps the prime minister has convincing evidence that spending hundreds of millions to take guns from law abiding citizens will help more than stopping gun smuggling and hiring police officers.

But we haven't even seen those questions asked, let alone answered. There hasn't been any significant debate because he did this with an order in council, rather than taking a law to Parliament.

Todd:

Aside from the merits of the actual policy, this is the wrong way to do this. Accountability is important. It's wrong for the prime minister and his cabinet to do this without any debates or votes in Parliament.

Aaron:

We've looked at this issue and surveyed our supporters and we've concluded that this is a bad policy and the prime minister is imposing it the wrong way. So, we've launched a petition opposing the prime minister's gun ban and buyback.

INTERVIEW

New Zealand's Gun Ban and Buyback Experience An interview with the New Zealand Taxpayers' Union's Executive Director Jordan Williams



Todd MacKay

(Vice-President, Communications for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

Today we're joined by Jordan Williams. He's the Executive Director of the New Zealand Taxpayers' Union. So his job in New Zealand is similar to what we do in Canada, we look out for taxpayers. Now, the reason we asked you to join us today is because New Zealand is about a year ahead of Canada in a process that we just started, a massive program to ban and buy back thousands of guns. Tell us why that happened in New Zealand, and tell us a little bit about how that policy was implemented by the government there.

Jordan Williams

(Executive Director for the New Zealand Taxpayers' Union):

Well, it came in quite rapidly after a tragic event on 15 March 2019, where 51 people were slaughtered in the Christchurch terrorist attack. It was an Australian nutter who had come to New Zealand, had got a firearms license, and had a whole lot of firearms, including a number of illegal firearms, and live streamed this terrible event. That was on 15 March. By 11 April, parliament had passed (the legislation) ... it was nearly unanimous, there was only one vote against it, 119 to one, a ban on semiautomatics and what politicians like to call military style, which actually, once you get down to it, it's very hard to define.

Todd:

Describe the policy a little bit in New Zealand. What did it look like? How did it roll out?

Jordan Williams:

Well, basically overnight, it banned a huge number of firearms people mostly had for practical purposes. I mean, unlike the U.S., I don't know what it's like in Canada, most firearms owners have it for a practical purpose, which is mostly either pest control or hunting. There are a lot of sports shooting clubs, but, for example, New Zealand does not have that pistol shooting culture. I mean, the most popular firearm in New Zealand is probably the .303. Lot of soldiers brought it back after the Second World War. We don't hunt moose, but we hunt a lot of red deer, and, of course, most kids growing up on rural properties would be given a bunny gun at their 14th birthday for shooting rabbits or possums. Possums are an Australian pest.

Myself, I'm one of the quarter of a million New Zealanders who own or have a firearms license. I've got a little .17 HMR for shooting wallabies and possums. Wallabies are also a pest in a couple of areas of New Zealand. But my point is, is that for most New Zealanders that this affected, it would be the likes of a .22 semiautomatic that can hold 10 rounds. That's now banned.

Similarly, the next in line is probably going to be pump action shotguns. But, for example, if you

had a semi-automatic shotgun for duck shooting, which is a big sport here, you were probably affected because of the size of the magazine. What the government did is they said, "All right, all of those are banned, and you've got to hand them in to the police, and we'll compensate you, and you've got until the end of the year."

Now, what that led to is, actually, when you went down into the detail, it was not the fair compensation that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had promised. Because when you look at the upper limit, if your firearm was brand new, the government would pay you no more than about 90 per cent of the wholesale price. From a taxpayer's perspective, the irony is, because the government had really, really gone cheap in the compensation area, it led to a heck of a lot of resentment, particularly for firearms of historic value that were, on the schedules, considered old and of very low value.

Whereas, the Australian model, instead of using wholesale prices and deducting say 50 per cent if it's had a bit of wear and tear, they were quite generous. In fact, I think they were paid about 110 per cent of retail if something was brand new. Now, from a taxpayer's perspective, the Taxpayers' Union wasn't out there saying, you should be paying more. But certainly, it was something that we talked a lot internally here at the Taxpayer's Union, that actually what the government's trying to do isn't going to work, because the amount of resentment in the firearms community is high.

Everyone understood that this terrible event, there probably had to be some sort of political reaction to it. But when you see Jacinda Ardern on the cover of Time magazine, and The Guardian in the UK, and all the left media around the world fawning over her response to the Christchurch massacre, in actual fact, New

Zealand firearms owners felt under attack, that their way of life, their lifestyle, their hobbies were not at all understood or respected by our Labor Party or center-left government, the leading party in particular.

It seems that the key advantage New Zealand had in the area of firearms law is very, very high compliance rates. It would be difficult to find anyone with a firearm that didn't have a firearms license, and that. There's historically quite a lot of trust between the police and the firearms-owning community. Well, that's pretty much gone now. There's a lot of resentment towards the police, firstly, from the firearms community for the way that this was so suddenly politicized, and it turned into a bit of a Punch and Judy show to the licensed firearms owners, and, let me emphasize, law-abiding licensed firearms owners.

What we are sadly starting to see now is a real erosion of that. I mean, again, anecdotal, but our big hardware companies, apparently they noticed quite an uptake in sales of short run PVC piping. What that was, was people burying their grandad's firearm, that was now banned, in the backyard.

Todd:

Certainly that concept of government being accountable to the people, and working with the people rather than against them, I think that's an important part of the Canadian conversation as well, especially given that some of those definitions that you were alluding to, how do you define some of these specific firearms? In the Canadian context, some semi-automatic centerfires are being banned, others aren't. So it creates a real sense of resentment across the board. But let's go to your point and to the taxpayers' point, how much does this actually cost New Zealand taxpayers?

Jordan Williams:

Well, about just shy of \$100 million (NZD) went out the door for the buyback. We didn't criticize that per se because, arguably, the bigger problem is that because the government was being cheap, the compliance was probably quite low. The big uncertainty we're dealing with is, the government does not know how many firearms are actually in the New Zealand community. I mentioned that we have very good legal compliance and that licensed firearm owners, most people that own a firearm and if you trade a firearm, even in rural communities, private sales through the equivalent of Amazon sort of thing, people look for the licenses and require that, to show me your license.

We don't have a central register of the firearms, and frankly, the government just didn't go and do the homework. Go back to customs data. There's not a heck of a lot of leakage across the New Zealand border, because you may have noticed if you look at a world map, we've got quite a big moat around us, and it shouldn't have been that difficult to come up with estimates of where the actual number is. But the best we have is that there is somewhere between 55,000 and 240,000 firearms of the particular classes that were newly banned.

The buyback resulted in 61,000, very close to the low end of that estimate, being handed in. Officials will privately acknowledge that there is a heck of a lot still out there that are now illegal. Probably a very low proportion of those would be owned by what you and I would consider a criminal, although they are now. But now we have the problem of a huge volume of these now-illegal firearms, that are illegal firearms, and we will see in the years to come, that earlier compliance I mentioned and everything being done in the open is suddenly going to be done on

a black market. I think that's terribly sad.

The other big explosion we've seen, and I think in hindsight, I think most parliamentarians would acknowledge this now, is we left it up to the police to come up with the policy in this area, rather than just enforce the law and run the administration around this. Not only was that poor, and I'll come back to that in a moment, it was very expensive. It went from \$18 to about \$35 million (NZD) in the costs of regulating this particular area, and that's just pen pushers here in Wellington.

Todd:

There's a lot of problems there, a lot of concerns. To kind of recap where you're coming from and to give some perspective to the Canadian context, we're looking at well over \$100 million dollars in costs in New Zealand already for this. But New Zealand has about five million people. Canada has about 38 million people. I suspect we probably even have a few more guns than New Zealanders do, just given our culture, and how many hunters we have. If it costs \$100 million for New Zealand, it's likely to be six or seven times that in Canada, even if you make allowances for the different types of guns that are being captured in each policy. The cost for this is extraordinary.

Jordan Williams:

Back of the envelope, I think it's about \$2 billion, Canadian. I mean, the New Zealand-Canadian dollar are very similar in value. Back of the envelope, assuming the scope of the bans are about the same as ours, because that's the real issue. It's not the number of firearms owners, it's the number of firearms that are banned. We've got about quarter of a million licensed firearms

owners here, but I'd be very surprised if Canada gets away with it costing \$2 billion. But the thing is, is go back to my point earlier, we did it on the cheap. If you want it to actually be successful, you probably want to pay \$3 billion, and then the question is, is that \$3 billion worth it for what you get in return?

Todd:

Yes, exactly, and that's a huge point that I want to get to in just a moment. But I do want to talk to you about where the policy debate is going now. So with the Canadian debate, the government brought this policy forward to ban and buy back a lot of guns, but it's saying that it's going to have more legislation down the road. We don't know what that's going to look like.

In New Zealand, you're having heated debate about the gun registry, and of course, we have a lot of history with that in Canada. When they first brought it here in the '90s, they said it was going to cost \$2 million. The actual bill came in at north of \$2 billion, an incredible amount of money, with absolutely damning indictments by the auditor general at multiple points, to the point where the government reversed itself, got rid of the gun registry, and even after that government changed, the current government has not brought back the gun registry. I think that's a pretty clear admission that it was a bad policy and one that didn't work.

But this is one of the issues. If you start moving down a path where it's not evidence-based, you're spending a lot of money, disconnected from the evidence of making things safer, that road goes to very expensive places, and I suspect that that's one of the concerns that you have when you look at the future in New Zealand.

Jordan Williams:

You're absolutely right. I mean, it is very saddening that our prime minister, who, in a lot of ways models herself on your prime minister, has tried to lead us into a American-style them-and-us debate and framed the firearms community as sort of American NRA-style nutters, but it hasn't really worked.

One of the things she promised in the immediate aftermath was, okay, they've done all these bans and she got all this wonderful press coverage around the world for that, and then it was the promise for the second tranche, this register, to be passed by Parliament by the end of last year. But one of her supporting or coalition partners, that is sort of the populist party in the middle, they hold the balance of power under our weird electoral system, but they have appeared to have been the handbrake on it. And then, of course, there's been a couple of examples of leaks of information, for example, and it's been a little bit of a headache.

Now, I don't think they'd ever acknowledge this, but the fact that it's no longer being talked about, the bill is sitting. It's been through select committee and sitting on the order paper and hasn't gone anywhere, then COVID came along. I predict, can't be too confident, but I think that it's likely to languish on the order paper until the election, and I suspect a year ago, they were going to hold this up as some great success for the government, when actually now it hasn't been.

The key question, though, is has it been worthwhile? The auditor general released a report in the last few weeks on that question, and it was nothing to do with the register, or this new bill. The policy issues aren't the role of the auditor general, but the implementation and the

spending of money is, and he tasked himself with the issue of this firearms buyback.

Todd:

Tell us about that. How did the implementation actually go? It's one thing to say you're going to do it. Governments love to put out the press release, but when they actually have to do it, oftentimes things look differently. How did the operation go?

Jordan Williams:

As you know, an auditor general is outside the political fray. He's tempered with his comments, but I think the key conclusion was that there's no evidence that the money will actually result in a safer community.

This is something that the Taxpayers' Union or ... we're the equivalent of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, can say, "Hang on. You guys spent \$100 million buying back these firearms, only to destroy them, often in front of the owner. You've doubled the amount of administration costs, give or take about \$35 million, and after having thoroughly gone through everything, the auditor general can't point to any evidence that this makes us safer. Isn't that the whole basis of what's going on, that led us to here?"

Now, there's a government inquiry into the Christchurch massacre. The firearms community would say, "Well, hang on, wait until we have that before you go ahead with this second tranche." However, what will be fascinating is that's going to be the first time we look at the far greater questions around how this Australian nutter was issued with a New Zealand firearms license, and how on earth the background checks, which clearly weren't done properly to identify this guy, failed based on what's in the media. There should

have been flashing red lights, but instead the police issued him a firearms license.

The test in the New Zealand legislation is that you are a, quote, "fit and proper person," to be issued with a firearms license. I got mine about 10 years ago, but they interviewed my girlfriend, took her into another room. They came around to home and checked me out, sort of sized me up, and wanted to talk to the people I lived with, my flatmates and my girlfriend by themselves, which is just the way that you should do it.

It was quite informal, but they were sort of figuring you out, and you have to do an evening at the police station, where they give you some lectures and you have to sit a little test, like you do for the driver's license, at the end. There's a policeman in there, and no doubt they're just sizing everyone up.

It's very difficult to put this stuff down into legislation, precisely what those tests are, because it does necessarily rely on a degree of judgment. But it seems that those basic steps that I went through 10 years ago have actually been watered down over recent years, and I hope that the government inquiry turns itself to that, because as a New Zealander, I feel a heck of a lot safer with those sorts of things than the government trying to create bureaucratic rules as to who is suitable and who isn't, or tries to invent very strange legal definitions of what is "a military style weapon."

Todd:

It's interesting. That's somewhat similar to the Canadian context. We have gun licensing here. You have to take a course. Usually it happens at your local Legion hall and there's an old fellow who's been hunting for 30 years, kind of looking you up and down before he signs off on a test.

That's a big part of it. But listen, I trust that that old fellow knows who should be owning a gun better than just about anybody else.

Unfortunately, in the Canadian context, with the tragedy that we had in Nova Scotia where more than 20 people were killed recently, and that caused a lot of this policy debate in Canada, that individual did not have a gun license. He had run-ins with the law earlier. In Canada, if you have a criminal record, your odds of getting a gun license are understandably and necessarily low. He had a criminal record, did not have a gun license, and was still able to get guns illegally.

We don't have all of the details of that yet, but unlike New Zealand, we have no moat. This is not an island. Canada has the longest undefended border in the world, and our neighbors to the south are lovely on many fronts, but they like guns quite a bit. There are a lot of guns in America, and it's not difficult for criminals in Canada to skip across the border to the south, pick up some guns, and bring them back into Canada.

So I want to move that discussion with you to the New Zealand context. How is the policy working in New Zealand, in terms of stopping illegal guns and then stopping criminals from getting guns? Because ultimately, most gun crimes are by definition committed by criminals, and most criminals have illegal guns. If we want to make things safer, it strikes me that dealing with that end of the equation is a big part of it. Tell me about how that's working in New Zealand.

Jordan Williams:

Our big problem around firearms is actually around gangs. When it was the baby boomers, it was the biker gangs, but are now they're just the

criminal gangs. At least, what seems to hit the news of firearms being pulled on police officers is usually gang related. What is clear is that this, in the last 12 to 18 months, this whole focus, it's been the wrong end, it's been all the law-abiding ones. Because let me assure you that those gang headquarters aren't being cleared out of firearms to march down to the police station, to hand them in as part of the buyback.

This is the point from the licensed firearms community, which is: why are you giving us a hard time? And I deliberately use the term that this shooter was an Australian. He was an outsider and he was seriously wacko. He'd traveled around the world, meeting various groups. As I say, there was lots of warning signs with this guy. So it seems it's understandable that members of the firearms community are upset that, hang on, the attention has been taken off the people that are the crooks or the gang members, and being put on to Joe firearm owner, who has a semi-automatic shotgun and likes to go duck shooting every May.

That is bizarre from a value for money perspective. A theme that runs through that auditor general's report is that all of this money came from, or particularly the admin money, has come from what the police's actual job is, which is to catch the crooks. I would argue that if you've got a family heirloom that has sat in your gun safe for 60 years, from granddad or your dad or whatever, that you occasionally use to shoot possums or teach your kids how to shoot, I venture to suggest that the police should not be wasting our taxpayer money coming after you.

Todd:

That takes it to an important point about choices, and that comes down to value for taxpayers,

which is a huge thing for you, a huge thing for us. It's not just about the money. If you're going to spend the money, you need to spend it on the best possible outcome. We looked at it. Even if you accept the government's projections here in Canada that this will only cost \$200 million, I think that's obviously very low-end, but even if you look at those hundreds of millions, you can hire a lot of police officers to go after gang members. There's lots of things you could do with the money that's better than buying your grandpa's gun and putting it through a press and destroying it. It won't make people safer.

Jordan Williams:

It's a symptom of an increasing rural-urban divide that we see across the Western world, and probably more so in countries like Canada and New Zealand, which are traditionally more rural-based. I'm sitting here in downtown Wellington, about 200 meters from our Parliament buildings. The man in the street, or here it will be the bureaucrat in the street, versus the opinion in my hometown, which is a province that's economy is largely based on growing apples and pears, and now wine, would be very, very different.

There's a real sort of them-and-us, or almost sort of intellectual snobbery towards the lifestyle and values of probably what the supporters of groups like the Taxpayers' Union and the Taxpayers Federation have, that are based and still connected into those rural communities.

We've got about 10 on staff at the moment, and about half of them are part-time student interns, at university, a lot of law students, and economics or finance, and I asked them, when's duck shooting open? Now, there'd be very few rural New Zealanders that wouldn't know that duck shooting opens the first Saturday of May,

but they didn't know. These kids didn't know. That's because they're mostly from the cities, and this is New Zealand, we've got more sheep than we do people.

Todd:

There's certainly a significant divide in Canada. So I'm talking to you today from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. As far as anybody in Toronto or Ottawa in the middle of Canada is concerned, I live in the middle of nowhere. It's a very different point of view. There's a huge divide here in terms of understanding. I think that's a reason that it's important to have groups like the Taxpayers' Union in New Zealand and the Taxpayers Federation in Canada, to give voice to some of these concerns and make sure that we're not bringing forward knee-jerk reactions that cost taxpayers a lot of money, but rather we focus on policies that actually work in respect to the taxes that people pay in. Hey, you know what, you're just starting your day there. You've got a lot going on. Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today.

Jordan Williams:

Thank you, Todd, and can I just say that from the other side of the world, we looked very closely at what the Taxpayers Federation does. We're a lot younger than you, we're only six years old, but we looked at the way the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is the voice for taxpayers in the corridors of power, and if our organization, when it is your age, is as half as effective as yours, I'll be very proud, indeed. Thank you for having me.

INTERVIEW

We Stand with Cassandra Parker Against the Gun Ban



Kris Sims

(British Columbia Director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

We have a special interview for you. Cassandra Parker is doing something really courageous. She runs a small business up in Prince George, British Columbia, selling firearms and hunting supplies.

When the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau suddenly banned thousands of firearms from being legally owned by Canadians, it hit her and her family-run small business really hard. But she's not complaining about it. She's doing something about it.

When we here at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation read about Cassandra's story, we knew that we wanted to tag in and be alongside her in court that day, pushing back against this ban. Why? Because we knew that hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars were going to be wasted on this buyback program and that it wouldn't make Canadians any safer.

We put out the call, we launched a petition, and we sent out emails to our supporters, asking for them to back us up so we could raise money, hire a lawyer, and be in court that day. They answered that call. We're hiring a lawyer and we're going to have that day in court. It's hard enough to run a family small business here in Canada without the government interfering in this way.

But this isn't about government policy. Not this time. This is about Cassandra. She's quite something. So, we hit the road. We drove up to Prince George, BC to sit down with Cassandra in her shop and have a conversation with her. Here it is.

Kris:

So, tell us about your shop here. How does your family fit in to the firearms world?

Cassandra Parker

(Co-owner K.K.S. Tactical Supplies Ltd):

I fit into the firearms world as a part of my family unit. My husband has been a lifelong hunter. When I first met him a few years ago, I had a basic firearms knowledge. My ex-husband had hunted. We had had firearms in our home growing up. We had always tried to eat as much wild game as we could.

When we got together and when we got married, we decided that we would expand the home-based business that we had already started and we kept building and building, and now it's just the storefront that we love and helps us incorporate firearms into our community.

KKS Tactical Supplies has been our little niche market. It started with our binary exploding targets, and then just kept expanding. Now we

do hunting rifles, tactical shooting rifles, all the ammunition, the optics, and all that kind of stuff.

We wanted the store to be a spot that other families like ours could come to take their children to get them into the sport. We've got five kids and it's a huge part of our life. Our entire year centers around hunting seasons and fishing seasons. It's something we love.

Kris:

You mentioned the seasons, the hunting seasons and how it's just a part of your calendar of your life. So, can you go over that for us? A lot of Canadians can't relate to that, and I really want them to. How do you balance hunting and fishing, and what does that look like on your family calendar?

Cassandra:

We're going to start in January with ice fishing, obviously. Ice fishing is a huge, fun activity for our family. We have an interactive camera. My husband calls it interactive TV. We take the kids and we watch the fish; we get to jig and it's a lot of fun.

It gets us out in the winter when it's cold up here in Prince George. It's not uncommon to be -32 degrees before windchill. You have to find activities to do outside, otherwise you get stuck inside and the kids just go to screen time.

Then from there, we end up in March, typically. The ice will come off and we start getting prepared for spring bear. At that point, there's still predator hunting going out throughout the fall, throughout the winter as well.

Predator hunting is a big part of sustainable hunting in our area, especially when you're

surrounded by ranch lands. We have issues like caribou management in our area, and other things where predator control like wolves and coyotes is really important. So, we try to focus a bit on that through those winter months as well.

For spring bear, the meat is one of our favorites. We make a lot of jerky and pepperoni. Our kids could eat a whole package to themselves. We'll also start river fishing.

We fish the Bowen River typically, and we start with trout and keep going through the year. Eventually, we have a spot that we get down so far, we have to hike in. It's a lot of fun, and a great activity for our family.

Come July when bear is over, we try to focus more into fishing again, which means lake fishing. We go sturgeon fishing down the Lower Mainland, and all sorts of activities like that. Then we wait for fall. So mid-August, bear season opens again, and we start preparing for bear and rabbit. Then come September, we go straight into our deer, our moose, elk if we're lucky.

Our family doesn't hunt a lot of sheep right now just because we've got young children. Taking that time and hiking everybody up to the mountain can be a little bit of a challenge. But most of our fall is a good 40 hours a week of trying to find a sustainable hunt, so moose and mule deer and white tail deer.

It's insane in the shop. This last hunting season, we had a bull moose draw in 7/11 region. My husband and I split up the time where he could go hunting and I would take care of the shop. And then he'd drag his butt in here about noon. We keep going every day, right through the whole season.

Wild game is never recalled, right? We know that it was fed properly. We know that it's sustainable,

because we choose to hunt sustainably. We wouldn't poach anything. We make sure that we follow all the regulations, and we only take animals that are ready to be harvested.

Kris:

So, I'm a firearms owner, myself. I'm a married mother of two. I grew up in rural, western Canada. For us, it's just a part of your life. It's part of your culture. It's just like having a tool. For me, it's no different than owning a chainsaw or a quad or a pickup truck. It's just really a normal, safe part of life. It's a way of life.

Can you describe, for some of our fellow Canadians who may not be familiar with the firearms world here in Canada, what it is as far as safety goes? What sort of steps do you need to go through here at the shop and at home to keep things safe?

When I went and got my Possession and Acquisition Licence so that I could own a rifle or shotgun, I had to have a big background check. My spouse was spoken to. I had to have references; people that were being phoned. I had to go through a course. Every single time I want to purchase a firearm or ammunition, I have to show my license. Can you describe what sort of steps you go through to keep things safe at the shop?

Cassandra:

For sure. Any Canadian who owns a Position and Acquisition License needs to go through the firearm safety course. Then once they've completed that and pass the written exam and the practical exam by a licensed instructor, they need to submit that application to the RCMP, so the Canadian Firearms Office. Then they need to go through a full background check.

They want to know where you've lived over the last five years. They want to know if you've had any changes in spouses in the last two years. They want to have two references, so character references. They want a photo guarantor.

There's a whole lot of things that go into this application on its own. On top of that, once you get your firearms license, you need it to go and purchase ammunition and firearms, and other things too. But primarily, those are the two things that most people are after.

When you go into a store like ours, we ask to see your PAL. We check it on the RCMP database. We make sure that it's valid, and if you're buying a non-restricted, then we have to match the person to that. It goes for the ammunition and the firearms. It's a lot, right?

Then in-store, we have to store them properly, right? Everything is trigger locked. Everything is locked up at night. There is no access to customers off the street to just walk in, and pick up a firearm without a license. It's not this willy nilly, like here, take a gun. That's not how this works.

For us, on top of all those security measures, we have extra security measures just in the store. We run security cameras constantly. We have metal grates on the doors. We have anti-break film in the windows. Security is not something that we take lightly.

Kris:

When you heard about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's buyback program of firearms happening in the middle of this lockdown, what went through your mind?

Cassandra:

May 1, 2020, was an interesting day for our family, in general. I had gone out and was doing my normal morning run and came back to my husband sitting on the couch saying “read this.” It was like being hit by a car. It was insane. It’s a huge impact to my business and my daily life, this idea of a buyback program where the federal government is going to use my tax money and your tax money to purchase property that I have legally purchased.

My family has invested as much money as we could into our business, and time and energy. To have it just taken from under our feet by the stroke of a pen was completely disheartening.

Kris:

What would a firearm ban like this do to this place? What would it do to the shop?

Cassandra:

For our business, it’s a huge chunk of our monthly profits. It was a huge chunk of inventory that we’d already paid for. Right? If we had had it stolen from us, like if I had had a break-in or there had been a fire, I’d have insurance to cover it. But when the government takes it and then doesn’t initiate a buyback program, even immediately, they just ask you to sit on that inventory.

We’re already dealing with COVID-19 and the repercussions of shutting down businesses and people staying home and the economy slowing down. Now I’m sitting on inventory that I can’t sell. I can’t reinvest into my community. I can’t reinvest into my family. And I can’t reinvest into my business.

It’s not just what I’m sitting on, but it’s what I would have already sold as well. Our name is KKS Tactical Supplies. Tactical isn’t a scary thing, right? Tactical doesn’t make something more lethal or dangerous. It means that I can use the same firearm as my husband, who is 6’7”, right? I’m 5’5”.

I need an adjustable stock. I need to be able to adjust our firearms so that all members of my family, whether it my five-year-old or my 15 year, old can use a firearm safely. I call it furniture. A red couch isn’t more dangerous or different than a blue couch.

Kris:

You are helping to lead this fight against the firearms ban, against this buyback program in court. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has joined forces alongside you. We’re fighting against this in court.

We know this would be a huge waste of taxpayer’s money. We need only look at the failed long gun registry. We wasted more than a billion dollars on that long gun registry for no good reason. So, we don’t want to go down that road again. Why are you fighting this in court? What does this mean to you?

Cassandra:

Beyond the shop, this means my freedoms as a Canadian citizen. This isn’t just about an object, a firearm. A firearm is a tool, right? It’s no different than my chainsaw or my quad if I’m out hunting and I need something to help me.

When you start taking property away from Canadians, without a conversation, without a discussion in Parliament, it means that you can

do that with other things. It means, I don't know, in the future, what kind of world my Canadian children will be living in? At what point can the government take other freedoms away from my family?

Kris:

Is there anything that I haven't asked you yet that you want fellow Canadians to understand about your shop here and about your way of life when it comes to hunting and firearms?

Cassandra:

I think it's important that we all stay calm, and we have these conversations with our neighbors and our friends and our family members. We should talk about what does it mean to be a firearms owner. What does it mean to you to be a firearms owner? It's not this free-for-all, shoot everything kind of mentality.

That's not what we're about in Canada. It's about hunting. It's about target shooting. It's about competitions. And it's about family businesses like ours, where we've invested everything we can into a place that other families can bring their children in, and they can continue traditions, Canadian traditions for hundreds of years.

DEEP DIVE

We Join the Fight Against the Gun Ban



Todd MacKay

(Vice-President, Communications for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

It's time for our Deep Dive. This is when we get deeper into important issues and our federal director, Aaron Wudrick, is joining us today because he's got an important announcement.

Aaron Wudrick

(Federal Director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation):

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is joining the court fight against the Trudeau government's gun ban and buyback policy.

Todd:

That's an important fight. Canadian Taxpayers Federation supporters are energized about this issue.

When the Trudeau government first announced that it's banning thousands of guns and spending hundreds of millions of dollars to buy them back from licensed gun owners, we surveyed our supporters. We asked them, "Hey, what do you think of this?" More than 90 per cent came back saying, they're opposed to this policy.

They recognize that criminals get their guns illegally. They smuggle them from the States. And they also recognized that there are much better ways to make Canada safer than spending hundreds of millions of dollars taking guns away from licensed gun owners.

We've had thousands of Canadians signing our petition against this policy.

And then we sent out an email. We said, "Hey, listen, if we take this to court, would you mind chipping in to help on the legal bills?" And the response was immediate. Our supporters were there. So we're going to go to court. We're going to try to stop this policy. We're going to make arguments against it.

Aaron, tell us a little bit about what we're getting into.

Aaron:

The main case is actually being launched by a woman named Cassandra Parker. She owns a gun store in Northern B.C. and the gun ban and buyback is obviously devastating for her personally and her business. The ban makes it illegal to sell a lot of guns, but the Trudeau government also doesn't have any real firm or clear plans to implement the buyback part of the policy. So she's effectively stuck with an inventory that she can't sell. So she's filing an application, she taking them to court.

We at the CTF are applying to intervene in the case, which means we're asking for the opportunity to join the case and make arguments from a taxpayer point of view that we think are important for the court to hear. And of course, we have a history of doing this in a number of cases, including most recently on things like carbon tax.

Todd:

There's a number of groups getting into this case. And I think it's fair to say that Ms Parker's going to need all the help she can get. Because over at the Department of Justice in Ottawa, they've got office buildings full of lawyers that will be jumping into this one.

Now I do want to get to the legal arguments that are coming out of this case. Conveniently, Aaron, you're a recovering lawyer and you're not all the way recovered yet. So you can let us know what some of the legal points are here.

Aaron:

Obviously it makes sense that Ms Parker's concern about the ban since it could put her out of business, but the problems with the law actually go a lot further. And in her legal filing, she makes a couple of arguments, including that the gun ban and buyback is, quote: "unreasonable, arbitrary, and unsupported by the evidence." And also that it "infringes on the right to enjoyment of property."

Todd:

That's interesting because we don't often hear about any requirements for laws to be reasonable. And we don't often hear about property rights in Canada. So let's break those apart and go through them one at a time. What's going on with the reasonable requirement? Tell us about that.

Aaron:

There's a branch of law that's called administrative law. And that basically governs whether decision making bodies like courts and tribunals and governments follow the right

process and procedures and make decisions that are reasonable. And one of Cassandra Parker's arguments is that the decision the Trudeau government made, based on the evidence, actually isn't reasonable.

I'll give you an analogy. Some of you might remember a toy called lawn darts. They're these very heavy darts that you can throw way up in the air and they land on your lawn. There was a tragedy somewhere. I believe it was in the States and someone was killed by one of these. So the government's decided to ban lawn darts. Now when they did that, they didn't ban every kind of dart. They only banned the lawn darts because those were the ones that had this incident that people were worried about. And there was an example of the risk.

So if you come back to the guns again, in this case, the Trudeau government is banning all kinds of guns, thousands of models of guns, without any evidence that they're actually more dangerous than other guns and under administrative law, that can be a big no-no.

Todd:

Government lawyers are going to have a tough time, it seems to me, on the other side of this issue.

Fully automatic guns, guns that keep firing when you hold the trigger down, they've been banned in Canada since the late 1970s. It's pretty easy to draw that line. If you can hold the trigger down and it fires automatically, fully automatic, it's banned. I don't really think there's a lot of argument about that in Canada.

But now the Trudeau government is banning some guns and not others with no particular explanation. I'll give you an example. A lot of

farmers and ranchers use a gun called a Ruger Mini 14.

Ottawa is banning that gun, but it's not banning another gun called an SKS, even though it operates very similarly. It's the same principle and the same basic operation. In fact, the SKS actually fires bigger, heavier bullets.

So it's going to be really hard for the Trudeau government to justify why it's banning some guns and not others. It'll be hard for the government to bring evidence to support its ban.

Now Aaron, you also mentioned property rights, but property rights aren't included in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedom. So explain how that enters the debate.

Aaron:

Well, you're right, Todd. Property rights are not in the Charter, but they actually are in the Canadian Bill of Rights.

Todd:

The Bill of Rights. That sounds American. I think you're going to have to remind people about the Canadian Bill of Rights.

Aaron:

It's actually a bill that was brought in by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who passed this law well before Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau implemented the Charter. And we don't hear a lot about the Bill of Rights anymore because it's been overshadowed by the Charter which ended up covering a lot of the same types of rights. But if you want to think of the Charter as like being new wallpaper that was put up over the Bill of Rights, which was the old wallpaper, there's

actually some spots that weren't covered and so you can still see the old wallpaper and that wallpaper is still the law of the land, the Bill of Rights. And the Bill of Rights includes in Section 1A, the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of person and enjoyment of property.

Todd:

I'm guessing most Canadians didn't know about that. It's good to know that property rights are an important right in Canada because property rights are really important.

Aaron:

They really are. And it's unfortunate that property rights are often framed as an American-only thing. But thanks to the Bill of Rights, we do have statutory protection of property in this country, specifically that you have a right to enjoy your property.

In this case, Cassandra Parker is arguing that the government went way too far in banning way too many guns. Governments do have the right to limit certain rights, but they need to provide a justification for it. And those limits need to be minimal.

I'll give you an example. We have a pretty robust freedom of speech in this country, believe it or not, but there are obvious things that are not allowed, such as libel and slander. You can't say that someone has murdered somebody else, if it's not true, because of course that could do a lot of damage to their reputation. And it's limited to things like fact, you can call someone a mean name, but you cannot say something about them that's just factually wrong.

Going back to the guns though, the government, they're not just banning a specific gun for a

specific reason. They're just arbitrarily banning thousands of guns with no evidence and without even trying to minimize limitation on property.

Todd:

Those are the overarching points in the case as it's going forward, but tell us where the Canadian Taxpayers Federation fits in on this.

Aaron:

The obvious angle for us is the cost. During the election, the Liberals have talked about a buyback program and they had estimated that program would only cost about \$200 million. But for people who are old enough to remember, the Liberals once created a gun registry, that the price tag was only supposed to be \$2 million and in reality, it ended up costing over a billion dollars. A slight cost overrun to say the least. So you can appreciate that we're a little bit skeptical when it comes to governments estimating costs when it comes to guns.

Todd:

That billion dollar gun boondoggle, that's probably one the Liberal government would prefer to forget about. And speaking of more reliable estimates on the gun buy back, I was just talking to our friend, Jordan Williams on the podcast a few weeks ago. He's the executive director of the New Zealand Taxpayers Union. And of course, New Zealand has very recent experience with banning guns and buying them back. They had cost overruns and here's Jordan talking a little bit about that.

Jordan Williams

(Executive Director of the New Zealand Taxpayers' Union):

Back of the envelope, I think it's about \$2 billion [for a cost projection in Canada]. The New Zealand-Canadian dollar are very similar in value. Back of the envelope, assuming the scope of the bans are about the same as ours, because that's the real issue. It's not the number of firearms owners, it's the number of firearms that are banned. We've got about quarter of a million licensed firearms owners here, but I'd be very surprised if Canada gets away with it costing \$2 billion. But the thing is, is go back to my point earlier, we did it on the cheap. If you want it to actually be successful, you probably want to pay three billion, and then the question is, is that three billion worth it for what you get in return?

Todd:

That was Jordan Williams from the New Zealand Taxpayers Union. He's ballparking a cost in Canada for a buyback at \$2 billion. Hopefully he's on the high end of it, but I think it's a pretty good bet that it's going to come in over \$200 million that the government is ballparking for this.

Aaron:

I think it's safe to say the government has generally low-balled their average on these things and obviously preventing the kind of crazy cost overrun on it is right in our wheelhouse at the CTF.

Now the tricky part from a legal standpoint is that wasteful spending isn't really a legal argument. If we had to go to court every time there was wasteful spending, we probably have to just be a full time law firm and we'd be in court every day. But the spending part is connected to

the reasonableness of the law and that's where I think there's a legal angle that we can bring forward.

Todd:

So basically we can't go to court just to complain about wasteful spending, but we can go to court and make strong arguments that a decision that's leading to wasteful spending is unreasonable.

Aaron:

That's right. And you know, we are still working with our external lawyers to hash out some of the finer points and we hope to be filing our arguments soon, but because we're seeking to intervene in the case, which means we're basically just asking the court to let us in. We have to convince the court first that what we have to say will be useful to them. So it's kind of like being pre-screened before we can formally participate in case.

Todd:

It's always a little bit hard to know what will happen in the court process, but listen, we've got great lawyers working on this. We're watching other cases as well, we're looking at those. And so overall, we're feeling pretty good about our chances here. I think we can make a real difference on this issue.

Aaron:

I think so. And the CTF has a great track record in court. Just in December we intervened at the Supreme Court to argue that judges shouldn't get automatic raises when governments are trying to keep a lid on spending across government. We're, of course, the only non-government organization that's intervened to argue against the Trudeau carbon tax. We've done that in Ontario and Saskatchewan and Alberta, including a win at the Alberta Court of Appeal. And that one is going to the big final for all the marbles at the Supreme Court in the fall and we'll be there again, arguing against the carbon tax. And, you know, while there are no sure bets at court, we're confident that we can make a difference in this fight against that terrible Trudeau government gun ban and buybacks.