

Gun control: Once-banned guns used for sport, some say

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provision in the law set the ban to expire this year unless Congress renewed it, which it did not.

Although some students interviewed did not know the specifics of the ban, many felt strongly that the ban should be renewed.

Graduate student Hill Pierce said he had heard about the expiration of the ban and feels that semiautomatic weapons are unnecessary.

"The idea that Americans need assault rifles is ridiculous," Pierce said.

Pierce said he favors stronger regulations on assault weapons and handguns and hopes Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry will take a stronger stance on the issue of gun control.

Senior Brianna Ronemus agreed, saying she did not favor ending the ban.

"There's no real use for semiautomatic weapons except for killing stuff," Ronemus said. "If more people can get ahold of these weapons, it can't be good for anybody."

Junior Noah Martinson said the expiration of the ban will put police officers in danger.

"It's a step backward, not a progressive step for the country," Martinson said.

"There's no real use for semiautomatic weapons except for killing stuff... If more people can get ahold of these weapons, it can't be good for anybody."

BRIANNA RONEMUS | University senior

Senior Jason Pate said he was surprised the Legislature and the president let the ban expire and assumes that another ban will eventually be put into place. Pate said whether people need assault weapons depends on their circumstances, adding that some of these firearms are used for hunting or recreational shooting.

"People do need self-defense, but not to the extreme," Pate said.

Even gun enthusiasts have been left confused by the expiration of the ban. Gunter, who said he has worked at The Baron's Den for six years, said the store has received many calls from people seeking more information about changes to the law.

"Even people who know a lot about guns don't know about it," he said.

Gunter said the ban was ineffective because it "dealt with cosmetic differences," noting that black, military-style weapons like the 9 mm Beretta Storm carbine looks much less deadly to some people than similar models with a wooden stock.

"Just because a gun is black and has more handles doesn't make it worse than anything else," Gunter said. A grandfather clause under the ban allowed people to buy and sell existing semiautomatic weapons that were restricted by the ban. Gunter said similar weapons, minus banned features, could also be sold and purchased new during the ban.

He added that he doesn't think lifting the ban will have a significant impact on the sale of semiautomatic weapons, although he said prices of formerly banned weapons have dropped. A Colt AR-15 like the ones he demonstrated, which would have sold for about \$2,000 under the ban, now retails for less than \$1,000. Yet Gunter said the prices on semiautomatic weapons still make them prohibitively expensive for potential criminals to purchase for use in a crime, saying it would be cheaper and easier to obtain a

stolen weapon or buy a used firearm from a pawn shop.

Gunter said some of the formerly banned weapons are purchased by military collectors. Gunter, a former Marine, said he purchases some military-style guns.

"I buy them because I used similar guns in the military," he said.

He also said they are used in competitive shooting events like those hosted by the shooting range at The Baron's Den.

"I own a lot of military-style firearms, and the worst thing they've ever done is punch holes in paper," Gunter said, referencing the paper targets used at ranges for practice.

He added that there were ways for firearms collectors to get around the ban by doing modifications to make their guns look more authentic.

Gunter said some people confuse semiautomatic weapons with fully automatic firearms or "machine-guns." He noted that automatic guns are still restricted by the National Firearms Act of 1934.

"It's a failed experiment, basically," he said. "It did nothing to deter crime. Just banning anything is not going to make it safer."

Instead of reinstating the ban, Gunter said he believes stricter enforcement of existing weapons laws is necessary to curb crime involving firearms.

But supporters of the ban, including several national law enforcement groups, adamantly proclaim the need for renewed restrictions.

Before the ban expired, members of the Million Mom March made a tour stop in Eugene in August to support continuation of the ban. The event attracted about a dozen supporters, including Eugene Police Chief Robert Lehner and Rebecca Lynn, whose daughter was shot at Thurston High School in 1998, according to an Aug. 11 article in The Register-Guard.

Lynn said Thurston shooter Kip Kinkel used an illegal magazine of 50 rounds when he shot 27 students, killing two, according to the article.

In an open letter to President Bush on the Million Mom March Web site, Sarah Brady, the chairwoman of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, urged the president to reinstate the ban.

"Now, these guns, designed by military scientists to inflict the maximum level of damage to human beings, are back on our streets," Brady said.

Brady said the law was effective, according to the letter.

"This law worked, and it saved lives," she said. "It saved the lives of police officers and children."

Both sides of the debate cite

studies they say support their views.

The National Rifle Association, which wanted the ban to expire, cites a 2001 report by the U.S. Department of Justice that indicated only 7 percent of inmates who carried a firearm during the offense that put them in jail used military-style semiautomatic weapons. Handguns were used by 80 percent of the inmates, according to the study.

"Now, these guns, designed by military scientists to inflict the maximum level of damage to human beings, are back on our streets."

SARAH BRADY
Chairwoman, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

However, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence cited a different study. The group said information from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol,

Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives demonstrates the law has saved lives. The study indicates that 4.8 percent of guns suspected of being used in a crime and traced by the ATF before the ban were semiautomatic weapons, while 1.6 percent of guns traced after the ban went into effect were semiautomatic rifles.

A federally funded 2004 report to the National Institute of Justice on the effectiveness of the ban found that large-capacity magazines used in all types of guns were involved in more gun crimes than assault rifles, but it was not clear how a shooter's ability to fire multiple shots without reloading affected his lethality.

"Should it be renewed, the ban's effects on gun violence are likely to be small at best and perhaps too small for reliable measurement. (Assault weapons) were rarely used in gun crimes even before the ban," according to the report.

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SEMI-AUTOMATIC ASSAULT WEAPONS NO LONGER BANNED

AK-47 and other Norinco, Mitchell and Poly Technologies Avtomat Kalashnikovs — Firearms made in Russia and elsewhere.

Uzi and Galil — Manufactured by Action Arms Israeli Military Industries.

Beretta AR-70 and SC-70 — Firearms manufactured in Italy.

Colt AR-15 — The civilian version of the M-16 rifle used by the U.S. military.

Fabrique National N/FAL, FN/LAR, FNC — Belgian-designed weapons used by many nations.

SWD M-10, M-11, M-11/9 and M-12 — Domestic semiautomatic pistols based on the fully automatic MAC-10.

Steyr AUG — A rifle made in Austria.

TEC-9, TEC-22 and TEC-DC9 — Firearms made domestically by Intratec.

Street Sweeper and Striker 12 — Revolving semiautomatic shotguns manufactured domestically.

Sources: Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, National Institute of Justice

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