



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (10.08 p.m.): I rise to oppose the Weapons Amendment Bill introduced by the honourable member for Caboolture. This Bill raises a fundamental question; that is, what sort of society do we want? Do we want a society where some families live with the constant fear that, if ever a domestic dispute gets out of hand, tragedy is only a gunshot away? Do we want a society where we dare not accidentally cut someone out on a freeway because there is a chance they might have a .357 magnum in their glove box? Do we want a society where students open fire on their classmates? I certainly do not.

The tragedy at Columbine High School in Colorado last week prompted a local newspaper item about guns in Queensland schools. Warren Davis, an assistant director-general of Education Queensland, is quoted in the Queensland Times of 23 April as saying that guns in Queensland schools are "an extreme rarity". Thankfully, that is true and I will do everything to keep it that way.

But another quote attributed to Mr Davis in that same newspaper item sums up what I want to say about this matter tonight. Mr Davis is quoted as saying—

"We're not like America yet."

Yet! It is that little three-letter word at the end of that sentence which chills me to the bone. Are we going to roll over and let this country become like America? Are we going to effectively become the 51st State of the United States of America by following everything America does? Or are we going to be our own people? Are we going to stand up for commonsense and for common decency and never become like America?

There are some great things about America. I studied for my PhD in America. My wife is American. My first-born son is American. I have great admiration for the American people, but I do not like the American gun culture, and I never want an Australian gun culture. I want Australia to be Australia.

It is ironic that One Nation, with Pauline Hanson draped in the Australian flag, claims to be the most patriotic political party of them all. One Nation is openly critical of globalisation. One Nation is so proudly Australian that it wants to build trade walls and race walls around our land of the Southern Cross. But when it comes to guns, One Nation is not patriotic. One Nation wants Australia to be America. One Nation wants to take us straight down the American road—the dangerous road, the heartbreaking road, the wrong road.

After the tragedy of Port Arthur, the National/Liberal coalition Government—as the member for Yeronga just pointed out—acted promptly and responsibly to a nationwide call for strict new firearm controls. New laws, formulated after much consultation and debate, have proven to be logical, in the main workable, and enforceable. And most importantly, they have been proven to protect the interests of honest, responsible, law-abiding firearm owners. The legislation introduced by the coalition recognised that there were justifiable grounds for possessing firearms. That proposition was never questioned. The coalition also recognised that the existing legislation provided too much scope for people with unjustifiable grounds to purchase and possess firearms.

In this Bill, the honourable member for Caboolture raises the issue of self-defence. In his second-reading speech he said—

"We strongly support the concept of self-defence, and so in this Bill defence of a person or the person's family in the person's place of residence will be a valid reason to obtain a firearms licence subject, of course, to satisfying all other requirements under the Act."

The cold hard truth is this. When a person gets a gun for self-defence in their home, self-defence more often ends up as family attack. An extensive research project undertaken by Dr Arthur Kellerman, Director of the Center for Injury Control at Emory University in Atlanta, found this——

One Nation Party members interjected.

Dr WATSON: Those members ought to listen, because they just might learn something.

Mr Nelson interjected.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! The honourable member for Tablelands and the honourable member for Burdekin! I have been quite restrained so far with their interruptions. They should let the member have a fair go, the same as they will get a fair go when it is their turn.

Dr WATSON: Mr Deputy Speaker——

Mr Nelson interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have asked the member for Tablelands not to defy me. He has had a warning. He will allow the member to continue his speech in silence and extend the same courtesy to the member as that member will extend to him.

Dr WATSON: As I was saying, an extensive research project undertaken by Dr Arthur Kellerman, Director of the Center for Injury Control at Emory University in Atlanta, found this: a gun kept in the house is 43 times more likely to be used to kill a family member or a friend than an intruder. Let me repeat that: a gun kept in one's house is 43 times more likely to be used to kill a family member or friend than it is to kill an intruder. In a study examining 743 deaths in the home from gunshot, only two out of the 743 people killed were intruders—two out of 743. The other 741 who ended up dead were family members or friends. Being an American study, some people may say that this has no relevance to the gun debate in Australia. Well, let us look at an Australian study.

The October 1991 issue of the Medical Journal of Australia reports on a study done into all the firearm deaths that came before the Brisbane Coroner between 1980 and 1989. In that time, the Brisbane Laboratory of Pathology and Microbiology collected data on 587 firearm deaths. Four hundred and sixteen of these deaths were from the Brisbane metropolitan area and 171 were from other parts of Queensland. One cannot get much closer to home than that. Let me read to members the results and then the conclusions of that study.

Suicide accounted for 76% of the firearm-related deaths. If we are serious about curbing youth suicide and suicide in general, then that alone is reason to make it harder to obtain a firearm. But back to the figures. Of the remaining 24% of firearm deaths, 18% were from homicide, 3% were accidental and 3% were undetermined. Of the 108 homicide deaths, almost half were committed by family members, while friends and acquaintances accounted for another quarter. This Queensland study found only one case where the homicide was the result of a civilian killing a felon. So for all caring Queenslanders, and especially for those who have children, this study makes a chilling conclusion. It says——

"Parents who keep firearms for reasons of family protection should realise that if their guns ever did kill someone, the most probable victim would be their young adult son dying by his own hand."

In America and in Australia, two independent studies have reached the same chilling conclusion. With a gun in the house, self-defence is much more likely to become family attack. In other words, if a person keeps a gun in the house for self-defence, the person who is most likely to end up dead is someone they love.

There is one other issue about this debate that I want to clear up. For far too long now we have been forced to swallow the assertion that people have always had some God-given right to bear arms. In all these debates about guns, someone always trots out that old chestnut: "Citizens have a right to bear arms." Let me set the record straight about that statement once and for all.

The English Bill of Rights of 1688 does mention that people have a right to bear arms. But the actual wording in that Bill of Rights is this——

"That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law."

Members heard me correctly. The original Bill of Rights said that only Protestants could bear arms, and it also said "as allowed by law".

Mr KNUTH: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. The original Bill of Rights does say that Catholics already have the right to bear arms.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Dr WATSON: The original Bill of Rights said that only Protestants could bear arms, and it also said "as allowed by law". Perhaps the honourable member for Caboolture and his colleagues could live with that full wording, but I am not sure whether anyone else could. That archaic law has no relevance or place in our modern society.

In conclusion, I call on the members of One Nation and any other people in this House who might support this Bill to be truly patriotic; put the interests of all Australians first; and do not take us down the American road. Instead, they should help us maintain a society in which people do not have to live in constant fear that a domestic dispute will end in death, or that a neighbourhood dispute will end in tragedy, or that schoolyard jealousies might one day turn into schoolyard massacres. Let Australia show the way. Let Australia be a place where my children and their children can live in relative safety. Let Australia be Australia. I urge all members of the House to reject this Bill outright.
