

# Time to (finally) kill the gun registry

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On Sept. 21, the House of Commons will vote on a bill to close down the Canadian Firearms Registry's authority over long guns. The legislation is up for third reading. If it passes, it will become law pending approval in the Senate and Royal Assent.

Though, technically, Bill C-391 is a private member's bill initiated by Conservative MP Candice Hoepfner, it is widely seen as a Conservative initiative blessed tacitly by Stephen Harper himself. In both the 2005 and 2008 elections, the Conservatives promised to scrap the registry. After being elected, they declared an amnesty for long gun owners, since renewed four times, effectively putting registry enforcement in limbo.

Since the Tories form a minority government, however, the bill's passage is far from guaranteed. While it easily survived second reading, thanks to the support of eight Liberal, 12 New Democrat and one independent MP, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff announced in April that he will whip the Liberal vote this time around, reducing the majority support for the bill to a scant 158 out of a total of 308 MPs. (Mr. Ignatieff is promoting his own "compromise" on the issue -- which would keep the registry, but strip away some of the associated sanctions.) Hence the mounting interest in recent days, as the Sept. 21 vote approaches.

On Monday, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the registry, and called on police chiefs and officers to tout its benefits to politicians and the public. The association's president, Toronto Chief of Police Bill Blair, said that police officers consult the registry up to 11,000 times daily, and that he believes it is a cost-effective means of reducing crime.

But support for the registry among police rank and file is not unanimous. Just the opposite: In a (admittedly unscientific) straw poll conducted on a police-officer forum, 92% of the 2,631 respondents reportedly voiced support for scrapping the gun registry.

Earlier this year, several former front-line officers spoke out publicly. "Never have I attended a killing where the registry of any of the weapons would have prevented that killing from occurring," said Dave Shipman, a retired 25-year veteran of the Winnipeg city police, who investigated violent crimes and homicides. A colleague went further -- 33-year police veteran Jack Tinsley accused police leaders of perhaps not being "in touch with what is really taking place on the street on a day-to-day basis" and of being politically motivated. Other critics have suggested that the registry's value to police isn't related to safety: It is simply an easy, bureaucratic means to tack on additional charges against criminals who already have been arrested.

This week, polling firm Angus Reid released the results of a survey showing that only 13% of Canadians believe the registry has been successful in preventing crime. Fortythree per cent believe the registry has been unsuccessful, while 29% feel it has had no effect. More Canadians would scrap the registry than keep it.

We stand among the abolitionists. The gun registry criminalizes law-abiding gun owners by penalizing them if they fail to register their guns. Yet it scantily inconveniences actual criminals, who don't register their guns anyway. Moreover, the cost of the program, estimated at over \$2-billion, is far out of proportion to the theoretical effectiveness of the registry in preventing crime (though, admittedly, most of that money is a sunk cost). Even if it were true that a life or two had been saved because of the registry, orders of magnitude more good could be done with that money if it were instead invested in any number of other areas -- from projects to target cybercrime and child pornography, to programs to divert the at-risk youth who might one day be tempted to join the ranks of criminal gun-toters.

As Public Safety Minister Vic Toews pointed out earlier this year, Canada already has a licensing system for hunters and people who use long guns, to prevent persons with criminal records from accessing them. From the beginning, the registry represented a needless, wasteful duplication of this effort. It is time for Bill C-391 to pass and for this boondoggle to end. Politicians should heed the will of their constituents, pull the trigger on the gun registry, and redirect its funding to other, more proven means of

combatting crime.

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