

Distorting the gun facts

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper's law-and-order Conservatives have no valid reason to kill off Canada's rifle and shotgun registry, beyond pandering to their rural constituencies. So they've resorted to playing up the cost of the so-called "long gun" database and denying its usefulness, trying to cast it in the worst possible light.

And sadly, with support from a handful of spineless New Democrats and Liberals, the Harper government nudged forward a private member's bill in the Commons last week that would kill the long gun registry and deprive police of a crime-fighting tool they find helpful. The Conservatives are forever attacking the gun registry as a "billion-dollar-boondoggle." And indeed, it did cost \$1 billion to set up, due to cost overruns. But that is water under the bridge.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police report that the registry for handguns and long guns cost \$8.4 million this past year to operate, hardly an onerous amount. Furthermore, the registry could pay for itself, if the Conservatives had not decided to stop levying fees for registering firearms. They have even waived the \$60 to \$80 fees to renew licences to possess and acquire firearms. In the process, they have made the registry a burden on the general public, the better to discredit it.

Meanwhile Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan is fond of saying things like, "It's clear that the firearms registry is a giant waste of money and is totally useless in preventing crime." But that isn't how the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police sees it. They strongly support the registry, and argue, rightly, that Canada's 2 million gun owners "need to be accountable" for their 7 million firearms.

The Mounties say that police consulted the registry some 3.5 *million* times last year, a huge jump over the year before.

And Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair credits registration with helping his force recently uncover a cache of 58 unregistered firearms including a machine gun and submachine gun (both classified as "long guns"), 17 handguns, 35 rifles, four shotguns and thousands of rounds of ammo. We can only imagine the result, if those weapons had found their way into the hands of gang members and other criminals.

Blair calls the cost of the long-gun registry "money well spent." It makes life safer for his officers, who know what they're up against when they respond to calls. And guns that are duly registered to hunters, farmers and target shooters are also likelier to be disarmed, carefully stored under lock and key, kept out of criminals' hands and not loaned out to unlicensed people.

That makes life safer for us all. Scrapping the registry is a politically motivated move with no policy rationale.