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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Violence Policy Center's Report on Fifty Caliber Sniper Weapons

October 11, 2001

This week, the Violence Policy Center issued a new report, *Voting From the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifle*. The report demonstrates the extraordinary dangers posed by long-range, fifty caliber sniper weapons. These military weapons can shoot down airplanes and helicopters, pierce armored personnel vehicles, and threaten military bases and civilian populations around the world. The report also reveals for the first time that Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda organization has acquired many of these weapons from the United States.

Prior to September 11, few experts could have predicted that large-scale terrorist actions were possible using such low-tech means. But now these events have lifted the veil of complacency to reveal serious security vulnerabilities throughout the country. The Violence Policy Center report demonstrates that there are a myriad of low-tech methods terrorists could employ using long-range fifty caliber sniper weapons to cause massive carnage at civilian airports, at chemical and nuclear facilities, and at key infrastructure points throughout the country.

Unfortunately, these weapons are easily available in the United States. Unlike machine guns, grenade launchers, and other military-type weapons, these sniper weapons are not regulated under the National Firearms Act (NFA). In fact, fifty caliber weapons are even less regulated than handguns since the minimum age for purchase is just 18 instead of 21.

Within the next few days, Congressman Rod Blagojevich and I will be reintroducing legislation that recognizes the national security threat these weapons pose and that regulates them accordingly under the NFA. I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

In addition, because of the severe national security issues raised by these weapons, I have written to Tom Ridge, the President's newly-appointed Homeland Security Director. I have warned him about this problem, and I have asked him to support our legislation. Finally, I have written to General Colin Powell who, as a former military commander in the Gulf War, is acutely aware of the destructive power of these guns. As a preliminary step, I have recommended that he immediately halt

the export of these dangerous military weapons to foreign nationals overseas.