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Close the gun show loophole

By John Rosenthal | August 16, 2008

A DANGEROUS "gun show loophole" continues to allow criminals and terrorists to legally buy and sell guns in the United States on a cash-and-carry, no-questions-asked basis.

At approximately 5,000 gun shows each year in 32 states, criminals and terrorists are allowed to purchase firearms from private gun dealers without an ID or background check. Although many gun dealers are federally licensed and therefore legally required to contact the National Instant Criminal Background Check System to ensure that a prospective purchaser is not prohibited from possessing firearms, private sellers have no such requirement.

Consider the following examples.

- A manual titled, "How Can I Train Myself for Jihad" was found in September, 2001, among the rubble at a training facility for a radical Pakistan-based Islamic terrorist organization. The manual contained a chapter on "Firearms Training" and singled out the United States for its easy availability of firearms. It also named the states where Al Qaeda members in the United States could "obtain an assault weapon legally, preferably AK-47 or variations."
- In Texas, Muhammad Asrar was arrested in an investigation of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He pleaded guilty to immigration violations and illegal possession of ammunition. The Pakistani store owner said he had bought handguns, rifles, and a submachine gun at gun shows since 1994.
- On Sept. 10, 2001, just one day before the devastating attacks against the United States, Ali Boumelhem was convicted in Michigan on a variety of weapons violations plus conspiracy to ship weapons to the terrorist organization Hezbollah. He and his brother Mohamed had purchased an arsenal weapons from Michigan gun shows without undergoing background checks.
- On April 20, 1999, in the deadliest high school shooting in US history, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold procured two shotguns, an assault rifle, and a TEC-9 assault pistol and shot 26 students in Littleton, Colo., killing 13 before killing themselves. An ATF investigation found that all four weapons had been purchased from private sellers at gun shows. Three of the guns were purchased by Robyn Anderson, a friend of both Harris and Klebold. Anderson said that she would not have purchased the guns for the teens if she had been required to undergo a background check at the gun show.
- Branch Davidian cult leader David Koresh used Texas gun shows to make large gun purchases. According to an ATF arrest warrant, Koresh and his cult made "regular purchases of weapons and ammunition [from] flea markets and gun shows." Authorities estimated that Koresh had at least 200

automatic and semi-automatic assault rifles stockpiled, plus thousands of rounds of ammunition. In 1995, four FBI agents and six Branch Davidians died in an exchange of gunfire. Seventy six people died in a fire that destroyed the cult compound.

- Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was a "private seller" at gun shows. He along with accomplice Michael Fortier, admitted to stealing \$60,000 worth of shotguns, rifles, and handguns from an Arkansas gun collector's ranch and then reselling the stolen weapons at gun shows.

Buyers and sellers at gun shows be required to abide by the same reasonable standards that law abiding gun buyers and the majority of federally licensed gun dealers comply with. It's not too much to ask that criminals and terrorists who have been known to exploit the "gun show loophole" undergo background checks and show ID's before they buy guns in the United States. Both presidential candidates and the majority of Americans, including gun owners, support closing this dangerous loophole. It's time for Congress to act.

John Rosenthal is cofounder of Stop Handgun Violence, Common Sense About Kids and Guns and American Hunters and Shooters Association. ■

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