



NEWS

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OPINION

THE CLINTON GUN BAN: A TEN-YEAR DECEPTION *WELCOME EXPIRATION OF "ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN" ENDS DECADE OF LIES, CONFUSION*

By Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter

Monday, September 13, marks the welcome end of a federal law that was the meaningless product of a cynical and deceptive campaign to erode one of our constitutional rights. It should be a day remembered well for the rare restoration of a fundamental freedom, each and every one of which is precious.

President Clinton's so-called "assault weapons" ban was nothing more than a sop to anti-gun liberals. It provided only the illusion of reducing gun violence, but it did real damage to our liberties.

The ban on making, importing or selling "assault weapons" was part of the Violent Crime Control Act of 1994. It outlawed semi-automatic rifles featuring detachable magazines with more than 10 rounds of ammunition, and any more than one attachment, such as a pistol grip, a flash suppressor or a bayonet mount.

Proponents said the idea was ridding our communities of particularly threatening, military-style firearms designed only for killing people. What the law actually did is a classic example of government acting in a way that is all form and no substance.

In fact, California Democrat Senator Dianne Feinstein admitted to "60 Minutes" in January 1995 that the law she championed was purely cosmetic. Still, she said, "If I could have gotten 51 votes in the Senate of the United States for an outright ban, picking up every one of them, 'Mr. and Mrs. America, turn them all in,' I would have done it."

The gun control lobby did a bang-up job of convincing the American people that the law protected them from criminals using "automatic weapons" or "machines guns," ignoring the fact that the law had nothing to do with those weapons and that the only people giving up the outlawed guns were – by definition – not criminals.

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Advocates ballyhooed the ban's dramatic effect on gun violence, even though America's violent crime rate has declined every year since 1991 – three years *before* the ban. And they took pains to include in the “assault weapons” debate such red herrings as Uzis and AK-47s – which were outlawed in 1989, five years *before* the 1994 law was signed.

They also avoided the facts about the relatively small caliber of ammunition used by the single-shot, semi-automatic rifles. They left out the fact that these are not the fully automatic “spray fire” guns covered by federal law since 1934. They were silent on how the ban on guns that they labeled as “killing machines” also took aim at the Colt AR-15 and the Springfield M1A, which are favorites of law-abiding participants in recreational target shooting and competitive marksmanship sports.

This law wasn't about pistol grips or bayonet mounts or muzzle flash suppressors. That would be like making it illegal to drive a car with a spoiler, fancy wheels or a bright paint job because it might seem too threatening to pedestrians.

This law wasn't even about clips larger than 10 rounds. After all, you get only one shot each time you squeeze the trigger.

No, this was about using legitimate public safety concerns to promote bad public policy. This was about using confusion, distortion and outright lies to sway public opinion. Ultimately, this was about taking another step toward the goal of banning guns entirely, of abridging Americans' 2nd Amendment right to keep and bear arms.

Advocates of the ban contend there is no need for that type of gun. That's like saying adjectives or adverbs should be banned because newspaper columnists and folks who write letters to the editor have no need for them. Simple, no-frills declarative sentences should be enough for anyone to get their point across. But then the words “simple” and “no-frills” would have to go, too. And those words actually make a difference in the sentence's effectiveness, while the attachments that turn a semi-automatic rifle into a banned assault weapon make no difference at all in how the gun functions.

More importantly, proponents of the assault weapons ban have proven no compelling reason for restricting our 2nd Amendment rights. The burden is on them, just as it is on anyone who wishes to limit any of our other constitutional protections, such as privacy, religious freedom or free speech.

America's Founding Fathers didn't say the 1st or 4th Amendments were any more or less important than the 2nd. Neither should we.