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Lorne Gunter: Don't believe the gun registry hype

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[Lorne Gunter, Canadian politics](#)



If you hand out enough parking tickets, occasionally you're going to nab the odd car thief in the process. But it would be wrongheaded to imagine you could make a dent in the total number of auto thefts by increasing your enforcement of parking bylaws.

Yet, this is about what Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair would have us believe about gun registration.

Since the summer, as part of "Project Safe City," Toronto police have been rousting firearms owners who have failed to renew their gun licenses. The other day while performing a search on one such owner's home, officers stumbled across an impressive cache of weapons. Instead of the 25 registered firearms they expected, they found 58 firearms and 6,000 rounds of ammunition: one machine gun, one submachine gun, 17 handguns, 35 rifles and four shotguns.

That sounds like an impressive haul — and it is — but its discovery is coincidental to the usefulness of Ottawa controversial rifle and shotgun registry. Finding these guns was like stumbling across a stolen Lexus while writing its driver a ticket for parking in front of a hydrant.

Chief Blair, though, used the occasion to throw his support (again) behind the federal gun registry. The chief, who is also the head of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, said the find proved the registry's worth in battling gun crime and urged MPs — who next Wednesday will hold an important vote on whether to dismantle the billion-dollar registry through a private member's bill — to keep the databank because it is helpful to police.

But his own officers' seizure does not back this claim.

The owner in whose home the collection of guns was found had not registered his guns with the new registry. His home was selected for a search because he had permits under the old Restricted Weapons Registry System, which predated the current registry and permitted the ownership, in some circumstances, of machine guns and other automatic and semi-automatic weapons. His old permits had lapsed seven years ago and police were curious about the state of his collection now.

So it wasn't the new database, but rather an old one that tipped police to the owner of this hoard of guns.

Chief Blair told a news conference that without the registry, his officers would never have known about the original restricted weapons; and would not have information about individual firearms owners because Bill C-391 would do away with owner licensing. Neither claim is true.

Even if the private member's bill, introduced by Manitoba Tory MP Candice Hoepfner, manages to survive an open vote next week in the House of Commons, and eventually brings about the closure of the registry begun by the Liberals in 1998, individual gun owners will still have to take rigorous safety courses and obtain federal licenses before legally buying and using guns. Also, handguns and other "restricted" weapons will still have to be registered.

Only hunting guns — shotguns and rifles — would be exempt from registration under Ms. Hoepfner's legislation.

Even if Bill C-391 had passed a year ago and the registry had been shut down for 12 months now, Chief Blair's officers would still have had the information they used to find the 58 firearms they so proudly displaced earlier this week. Indeed, they would have been able to find those same weapons had the registry never existed.

What's more, it is counterintuitive to claim that a registry will stop gun crime. Only law-abiding citizens will jump through all the bureaucratic hoops to license themselves and register their guns. If you go looking for gun criminals using information in the registry, your likelihood of finding any is about the same as finding that stolen Lexus in front of the hydrant.

According to Statistics Canada, gun homicides are up 24% since 2002, despite the existence of the registry. And according to the Canadian Institute for Legislative Action and the Canadian Shooting Sports Association, 92% of gun crimes in Canada are committed with illegal handguns.

While Chief Blair and his officers are fanning out across Toronto knocking on registered gun owners doors, gangs and other criminals are continuing their crimes and are making a mockery of the chief's claims for the gun registry.

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