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Would Albertans join Confederation today under the present rules? Would anyone?

Of the hundreds of public presentations made to a committee of MLAs last month on "Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation," the prize for brevity goes to Glen Parent of Wainwright.

"Imagine," he told the committee, "that Alberta had not joined Confederation in 1905. And imagine if Ralph Klein and Paul Martin met today to negotiate Alberta's entry into Confederation. How do you think that meeting would go?"

"I suppose Martin would say, 'Ralph, here's the deal--what I will do is make all your people register their guns, then I'll tell your wheat farmers that once they harvest their crops, it all belongs to me. Then I'll enact an Accord that will hamstring your oil industry. And Ralph, all you have to do in return is give me nine billion dollars a year. So what do you say?'"

Parent has a point. There's no way Albertans would willingly join the present federal structure on the present federal terms.

That was the purpose of the government's hearings. What sort of federal arrangement would make sense? The committee reports in the summer.

Most of the presenters favored greater provincial powers. This isn't because they're closet separatists, whatever the media may think. It's because the national government has invaded so many provincial areas of jurisdiction that

the federal system no longer works.

It's bad for Canada, not just Alberta.

Take Parent's example of gun control, something that still riles any Canadian who isn't totally brainwashed.

Ottawa's 1995 Firearms Act was not only pointless, for the obvious reason that criminals do not register guns. It's also an attack on the provincial right to regulate private property.

Ottawa knew this, of course, but didn't care. Ottawa always craves greater political power and control, and the only place to get it is to poach it from the provinces.

As a result we have spent almost \$2 billion (according to the most recent estimates) paying 1,800 new federal bureaucrats to snag hobbyists, hunters and farmers across the country with absolutely useless red tape on a matter that is none of Ottawa's business and probably hasn't stopped a single crime.

We're indebted to Saskatchewan Conservative MP Garry Breitkreuz for almost everything we know about the gun registry, such as the following.

- The system has a 71% error rate in licensing owners and a 91% error rate in registering individual guns.
- A gun's federal registration certificate does not contain the

name of the owner, model, calibre and magazine capacity. I'm serious. It shows the manufacturer and the serial number, among which there are known to be at least 222,911 unexplained duplicates.

- A reasonable estimate is that the Firearms Act has made criminals of one million Canadians who refuse to license and register.

This disaster shows what happens when Ottawa finds a bogus pretext to seize turf from the provinces. Billions are wasted, people are put in jail, rights are trampled, distrust and resentment spread.

And we still haven't mentioned health care, the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, fiscal equalization and our Ottawa-run western police force.

Would Albertans join such a cock-eyed arrangement today? Not on your life.

However, the real question is what we can do about it. And the answer lies in returning our country to its original design, of stronger provincial responsibilities and less federal government.

- Link Byfield

Link Byfield is chairman of the Edmonton-based Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy.

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