

Ban on assault weapons allowed to expire quietly

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Layout Editor

The federal ban on assault weapons expired Sept. 13 with little fanfare. President George W. Bush had promised during his 2000 campaign to sign a renewal bill if it came to his desk, but such legislation never went up for a vote.

The ban has been controversial ever since former President Bill Clinton signed it into law in 1994. The ban's supporters, including members of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and several Democratic senators, claim that it has reduced violent crime and gun deaths, and that its expiration could lead to an increase in such incidents.

The law's opponents, particularly members of the National Rifle Association (NRA), continue to hold that the law was pointless, and that most of the guns it banned were not true assault weapons.

The ban targeted semi-automatic, not fully automatic rifles. Automatic rifles are strictly regulated by the National Firearms Act of 1934 and are not available for civilian purchase. However, many

of the rifles formerly covered under the ban can be converted to fully automatic rifles with a kit, although some rifles, such as the AR-15, have internal parts that prevent conversion.

The primary targets of the ban were weapons that bore cosmetic and feature similarities to military assault rifles. Folding stocks, which make the weapon easier to conceal, were prohibited. The inclusion of a mount at the end of the barrel for a flash suppressor, which conceals most of the flash at the end of the rifle barrel, was forbidden by the ban. Magazines containing more than 10 rounds for such rifles were also targeted.

According to The Denver Post, the ban was originally introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D - Ca.), partly as a response to a shooting at the San Francisco law firm of Pettit & Martin in 1993, which left eight dead and six wounded.

The gunman in the shooting, a 55-year-old real estate developer with alleged grudges against members of the law firm, used two high capacity TEC-9 semi-automatic assault rifles to shoot his victims before ending his

own life with a .45 caliber pistol.

"It was the ultimate shock," Feinstein said in an interview just after the law's passage. "That building is one of the great economic citadels in the city ... and then - boom. Someone comes in, aggravated, and goes right through the place."

Feinstein won a brief victory in March when the Senate voted to amend a law that would have protected gun manufacturers from lawsuits. The liability "shield," the top legislative priority for the NRA this year, would have prevented legal challenges like the one levied against the Navegar firearms corporation following the San Francisco shooting.

The California Supreme Court dismissed that case in late 2001, but the public outcry over the verdict prompted then - Governor Gray Davis to repeal a state law that shielded manufacturers from such prosecutions.

After the addition of the Feinstein amendment, the NRA scuttled the entire bill, rather than see the ban renewed.

The NRA has been



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AR-15 assault rifles are now legal for purchase

attempting to repeal the ban since it was first enacted, and did succeed in getting a repeal measure passed through the House in 1996. The threat of filibuster by Feinstein and an almost - guaranteed presidential veto by Clinton stopped the effort in the Senate.

The NRA's chief lobbyist and the executive director of its legislative branch, Chris Cox, participated in a Washington Post online Q&A Sept. 17.

"At the bottom line, the gun ban was a bad law and bad politics," Cox said. "Study after study show that the ban

targeted guns rarely used in crime, and that they are not different from other guns in terms of how they operate or the ammunition they use."

The immediate local effects of the gun ban are difficult to gauge, as it will take months for dealers and shop owners to begin stocking the newly legal guns and parts in large quantities.

"We've had more calls for (high-capacity handgun) magazines, but that's about it," said Brian Talley, an employee with Southern Firearms and Police Equipment, a local gun retailer.

Notes from the Academic Deans

Adrienne Israel and Steve Shapiro

Academic Dean and Associate Academic Dean

After surveying students and faculty this past academic year (2003-2004), a group of academic administrators and faculty are close to presenting a new day-time class schedule that will be used beginning in 2005-2006.

To get more student feedback, the Community Senate plans to set up a "mock registration" next week for students in the lobby of Founders hall.

Students will be asked to use the proposed new schedule to determine whether the experimental organization of class time meets their needs. After the results are in, the class schedule will be further refined before it is implemented by the college.

The effort to produce a new class schedule has been coordinated by Lynn Moseley, Professor of Biology and the Natural Science and Math Division Director, and by Steve Shapiro, Associate Professor of Physics and the Associate Academic Dean. All the Academic Division Directors and the

Academic Dean have contributed ideas based on their reading of the surveys and conversations with faculty, staff, and students.

In the late 1990's, faculty attempted to revise the schedule, but the process produced few results. A year ago Academic Dean Adrienne Israel, working with the Division Directors, revived efforts to change the class schedule for three basic reasons:

1. To create more blocks of time during the day with no classes in session so that students and faculty can gather for cultural and educational events, meetings, or simply experience some "down time" from an otherwise hectic schedule.
2. To provide flexibility to schedule field trips, study time, and class preparation time by designing choices between Monday/Thursday and Tuesday/Friday classes.

3. To ensure a more even distribution of classes during the day, make better use of the entire week, and allow greater use of the college's classroom facilities during the day.

Based on the results of last spring's surveys, the proposed new schedule has 50-minute class periods for classes that meet three or more times per week; 75 minute class periods two or three times per week, some 110 minute classes that meet twice a week, and once a week class periods of 180 minutes, the latter two being mainly for laboratory classes, possible rehearsals, and studio art classes.

It also includes a few once-a-week 50-minute classes for short seminars and recitations sections. Additional information concerning the details of the new schedule will be circulated via forthcoming announcements in the Guilford Buzz.

Students are urged to participate in the "mock registration" and should send their comments and suggestions to A.Q. Abdul-Karim before October 12th.