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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

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October 9, 2001

HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA,  
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INDEPENDENT

The Honorable Tom Ridge  
Director  
Office of Homeland Security  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Governor Ridge:

I am writing to urge that you take action to remedy a serious terrorist threat: the national security risk posed by long-range fifty caliber military sniper weapons. Fifty caliber weapons are extremely powerful and have an extraordinary range. They are capable of bringing down airplanes and helicopters, they can pierce armored personnel vehicles, and they can be fired from thousands of yards away.

A new report by the Violence Policy Center documents the terrorist threat in alarming detail. The report is entitled *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles*. It demonstrates how terrorists could use these readily available weapons to cause massive carnage at civilian airports, at chemical and nuclear facilities, and at key infrastructure points throughout the country.

I believe there are some immediate measures that the Administration must take to address this threat.

First, I urge you to work with Secretary Powell to take immediate action to halt the export of fifty caliber weapons to foreign nationals. As I understand it, exports of fifty caliber weapons are regulated by the State Department through the Arms Export Control Office, which grants permits to U.S. manufacturers to export weapons abroad. An October 1, 2001, article in *Forbes Magazine* reported that the State Department recently reversed the policy of the prior Administration and gave the largest domestic manufacturer of fifty caliber weapons permission to sell these weapons to private individuals in Europe. Given the threat these weapons pose to our military troops and civilian populations, I believe it is urgent to prevent further proliferation of these weapons among foreign nationals abroad.

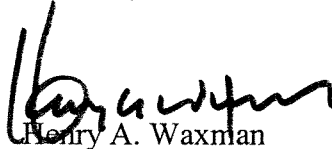
In addition, I urge the Administration to support legislation to require that persons who buy or possess fifty caliber weapons obtain federal licenses. As you may know, fifty caliber

The Honorable Tom Ridge  
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sniper weapons are more available in the United States than virtually anywhere else in the world. They are even less regulated in the United States than handguns since the minimum age for buyers is only 18 rather than 21. At a minimum, these dangerous weapons should be regulated like machine guns, grenade launchers, and other military weapons, all of which require federal permits.

I commend you on your appointment and look forward to working with you on this important issue and the other security challenges facing our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry A. Waxman".

Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Member