

Memphis, Tennessee
August 19, 1994

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 N. Capitol St. NW, #650
Washington, DC 20001

Suggestion

Dear Mr. Lamb:

In their editorial of August 16, The Commercial Appeal (Memphis newspaper) called for an open debate, with media coverage, on the bill to ban so-called "Assault Weapons." I agree wholeheartedly. For too long, the media have given us only myths, lies and half-truths on this issue.

MYTH #1: The bill "only bans 19 specific types of assault weapons, and that's all." (Bill Clinton, May 4, 1994)

FACT #1: The bill also bans dozens of other rifles based on essentially cosmetic characteristics; many of them have legitimate sporting or recreational uses (if that's really an issue). The bill also grants discretionary authority to the BATF; that's an extraordinarily bad idea. The bill also bans ammunition magazines which hold more than 10 cartridges; this includes magazines for numerous firearms which are not themselves covered by the ban. It includes magazines for the semi-automatic pistol now carried by the officers of the Memphis Police Department, as well as magazines for numerous other legal firearms owned by law-abiding civilians.

MYTH #2: An Assault Weapon is a machine gun that can "spray" bullets.

FACT #2: The term "Assault Weapon" has no generally accepted or understood meaning. Those who favor the ban tend to blur the distinction between semi-automatic rifles (one shot with each pull of the trigger) and fully automatic rifles (several shots with each pull of the trigger; i.e., machine guns). All the firearms covered by the ban are semi-automatic. Semi-automatic firearms have been around for about 100 years. They are not the same as machine guns. They cannot easily be converted to machine guns, and it is already a serious federal crime to do so.

And contrary to popular perception, machine guns are not presently banned. Anyone who is not prohibited from doing so may purchase a machine gun upon payment of a rather hefty transfer tax. There has never been a recorded case of a crime committed with a properly registered machine gun.

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MYTH #3: Assault Weapons are widely used in street crime.

FACT #3: Even if we broadly define "Assault Weapon" as synonymous with "semi-automatic rifle," they are very rarely used in street crime. Less than 1% of firearms used in crimes are semi-automatic rifles.

MYTH #4: Law enforcement officers and law enforcement organizations support the ban; only the National Rifle Association opposes it.

FACT #4: Many rank-and-file law enforcement officers oppose gun control. Many law enforcement officers are among the 3,000,000 members of the NRA, and many oppose the bill. Many law enforcement organizations (e.g., the Law Enforcement Alliance of America) oppose the bill.

There's a lot more, but that's a start. Let's do have an open debate with accurate media coverage. The truth about this bill can't stand the light of day.

Best Regards,

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