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STATEMENT BY REPRESENTATIVES
OF GUN OWNERS

Sept. 14, 1976

Mr. President, we are here today to express our concern over the present legislative efforts now underway, which we believe will have a severe and negative impact on millions of Americans who are decent, law-abiding citizens.

The nation has witnessed with alarm the tremendous rise in crime and violence that unfortunately has become rampant in our society. This is especially true of the situation in the big cities. There are many reasons why this situation persists. Some argue that it is because the judges refuse to punish the criminal. Others argue that the punishment is not severe enough to be a deterrent. There is still another group that suggests that America's crime problem is directly related to the existence of guns in general and handguns in particular.

Mr. President, ours is the history of a free nation. This country was won and defended by the free exercise of a people who, assembled with their own guns, overthrew a tyranny. From the beginning of the republic, guns have been plentiful in our society. Honest men who broke no laws were free to own and use guns of all kinds for legitimate purposes -- for target shooting, hunting and collecting.

We have always had crime in America. We have always had guns in America. It is only in the past few years that attention has been focused on the rise in crime and the freedom of our people to bear arms. If crime is a problem today, Mr. President,



we would submit that the cause is not found in the availability of firearms but rather it is because we live in an era where the judiciary has chosen not to punish the offenders.

Our fear, Mr. President, is that those who seek simplistic solutions to the crime problem have embarked on a course which will inevitably lead to the erosion of still another basic right: the right to keep and bear arms.

In the early 1960's, we began to hear the assertion that the handgun had no sporting purpose and should be banned from our society. Millions of constituents warned their congressmen that decent citizens would not tolerate the loss of their firearms without political reprisals against any representative who supported such restraints.

Realizing that a frontal attack on the handgun would be politically disastrous, the proponents of disarming America have chosen a somewhat different tactic. Rather than announcing their intentions to ban all handguns, they are now advocating that we ban only a certain type of handgun, the so-called "Saturday Night Special".

On its face, their argument is plausible. They seek to remove only those "cheap", "readily available", "short barreled" firearms.

We, the representatives of millions of gun-owning Americans, see a number of problems arising out of the effort to enforce any such law, given the ambiguous phrases which, up to now, have permeated present and past attempts to define this so-called "Saturday Night Special".



Early attempts to do so focused on price. Originally, we were told that these could be bought on the streets of any city for anywhere from ten to thirty dollars. But when the element of short barrel was introduced into the equation, we suddenly discovered that many short-barreled guns are priced in the \$100 to \$200 range. In fact, today a popular barrel length is four inches. Obviously, the question is blurred. Is it price or is it barrel length?

Today guns priced well above \$200 and well beyond the length that one would imagine constituted a Saturday Night Special, are now made with alloy frames so as to reduce the heavy weight. Would a new law, then, term these large, expensive handguns "Saturday Night Specials"?

Present attempts to define the problem handgun used in crime today are focusing on the words, "easily concealable" handguns. In all honesty, we ask what handgun would not be easily concealable? A \$2 hacksaw can turn a fairly expensive shotgun into an "easily concealable" handgun in a matter of minutes. In short, the objections directed at handguns today will be used against all other guns tomorrow.

Mr. President, what we find most alarming about this legislation is that federal bureaucrats will write the regulations and define the key terms to enforce a new gun control law that will reach into more American homes than any such law since the Volstead Act. In recent days we saw such a blatant distortion of the congressional intent that the Congress had to tell the bureaucracy that all-male choirs and father-son dinners were perfectly within the intent of Congress. Can you imagine what bureaucrats could



do in trying to define what is and what is not a Saturday Night Special?

Mr. President, we believe that the fears of our millions of members are valid. We believe that having found it politically impossible to pass a law eliminating the handgun, those who seek to deprive our people of their firearms are masking their intent in the creation of straw man arguments and a class of nonexistent firearms. Their real purpose is to obtain a statute vague enough to pass the Congress but potent enough to achieve their purpose. As one of their spokesmen constantly advocates, "It is time to disarm America."

All of this, Mr. President, is said to be in the name of keeping guns out of the hands of criminals. We who are old enough to remember the Volstead Act know full well the folly of trying to ban a thing to which the population has heretofore had free access. As with the international drug traffic today, banning the handgun, and most probably other weapons, will doubtlessly result in the creation of an illicit traffic in foreign-made black-market handguns of every description. In short, the criminal in this society will always have access to the weapons they use in the commission of crimes. It is the sportsman, the hunter and the honest citizen who once again will be forced to suffer the loss of some privilege, some right or some freedom because of criminal offenders. And, as too often has happened, the criminal offender will go unpunished while the honest citizen will pay for the misdeeds of that law-breaker. Must the rights of the law-abiding be continually diminished in a misguided attempt to deal with a lawless minority?



Mr. President, we have seen and applauded your courageous stand against the registration of gun owners. While many civil libertarians are clamoring for the destruction of any federal lists of people who may have been under surveillance by federal authorities, these same civil libertarians do not hesitate to propose the creation of registration lists destroying the privacy of half the American people.

We believe, Mr. President, and your congressional record supports our belief, that you do not stand for the erosion of the traditional liberties of our constituents. We want to bring these concerns to you because our readers and our club members want to be sure that you are aware of their views. We are fortunate to have a President with your legislative experience. We are fully aware that your veto may be all that lies between us and the loss of our liberties.

