

**Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman  
December 6, 2001**

I commend your efforts with this campaign, and I want to offer my congratulations on launching this new student-led organization, Gun Industry Watch. Oversight of the gun industry is always important because of the violence guns inflict on a daily basis, but it is particularly urgent today because of the role guns play in terrorism.

Since September 11, the need for gun control laws has never been stronger. Our current gun laws are so weak that our country can serve as a virtual arsenal for terrorists.

Let me give you one example: the 50 caliber sniper weapon. These weapons originally were used by U.S. armed forces to take out armored personnel carriers, shoot down helicopters and other aircraft, and even penetrate bunkers.

They have tremendous range — they can shoot accurately up to a mile and can be effective up to four miles. Combined with armor piercing and incendiary ammunition, it does not take a great deal of imagination to envisage what terrorists could do with these weapons.

Yet they are now being actively marketed and sold to civilians in the United States. In fact, they are also easier to obtain than handguns because purchases are permitted at age 18 instead of 21.

The threat that terrorists could easily obtain such high powered weapons within the United States is not a theoretical risk. One gun manufacturer, Tromix, is marketing a 50 caliber weapon on the basis that the weapon is powerful enough to pierce the cockpit windshield of a McDonnell Douglas DC-9 airplane.

In the face of this threat, I had hoped the Bush Administration would take action. Several weeks ago, I wrote to Governor Ridge, urging him to support greater regulation of these weapons of war. I look forward to receiving the Governor's response.

To the contrary, the Administration seems to be going in exactly the opposite direction. Today's New York Times reveals that Attorney General Ashcroft has even refused to allow the FBI to check its own records to see if terrorists have bought guns.

This is incredible. The American people have been asked repeatedly by the Justice Department to forego civil liberties and privacy protections in the fight against terrorism. But the Administration makes an exception when it comes to records of gun purchases. These are apparently sacrosanct.

On one hand, the Justice Department says it can detain indefinitely hundreds of individuals living in the United States because this is a sacrifice we must make in the war against terrorism. Yet on the other hand, the Justice Department says it can't inspect gun records — no matter how compelling the law enforcement need — because the right of gun owners to privacy is too great.

In this context, the establishment of the group Gun Industry Watch is extremely important. I congratulate you again for this initiative, and I wish you the best of luck.