



# We the People National Coalition to Stop the Gun Ban

February 6, 2013

## An Open Letter to Congress and the American People

**The undersigned members of the National Coalition to Stop the Gun Ban, representing some 37 national, state, and local organizations and millions of individual rights advocates, unequivocally oppose any infringement on the Right to Keep and Bear Arms. Specifically, we oppose any effort to insinuate government controls on private transfers of personal firearms between law-abiding individuals.**

Gun owners are as horrified and outraged as anyone at recent atrocities. Our outrage includes an additional dimension though, as we have come under attack from those exploiting these tragedies to push for new restrictions on guns and gun owners. These proposed restrictions would have no effect on mass shootings or on crime in general, but would interfere with our ability to protect our families.

In recent weeks, the focus of the gun control movement has been shifting from bans on semi-auto firearms and magazines to a stronger push for “universal background checks.” Unfortunately, “universal background checks” are much more complicated, expensive, and fraught with hazards than most people realize, and as American gun owners learn the implications of these proposals, they will increasingly join us in opposition to them.

## Background Checks Don't Impede Criminals

Most criminals obtain the guns they use through theft, straw purchasers, or through the same black market that moves other illicit goods such as drugs and stolen property. They will not be affected by background checks on private sales, just as they are unaffected by current checks on sales from licensed dealers. Nor can background checks stop crazed killers bent on going out in a blaze of infamous glory.

The murderers at Virginia Tech, the Batman Movie, and Representative Gabrielle Giffords' event in Tucson all passed background checks. The killers at Columbine got a friend to buy their guns, and the Newtown murderer stole the guns he used after killing the rightful owner. Those guns were legally purchased under Connecticut's strict gun control laws.

Firearms purchased legitimately through private transfers are rarely used in violent crime. There are, however, numerous instances of persons in immediate need of a firearm for self-defense being unreasonably delayed by the “instant” background check system. In some cases people have been seriously injured or killed while they were waiting for government approval to buy the gun that might have saved them.

## Injecting Government into Private Transactions is Unproductive and Dangerous

Checking every person every time they purchase a firearm is redundant, wasteful, and unproductive. The current system is already an overreach by the federal government, and it has serious flaws. It is not uncommon for sales to be delayed and even halted nationwide due to errors, system overloads, and technical problems. Adding private transactions into this unreliable system with its potential for abuse will cost taxpayers additional hundreds of millions of dollars that could be better spent on programs that actually reduce crime. Most importantly, if all firearms transfers require government permission to proceed, the government need only withhold that permission in order to halt all legal transfers. A right delayed is a right denied.

These proposals also represent a step toward federal registration of guns and gun owners, something that has been historically demonstrated to be of little use for stopping or tracking criminals while placing law-abiding gun owners at risk and laying the foundations for future confiscation. Additionally, a registration system is subject to abuse short of confiscation as when responsible citizens in New York, were recently identified on a newspaper website as being gun owners and were subsequently targeted by thieves and harassed by neighbors. There is no legitimate reason for government to have this information or to share it with self-serving media.

## Compromise on Background Checks is a Losing Proposition

Politicians and members of the industry thinking about compromising on the idea of background checks for private transfers need to remember two landmark events: Passage of the Clinton gun ban in 1994, and the agreement between the Clinton administration and firearm maker Smith & Wesson in 2000.

Within months of passage of the Clinton gun ban, hundreds of members of Congress who had voted for the ban were drummed out of office. Revisionists today claim that gun voters had little impact on that purge, but both sides, notably Bill Clinton, blamed the historic change on people voting their gun rights.

In 2000 Smith & Wesson was almost bankrupted by angry gun owners who boycotted the company after they signed off on an agreement with the Clinton administration subjecting itself to oversight and interference by the federal government in exchange for relief from lawsuits and promised government contracts. Just one year later the company was sold for a \$100 million loss.

## Don't Just Do Something; Do Something That Works

If politicians wish to positively impact the criminal misuse of firearms, and reduce the carnage when a deranged individual or group decides to attack innocents, there are several steps they can take that actually work.

- 1. Keep violent criminals behind bars.** While keeping guns away from criminals and lunatics is very difficult in a free society, keeping criminals and lunatics where they cannot get their hands on guns

has proven to be extremely effective. Violent crime has been reduced by more than 50% in the past 20 years even though the number of guns and gun owners has gone up dramatically during that time.

- 2. Put an end to imaginary Gun-Free Zones.** Millions of armed, responsible citizens walk the streets of this nation every day without incident. It is ludicrous to suggest that these same people cannot be trusted around schools, churches, or government buildings. Firearms misuse among lawful carriers is extremely rare, and though they have often stopped criminals in their tracks, a person legally carrying a firearm shooting the wrong person or innocent bystanders is almost unheard of. A cardboard sign declaring a space to be “gun-free” is a sham and an invitation to predators.

Restricting lawful access and use of guns will never deny illicit access and use of guns. We are representatives of groups and organizations all over the nation. With this letter, we put on notice any politician, firearms industry member, or organization that we are determined to protect, defend, and extend Second Amendment rights by every means at our disposal. We invite like-minded individuals and organizations to join us.

Respectfully,

**The National Coalition to Stop the Gun Ban**

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