

Mayor's Summit On Illegal Guns

by {ga=ddean}

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What is a city to do? There are illegal guns on the street that are being used to commit violent crimes, so as a city you do what you can on your own:

- step up enforcement of gun possession laws
- intercept illegal sales
- lobby for tougher laws and stiffer penalties in the state legislature
- and even try [suing gun manufacturers and dealers](#) for negligent marketing techniques.

But most of the guns -- reportedly [92 percent](#) of those recovered between 1988 and 2003 -- are from out of state. So no matter how many guns you take off the street here, more keep coming. Other states have lax gun laws, so it is easy for people to buy guns there and bring them to your city, and your laws have no effect outside of your borders. And the people that are supposed to intervene when there are problems across state lines in a federal system -- Congress and the rest of the national government -- do nothing; indeed they are trying to [prevent you from obtaining the information](#) about where the guns are coming from .

So what's a city to do? If you are New York City, you call together mayors from 15 cities from around the country at Gracie Mansion. On April 25th, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and co-host Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston, played host to what was dubbed [the Mayor's Summit on Illegal Guns](#) . Half photo op, half strategy session, the meeting concluded with the attendees signing a ["statement of principles"](#) (in .pdf format) which called for increased punishment of illegal gun possession and trafficking, action against gun dealers who allow so-called "straw purchases" (the use of a third party to buy guns), and resistance to federal efforts to limit the cities' access to gun trace information.

While it is true that shootings are down in New York so far this year, in many ways Bloomberg has staked his second term on making tangible progress in his campaign against illegal guns. He made the issue a central plank in his State of the City address, traveled to Washington to testify before Congress, and now has attempted to put together a broad coalition of local politicians from across the country. If nothing else, the effort has made Bloomberg a nationally-recognized name.

Positive Reaction, But Fruitful Follow-up?

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The reaction in the local press has been positive. The Journal News (Westchester) issued ["cheers for leaders demanding action"](#)

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[Bloomberg declined a request](#)

from the National Shooting Sports Foundation to speak at the meeting.

Of course, the important question is whether the mayor's coalition-building will do any good. Barring a major change in this fall's federal elections (not out of the question, but certainly not a sure thing either), Congress is unlikely to take any action to tighten federal gun laws. And given recent attempts to restrict access of local governments to gun trace data, New Yorkers might be forgiven for believing that Congress wishes them ill.

Congress aside, there are two ways that the "Mayor's Summit" could prove fruitful. Politically, the city can only benefit from attempts to reframe the debate over guns and from the creation of a broad network of like-minded mayors. The group of 15 that attended the meeting at Gracie Mansion included the mayors of such cities as Milwaukee, Jackson, Mississippi, Dallas, and Tulsa. A quick look at the press reports of the summit and the obligatory "balance" quotes from the National Rifle Association give a hint as to the anti-Bloomberg talking points: The mayor is an elitist with an elitist plan, out to get law-abiding gun owners. To the extent that the coalition grows to include more politicians from cities like Jackson, Dallas, and Tulsa -- hardly bastions of northeast-style liberalism -- the group's ideas may have more currency.

Practically, if this group proves to be more than a one-time photo opportunity, and can expand to include a broader network of cities, there are real opportunities for mutual assistance. Bloomberg has made much of his fondness for technology and information sharing, not only in public safety initiatives but throughout city government. Figuring out a way to share information about gun trafficking and related problems with cities across the country can only benefit New York's efforts (and everyone else's as well). Sometimes when Congress refuses to act, the people affected on the local level just need to get creative.

Court Victory

As if on cue, the same week of the Mayor's Summit, a federal judge in Brooklyn handed the city [another victory in its lawsuit against gun manufacturers and dealers](#)

. Judge Jack Weinstein, a Lyndon Johnson appointee who is a Senior Judge in the Eastern District of New York, again allowed the city's suit to go forward, despite apparent federal law to the contrary. Last year, Weinstein held that the suit could continue, despite the passage of a law prohibiting such suits (that decision is currently pending on appeal in the Second Circuit). And now Judge Weinstein has held that Congress' recent attempts to restrict the use of gun trace

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data by local governments do not apply to the New York case, because the city had possession of the information prior to the passage of the law. It is unclear whether Judge Weinstein's decision will hold up on appeal, but for now at least the city's lawsuit is still alive.

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