



**Statement of Senator Feinstein on the Mother's Day March to Halt the Assault
May 7, 2004**

“Tens of thousands of women will come to Washington this Mothers’ Day weekend to spread the word about the urgent need to renew the federal assault weapons ban.

I want to thank these women, and their families and friends who will join them, for their effort to focus the American public on the fact that we could lose this important law unless Congress and the President renew the ban soon.

I ask these committed Americans to do everything they can do to help save the assault weapons ban. They should write the President and urge him to help renew the ban. They should write Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and urge them to bring the assault weapons ban up for a vote. They should make their voices heard until the ban is renewed.

Time is running out. The federal assault weapons ban will expire on September 13 of this year if Congress and the President do not act. This means that AK-47s, TEC-DC 9s, Street Sweepers, and dozens of other types of military-style assault weapons will once again flood the streets of America. We cannot afford to let this happen. We owe the American people more than that. It is just that simple.

Assault weapons pose a grave threat to all Americans, but most especially to law enforcement officers on our city streets.

Just last month, I spoke at the funeral of San Francisco Police Officer Isaac Espinoza, who was shot and killed by a gang member armed with an AK-47 and a 30-round clip. Officer Espinoza took three shots in his back as a gunman fired 15 rounds in just seconds, giving Officer Espinoza and his partner, who was also shot, no time to seek refuge.

Officer Espinoza was a bright young star in the San Francisco Police Department, and he had a promising future and loving family. Now, that future is gone. His wife Renata is without a husband. His beautiful three-year-old girl Isabella is without a father.

And Officer Espinoza is far from the only law enforcement officer gunned down in his prime by an assailant wielding an assault weapon.

A recent study by the Violence Policy Center stated that one in five police officers killed in the line of duty is killed with an assault weapon.

That study listed a number of officers gunned down by assault weapons, and I'd just like to list a few examples because if we let the assault weapons ban expire, we can expect many more of these incidents.

On January 10, 1999, "Officer James Williams was killed with a MAK-90 or SA85 7.62mm rifle. Officer Williams was among a group of officers who were searching for a rifle that had been discarded by the occupants of a vehicle that was involved in a chase with police. While they were searching for the rifle, a gunman opened fire from a nearby overpass, killing Officer Williams. Chad Rhodes was arrested and charged with special-circumstances murder, attempted murder, three counts of firing an assault weapon, and possessing an assault weapon. Rhodes pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison without parole."

On June 12, 1999 in Orange County, California, "Sheriff's Deputy Brad Riches was killed with a MAK-90 or SA85 7.62mm rifle. Deputy Riches was sitting in his patrol car outside a 7-Eleven when his police cruiser was riddled with assault weapon fire. The 7-Eleven clerk said that a customer told him he was carrying an AK-47-style assault rifle to shoot a police officer. Maurice Steksal was convicted on November 19, 2002 of the first-degree murder of Deputy Riches."

And there are many, many more. But the list would be far longer if the assault weapons ban were not in place, because more of these guns would be out there. They would be easier for criminals to get and to use, and more officers would be killed.

Indeed, these shootings underscore the fundamental danger assault weapons pose to our society.

The good news is that the U.S. Senate has gone on record in support of extending the ban on military-style assault weapons. In a bipartisan vote in March, the Senate approved a straight 10-year renewal of the current ban as an amendment to a bill being pushed by the National Rifle Association giving gun manufacturers and dealers protection from civil lawsuits.

But in a bizarre twist, the NRA scuttled its own bill to prevent the extension from becoming law. This is the power of the NRA.

In over a decade as a U.S. Senator, I've encountered no lobby stronger than the gun lobby. I am convinced that if the NRA is going to be defeated, it will be by the mothers and fathers of this nation – parents who want a future for their children free of the violence and bloodshed sparked by the vast over-proliferation of guns throughout our country.

These are the people who came together in the first Million Mom March four years ago, and these are the people who will come together again this weekend.

These people will stand firm and say "Enough is Enough! Now is the time to protect our families from Assault Weapons." There cannot be any turning back.

Over the past decade, we have had a chance to examine the assault weapons ban and to determine if it works and enjoys support.

The results are in:

The ban works. Recent Department of Justice records indicate that the use of banned assault weapons in crimes has declined measurably -- by 65% in one analysis – since the measure took effect.

The men and women of law enforcement across the nation support the ban because, on the front lines, they know it protects them and makes communities safer. The Fraternal Order of Police endorses another ten years, as does almost every other major law enforcement organization, including chiefs of police all across the nation.

No weapons have been confiscated from legitimate gun-owners. In fact, the bill specifically protects 670 shotguns and rifles used for hunting.

Almost three fourths of the American people, and two thirds of gun owners, support renewing the ban.

In fact, a recent University of Pennsylvania Annenberg poll found that 71% of all Americans supported renewing the assault weapons ban; 64% of people in homes with a gun supported extension of the ban; and even 46% of people in NRA households support extending the ban, contrary to claims by NRA leadership that its members are universally against this proposal.

Some in the Senate opposed the ban a decade ago, fearing it would do little to reduce crime, and could threaten the Constitutional rights of law-abiding gun-owners and hunters.

Now, ten years since that vote, America has seen just the opposite: the ban has made our streets safer, it has protected law enforcement officers, and in no way has it diminished legitimate gun-owners' rights.

Moreover, we all know that the world has dramatically changed since 1993. September 11, 2001, has taught us many lessons; among them that terrorism lurks in our own cities and communities. Given today's dangers, it defies logic to let suicidal terrorists, gang members and others simply walk up to a counter and buy these weapons for potential attacks.

Assault weapons pose a fundamental danger to law enforcement and our society, and we will continue to work to extend the ban in the Senate. The assault weapons ban is too important to let die.

The bottom line is this – what is the argument for letting these banned guns back on the streets?

Who is clamoring for newly manufactured AK-47s?

Who is clamoring for new TEC-9s?

These are guns that are never used for hunting. They are not used for self defense, and if they are it is more likely that they will kill innocents than intruders.

These guns – and everyone knows it – have but one purpose, and that purpose is to kill other human beings. Why would we want to open the floodgates again and let them back on our streets? There is simply no good reason.

For a number of years now, President Bush has indicated that he supports renewing the assault weapons ban for another decade. But he has not lifted a finger to help. Ultimately, however, the voice of the White House will be pivotal in determining if the ban is ultimately approved by Congress and signed into law.

Now is the time to renew a sound law for another ten years.

We do this in the memory of Officer Espinoza and all the other police officers shot and killed with assault weapons.

We do this on behalf of all the women who are marching on Washington this weekend.

And we do this to keep our communities safe.”

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