

APRIL 3, 2001

BROAD CONGRESSIONAL COALITION CALLS ON PRESIDENT BUSH TO PRACTICE WHAT HE PREACHES

SAY PRESIDENT SHOULD ENFORCE LAWS BY FUNDING PROGRAMS "TO PREVENT US FROM MOVING BACKWARD IN THE EFFORT TO HALT GUN VIOLENCE"

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In the wake of the recent rash of school shootings and in advance of Administration's formal budget submission to Congress, a broad coalition of Democrats called on President Bush to practice what he preaches by fully funding existing gun safety laws. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), who organized the letter signed by 34 members, called on the President to keep his campaign promise to make sure that laws on the books are enforced, not weakened or hampered by inadequate funds.

In the letter, the members wrote that *"[e]xisting strategies have played an important role in the sharp decrease in gun violence over the past eight years and each, we believe, merits your support."*

The members specifically urged the President to support existing policies and programs such as the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative that will keep guns out the hands of minors, and called on his Justice Department to aggressively pursue and prosecute gun traffickers. In addition, they asked that the President requests full funding for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) so that it can continue to ensure licensed dealers are complying with gun laws. Furthermore, they called on the President to use his executive authority to prohibit the importation of assault weapons and to fully enforce the 1994 Crime bill.

The members concluded, *"[t]hese steps will at least prevent us from moving backward in the effort to halt gun violence," and that "[w]e must investigate increasing dialogue between the NRA, gun control advocates, and the government to find solutions that will ensure the safety of our children in schools and all citizens."*

The letter was signed by Schakowsky and Representatives Charles Rangel; Jerrold Nadler; Carolyn Maloney; Carolyn McCarthy; George Miller; Tom Lantos; Ellen Tauscher; Jose Serrano; Corrine Brown; Cynthia McKinney; Stephanie Tubbs Jones; Michael Capuano; Adam Schiff; Barney Frank; Al Wynn; Robert Wexler; Neil Abercrombie; Lane Evans; Tom Barrett; James McGovern; Anna Eshoo; Earl Blumenauer; William Lipiniski; John Larson; Jim Moran; Ed Markey; Howard Berman; Hilda Solis; Bob Filner; Nydia Velazquez; James Langevin; John Lewis; Eva Clayton; and Bill Luther.

Below is the letter to President Bush.

April 2, 2001

**The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500**

Dear Mr. President:

During the presidential campaign, you repeatedly stated that the best gun control measure is enforcement of the laws already on the books. In the wake of yet another school shooting tragedy, we would like to raise policies that you can preserve and enhance to prevent future tragedies. These existing strategies have played an important role in the sharp decrease in gun violence over the past eight years and each, we believe, merits your support.

- Preserve Youth Crime Gun Tracing

The Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII) is a collaborative program between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) and state and local law enforcement, tracing crime guns back to their source. The YCGII has been an asset to law enforcement in both solving crimes and providing a better understanding of the crime gun problem. In 1999, YCGII traced more than 64,000 crime guns recovered in the 38 cities it was used. It is due to this success that 12 more cities have been identified to implement this program in the upcoming year. In light of possible departmental budget cuts, we ask that you adequate funding levels to allow for this needed expansion.

- Maintain Gun Dealer Oversight

The ATF also has responsibility for licensing and ensuring that Federal Firearm License (FFL) holders are in compliance with federal, state, and local law. By ensuring compliance with the federal requirements for FFLs, the ATF assists law enforcement in several ways: (1) inspections of existing licensees help law enforcement identify and apprehend criminals who illegally purchase firearms; (2) inspections improve the likelihood that crime gun traces will be successful, since inspectors educate licensees in proper recordkeeping and business practices; and, (3) compliance inspections target licensees likely to divert firearms from legitimate trade to criminal use as well as dealers with a history of poor compliance. The important role played by ATF to make sure that licensed dealers are complying with the law is a critical component in preventing the easy flow of firearms into the hands of criminals. We hope that adequate resources and staff will be allocated to ensure enforcement of gun laws.

- Prevent Rearming Felons

Until 1992, the federal "relief from disability" program existed solely for the purpose of restoring the ability of felons convicted of federal crimes to legally buy and possess

guns. In the 10-year period from 1982 until 1992, this guns-for-felons program processed 22,000 applications from convicted felons, and restored gun privileges to approximately one-third of those applicants. Crimes committed by felons who obtained "relief" include sexual assault, homicide, and firearm violations.

Fortunately, the Clinton Administration and Congress refused to continue funding for the federal "relief from disability" program, despite continuing support for the program from the National Rifle Association. When Congress de-funded the program in 1992, felons resorted to the courts as a backdoor avenue to obtain restoration of their firearm privileges. The Department of Justice has vigorously fought the cases brought by felons. To date, only the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has agreed to restore the gun privileges of felons although several other federal circuits have considered such cases. Following the Third Circuit's ruling, the lower courts have restored the gun privileges of at least three felons. Your administration must be stalwart in refusing to use federal resources to rearm convicted felons.

- Prosecute Gun Trafficking

The Department of Justice has taken the lead in prosecuting illegal gun traffickers. Of 1,090 cases involving illegal firearms trafficking recommended for prosecution by ATF agents, nearly 90 percent were referred to the U.S. Attorney's Office. (The U.S. Attorney declined prosecution in only 10 percent of the cases.) Many of the prosecuted cases involved licensed gun dealers who were diverting large quantities of firearms to the illicit market. Your commitment to tough enforcement of the gun laws should make this prosecutorial effort a top priority.

- Enforce the Federal Ban on Assault Weapons and High Capacity Magazines

We urge you to be vigilant against the illegal manufacture and importation of both semi-automatic assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. The 1994 Crime bill prohibited the manufacture and sale of both semi-automatic assault weapons and high capacity magazines, and both former Presidents Bush and Clinton utilized their executive power to prevent foreign manufacturers from bringing their assault guns into this country. However, there has not been full enforcement of the law. The Treasury Department should strictly interpret and enforce existing law. We ask that you use your executive authority to prohibit the importation of weapons that pose a risk to Americans.

We believe these steps will at least prevent us from moving backward in the effort to halt gun violence. This is only the first step, we must be investigate increasing dialogue between the NRA, gun control advocates, and the government to find solutions that will ensure the safety of our children in schools and all citizens. Too many children are able to get their hands on loaded guns and, intentionally or not, injure and kill people around them. We must develop effective measures to address the misuse of firearms and ensure that criminals and children do not have easy or illegal access to guns.