Ballistic 'Fingerprinting'

Ballistic "fingerprinting" in general:

- Ballistic "fingerprinting" is the process by which "sample" shots are fired from a gun in order for law enforcement to collect the spent shell casings and store their markings (embossed on the shell casing by the chamber of the gun during detonation) in a database system. In theory, law enforcement would be able to match-up the markings (fingerprints) of any recovered shells at crime scenes to that of the samples in their database and determine what specific gun fired the bullets.

- The term ballistic "fingerprinting" must be considered a misnomer as, unlike a human print, which is unique and permanent, these markings change constantly through both standard use of the firearm (in some cases with as few as 25 shots) and through intentional alteration -- in other words, the so-called "fingerprint" can be altered by anyone using something as simple as a nail file on the inside of the chamber.

Problems with ballistic "fingerprinting":

- Despite the tens of millions of taxpayer dollars spent on implementing ballistic "fingerprinting," the technology does not work. New York and Maryland (the only two jurisdictions to implement such a program) have yet to solve one crime through ballistic "fingerprinting." There have been calls from many in law enforcement to end the program -- in favor of allocating more money and other resources to proven methods of curbing crime, such as more police officers and more prosecutors.

- By keeping an ever-expanding database of prints, jurisdictions are increasing exponentially the size of the already huge haystack they must sort through in order to find the "needle" in question.

- The firearms retailer is already licensed and monitored by the ATF and the purchaser of the firearm must submit and clear a comprehensive federal background check run by the FBI. Cleary, the practice of ballistic "fingerprinting" is an unnecessary and burdensome mandate on law-abiding citizens and law enforcement.