



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 17, 2014

Connecticut Gun Owners Ignore Registration Deadline

Connecticut State Police Lieutenant Paul Vance [reported last week](#) on the failure of gun owners in the state to register their “assault” weapons, noting that fewer than 50,000 applications had been received from the owners of an estimated 350,000 weapons in the state. And even that number might be too small. In simple terms, gun owners numbering in the thousands — perhaps tens of thousands, maybe totaling 100,000 — have simply ignored the December 31 deadline to register their firearms and thereby add their names to a de facto gun-owner registry.



Politicians — even those who voted against the bill back in April of last year — were surprised. Said state Senator Tony Guglielmo, “I honestly thought from my own standpoint that the vast majority would register. If you pass laws that people have no respect for and they don’t follow them, then you have a real problem.” At a town hall meeting last Thursday night Guglielmo heard from one of his constituents about the new law. Said the senator: “He made the analogy to prohibition. I said, ‘You’re talking about civil disobedience, and he said ‘Yes.’”

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Law enforcement officials appeared to be surprised at the invisible underground refusal to register. Mike Lawlor, an undersecretary of Connecticut’s Office of Policy and Management, said those who haven’t registered by the deadline will suffer the consequences:

Like anything else, people who violate the law face consequences ... that’s their decision. The consequences are pretty clear.... There’s nothing unique about this.

If a gun owner fails to register a firearm that now falls under the vastly broadened definition of an “assault” weapon, his crime, if convicted, is punishable by a prison term of one to five years and a fine of up to \$5,000. Plus he would not be able to own a firearm ever after. These same penalties apply to those failing to register high capacity magazines (now defined in Connecticut as containing more than ten rounds). And the numbers of those failing to comply are even higher. According to the Connecticut Office of Legislative Research, there are more than two million such magazines in the state and by December 31, just 37,000 declarations of ownership had been received by the state police.

The trick is finding out who those newly minted felons are. This being an election year, Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy isn’t likely to push hard for enforcement. Instead, other alternatives to encourage compliance are being considered. When asked, Lawlor said that the state police “could look into” the matter, suggesting perhaps “they could send them a letter.” He suggested that another “open” registration period could be considered, to remind those who might have forgotten to register, giving them a grace period of forgiveness. A marketing campaign might also be undertaken, touting the supposed wonders of gun registration and its promise of reducing violent crime in the Constitution State.



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If such civil disobedience continues, and the gun owners refusing to register their firearms continue to number in the tens or even hundreds of thousands, there is another option: repeal of the offending law. That's what happened in Canada, in circumstances eerily similar. Following a years-long effort to create a registry of gun owners there, one was finally passed in 1995. It never met its objectives, except one: Cost overruns exceeded initial estimates by a factor of 30.

It was finally abolished in 2012. Gary Mauser, professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C., outlined [the causes of its failure](#), which included the following:

- Under the new 1993 law, more than half of all registered handguns in Canada were prohibited but “no evidence was provided that these handguns had been misused.”
- In 1995 the law expanded police powers to search for and seize offending weapons from their owners.
- By 2001, “no more than half of all long guns ended up in the registry,” and opposition contributed to the rise of the pro-gun-rights Reform Party and to the end of the Liberal Party, which had pushed for the law.
- Annual costs to operate the registry were estimated to be \$2 million a year, but had exploded to \$1 billion by 2005. By the year 2012 the program was costing \$2.7 billion to administer.
- The auditor-general uncovered vast waste and corruption in the program which also contributed to the fall of the Liberal government in 2006.
- There was never any convincing evidence that registration of firearms was effective in reducing homicide rates.
- Police departments failed to use the registry partly because of vast errors in the database and partly because it only tracked law-abiding Canadians which helped not at all when tracking down criminals.

In his summary, Mauser wrote, “The evidence shows that the long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing criminal violence.”

Nor is the Canadian experience unique. No international study of firearm laws by criminologists or economists has found support for the claim that restricting access to firearms by civilians reduces criminal violence.

Looking back at the quiet invisible underground civil disobedience taking place in Connecticut, history might just record the beginning of the end for such efforts. If gun registration cannot be enforced in liberal Connecticut, where *The New American's* “[Freedom Index](#)” rating for the state's combined congressional delegation — two U.S. senators and four representatives — now stands at an appalling 17 percent, where else could registration be enforced?

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics.



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