

ATA Article for August 2014

Greetings from Ontario, Canada.

You may recall some time ago that I cautioned readers that there were threats to our gun clubs and ranges but at the time I was reluctant to talk about it. Why? Because articles like mine get read by people on both sides of issues and I did not want to enlighten those on the "other" side that may choose to do us harm. It looks like the cat is now well out of the bag and I believe it is now time for me to explain the problem. Many clubs in Ontario are now under the "gun" already.

When the Firearms Act was crafted it provided for a series of regulations, one of which was the Shooting Clubs and Shooting Ranges Regulations. Each province has its own Chief Firearms Office which administers a lot of things and is responsible for licensing gun clubs and ranges. One of the criteria that the CFO must ensure before a range permit is issued or renewed is that there must be compliance with applicable zoning laws but also evidence of compliance with any operating licenses required by federal, provincial or municipal laws. Guess what? Municipalities are now networking and have determined the best way for them to negatively impact gun clubs (and their ranges) is to put in place municipal by-laws for "operating licenses" like a "business" licence. Provisions are so onerous that clubs cannot comply with them. Municipalities then inform the CFO that the range permit should not be issued or renewed. The CFO will generally await the outcome of any court challenge to test the validity of the municipal legislation but clubs are clearly at risk. Some municipalities have resorted to regulating gun clubs through business licenses for instance where hours of operation are reduced (sometimes to the point of destroying a club's economic viability). Sometimes sound levels are regulated to compliance levels well below Ministry of the Environment tolerance levels for existing operations. Many municipalities do all this out of a sense of public responsibility. Others have an apparent, even obvious agenda – to shut down gun clubs.

Court challenges to by-laws are expensive for all concerned and outcomes are unpredictable. Some municipalities do not do much if any public consultation nor do they seek input from stakeholders such as gun clubs. More and more gun clubs must monitor a municipality's agenda. Don't get caught flat-footed.

On another topic, several gun clubs have reported to me that the CFO is now taking the position that trap houses can result in ricochets (they have probably seen shot impact areas on the near side of trap houses). The CFO wants a berm behind the trap house but I am told will settle for wood attached to the nearest face to absorb pellets.

And on the political front, we in Ontario will have another four years of Liberal rule. There are a great many things that a provincial government can do to make things difficult for firearm owners, as well as negatively impacting on our clubs and ranges. It was time for change, and voters were ready to replace the Liberals which had served several terms with a minority, having been propped up by the New Democratic Party (NDP), the latter of which extracted significant left of center concessions in exchange for their support of budgets and bills.

The Liberals abused the public trust with scandal after scandal that cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Premier Dalton McGuinty saw the writing on the wall it would appear and stepped down about 18 months ago. The Liberals chose Kathleen Wynne as their leader to finish out the balance of the term. Few thought the Liberals had any chance of winning another mandate. The Conservatives were leading

the polls. It was widely speculated that Tim Hudac and his provincial Conservatives would bring the change that voters wanted and our economy needed. The NDP decided not to support the Liberal's spring budget (in spite of it being very NDP friendly) and the provincial government toppled. We, in Ontario, were in for an election.

It was alarming how ineptly the provincial Conservatives ran their campaign. At the best of times, Tim Hudac was less than an inspiring leader. It was his election to lose and he and his team accomplished that big time. He promised one million new jobs but neither he, nor anyone else for that matter, could do the math in support of this lofty election promise. And, he vowed to ax 100,000 public sector jobs which made the math even worse. Visions of a former Conservative premier Mike Harris who slashed and burned came to the forefront. Voters were scared. It isn't so much that they didn't trust Hudac's math – they trusted that he would eliminate jobs in the public sector to the point that teachers, police and their unions, families and friends voted strategically to stop Hudac and his team and that they did. Almost everyone thought it would be a Liberal minority led by Wynne. Astonishingly, Wynne, who was a cabinet minister during the Liberal scandals was not punished but in fact rewarded with a majority. She became Canada's first elected openly gay Premier. The NDP no longer controls the balance of power. Hudac has resigned and the Conservatives are back to the drawing board with reduced members and little influence for the next four years. Firearm and gun club issues were not an election priority. But with the Liberals in total control in Ontario, hold on, we could be in for a rough four years.

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