What has erroneously been termed an “assault weapon” is a semi-automatic firearm that fires just one bullet with each pull of the trigger (versus a fully automatic firearm — machine gun — which continues to shoot until the trigger is released). Specifically, legislation has incorrectly defined an “assault weapon” as a semi-automatic firearm that can accept a detachable magazine and has two or more of the following cosmetic features (it is these cosmetic features that distinguish the firearm from other “non-assault weapons.”):

- A folding or telescoping stock
- A pistol grip
- A bayonet mount
- A flash suppressor, or threads to attach one
- A grenade launcher

None of these features figure into the criminal misuse of firearms, regardless of their appearance.

**SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION**

There is a tremendous amount of misinformation surrounding the issue of so-called “assault weapons.” Below are several of the more misleading allegations related to these firearms followed by corresponding statements of fact:

**Claim:** A commercially-sold “assault weapon” is a machine gun and has no place in civilian hands.

**Fact:** A so-called “assault weapon” is NOT a machine gun or automatic firearm. Automatic firearms were severely restricted from civilian ownership under the 1934 National Firearms Act. A so-called “assault weapon” is functionally no different than any other “legal” firearm. These guns fire in the same manner as any other semi-automatic firearm (one shot per trigger pull - no spray firing), they shoot the same ammunition as other guns of the same caliber and are no more powerful. What differentiates a so-called “assault weapon” from other guns is cosmetic; for example, the type of stock on the gun, which makes the conventionally operating firearm look more like a military firearm.

The gun-ban lobby understands that the confusion over what is and what is not an “assault weapon” only benefits them. Consider this statement from Josh Sugarmann of the Violence Policy Center:

“The public’s confusion over fully-automatic machine guns versus semi-automatic assault weapons — anything that looks like a machine gun is presumed to be a machine gun — can only increase the chance of public support for restrictions on these weapons.”

**Claim:** Semi-automatic “assault weapons” are high-powered guns that are meant for war.

**Fact:** So-called “assault weapons” are more often than not less powerful than other hunting rifles. The term “assault weapon” was conjured up by anti-gun legislators to scare voters into thinking these firearms are something out of a horror movie. These guns are used for many activities. In fact, the Colt AR-15 and Springfield M1A, both labeled “assault weapons,” are the rifles most often used for marksmanship competitions in the United States. And their cartridges are standard hunting calibers, useful for game up to and including deer.

continued
Claim: The 1994 “assault weapons ban” helped to reduce violent crime.

Fact: A recent comprehensive study by the Centers for Disease Control — hardly a pro-gun entity — looked at the full panoply of gun control measures — including the “assault weapons ban” — and concluded that none could be proven to reduce crime. Homicide statistics demonstrate that the miniscule use of so-called “assault weapons” in crime (less than 1 percent) continued to decrease after the ten-year ban expired in 2004 and their manufacturing and sales resumed.

Another study, commissioned by Congress, found “the banned weapons and magazines were never used in more than a modest fraction of all gun murders.” The report also noted that so-called “assault weapons” were “rarely used in gun crimes even before the ban.”

CONCLUSION

Crime control legislation should be based upon solid facts, not emotions or appearance. Semi-automatic firearms are now the most popular type of firearm in America and are used for a wide variety of legitimate purposes, including hunting, small game control, target shooting and personal defense.

They should not be banned.