



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 26, 2016

## Chicago's Futile Attempt to Shut Down Gun Pipeline

In the fall of 2014, Indiana resident Willie Lee Biles [made several trips](#) via a Mega Bus coach bus to Chicago carrying a gym bag containing more than 30 handguns. He would then sit on the front porch of a friend's home on Southside Chicago and sell them to anyone who stopped by. The markups were sometimes three and four times what Biles paid for them back home.



Officials investigating the case said that at least one of his customers was a convicted felon, while others were gang members. In May Biles was convicted of selling firearms without a license, a misdemeanor, and could be incarcerated for up to five years and fined as much as \$250,000.

Biles was part of the Iron Pipeline, supplying firearms from lightly regulated Indiana to heavily regulated Chicago. On Tuesday Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner signed a bill into law that now calls such activity a felony, with sentences that could reach 30 years. House Republican Leader Jim Durkin, who supported the bill, said that more than 400 people have been killed with guns in Chicago alone so far this year, and another 2,320 have been wounded by gunfire. He added that 60 percent of the guns used in those shootings came from states outside Illinois, such as Indiana.

Last November the *New York Times* published a report based on information from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research that attempted to define the extent of the Iron Pipeline's ability to funnel firearms from gun-friendly states into those that are highly restricted. It concluded that more than two-thirds of guns connected to crimes in New York and New Jersey were brought in from other states, mostly from the South, using Interstate 95.

In California, said the report, criminals used firearms obtained from nearby states with fewer gun control laws, such as Arizona and Nevada.

For instance, the handgun used in the murder of two Brooklyn police officers last year was traced to a pawn shop located outside Atlanta, Georgia. A handgun used to murder an officer in East Harlem, New York, last month was traced back to South Carolina.

William J. Bratton, New York City's police commissioner, called the Iron Pipeline a virtual "spigot":

We're trying to deal with it, but we have a spigot that's wide open ... and we don't have a national or local ability to shut that spigot down, at the moment.

What makes shutting down the "spigot" nearly impossible is the often tortuous path a firearm, legally purchased, might travel before it is used in a crime. A gun shop in Georgia or Indiana might sell it to a buyer who has passed the requisite background check, who then sells or gives it to a friend (or a stranger). He might claim that it was lost or stolen, and the trail ends there. That friend/stranger might



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then give or sell it to another friend, and so on, until it reaches the criminal using it in a crime.

The survey done by Johns Hopkins consisted of interviewing prison inmates in Cook County, Illinois, asking them where they got the weapons they used in their crimes. Of the 135 weapons involved, just two were purchased legally. Said one inmate: "Some people get on a train and bring them back.... [It] can be up to five or six guns, depending upon how much risk they want to take."

CNN was quick to pick up on the *Times*' story with the obvious anti-gun conclusion: All states need much stricter gun regulations. It quoted Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson:

When there's a profit incentive, people will drive through the night on I-95 to bring these guns into our city. Our problem is really the states down South ... that have weak gun laws. We have strong gun laws, but we're overwhelmed with all the guns from these weaker states.

Efforts to crimp the Iron Pipeline, such as the new law in Chicago, are bound to fail.

CorrectionsOne.com, a website devoted to the prison industry, noted back in November that guns can be found in prisons, regardless of the restrictions designed to eliminate them. If inmates can't bribe someone to bring them from outside, they'll make them. The article illustrated 15 different deadly weapons fashioned by creative criminals with lots of time on their hands.

Just as efforts to shut down drug trafficking from Mexico have failed, so will Chicago's new law. In 2008, the federal government initiated the Merida Initiative, designed to crimp the drug traffic coming out of Mexico. It ended up spending more than \$1.4 billion in the attempt, supplying the Mexican government with helicopters and surveillance technology to reduce the flow. The government failed miserably, with "narcogangs" growing in number and ferocity to the point where they outnumber and outgun the Mexican drug army. The flow of drugs into the United States continues apace.

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