Background Information On So-Called “Assault Weapons”

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: 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 continued

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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.*