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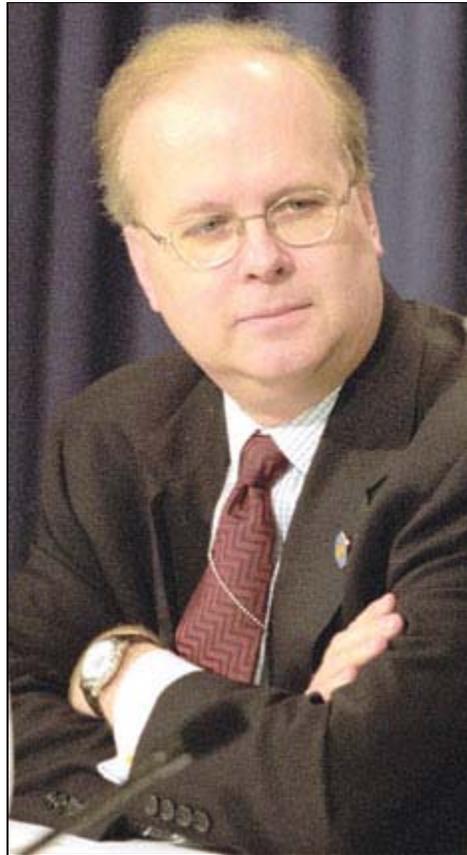
SEPTEMBER 7, 2004

Police chiefs seek meeting with Bush on gun ban

By [Klaus Marre](#)

A week before the controversial assault-weapons ban is set to expire, law-enforcement officials are requesting a meeting with President Bush in hopes that he can exert pressure on Congress to renew the ban. But the White House has been mum on whether such a meeting is going to take place.

In a recent letter to Bush, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and other law-enforcement groups asked to meet with the president "to share our perspective on the importance of preserving the ban." The IACP is unaware of a White House response to the request, and the administration did not return calls seeking comment.



FILE PHOTO

Presidential adviser Karl Rove

Karl Rove, Bush's top political adviser, late last week declined to answer directly a question from The Hill on whether the president would call to renew the ban in the next couple of weeks. Gun-control activists have pointed out repeatedly this year that Bush backed the reauthorization of the ban in 2000 but has not called on Congress to act.

Chiefs of police from Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Washington, D.C., will ask Congress tomorrow to renew the 10-year ban before it expires Sept. 13 and attempt to raise the visibility of the issue.

There is a “critical need” to extend the ban, the law-enforcement groups said in the letter. “If the law is not renewed, the firearms of choice for terrorists, drug dealers and gang members will be back on our streets. ... With homeland security becoming an increasingly vital part of the daily law enforcement mission, we need to know that these assault weapons and their capacity magazines will not be back in circulation.”

With the ban’s expiration days away, the law-enforcement groups said, they “fear that without [Bush’s] strong leadership, legislation pending in Congress to reauthorize the Assault Weapons Act will languish.”

Earlier this year, the Senate passed an amendment extending the ban to legislation that would provide gun manufacturers with liability immunity. But the underlying bill was pulled after the assault-weapons-ban amendment and a measure closing the so-called gun-show loophole were attached.

In the House, bipartisan legislation with 136 co-sponsors has not been acted on and it is seen as unlikely that it will be taken up. Calls to the offices of House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) were not returned by press time.

Sarah Brady, the honorary chairwoman of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence United with the Million Mom March, told The Hill that her side has the votes to pass the extension of the ban in the House and added that the GOP leadership does not want to bring it up.

Instead, House leaders plan to hold a vote on the day the ban expires on legislation introduced by Rep. Mark Souder (R-Ind.), which would repeal the Washington, D.C., firearms ban and eliminate “criminal penalties for possessing an unregistered firearm.” The legislation has 226 bipartisan co-sponsors, more than necessary to ensure passage.

Brady criticized the president for not pushing Congress to renew the ban, adding that if he truly wants it to be extended, Bush should be take the initiative.

The Brady Campaign has said Bush “won’t lift a finger to save the law.”

With the expiration of the ban imminent, Brady hopes this week will see some movement. The Brady Campaign has begun running ads and engaging in outreach activities. “We have been doing all we can to raise the visibility of the issue,” Brady said, acknowledging that advocates of a renewed ban had to compete with many other high-

profile news events.

National Rifle Association (NRA) chief lobbyist Chris Cox said it is not surprising that gun-control activists would take the opportunity “to continue to misrepresent and lie about what this issue is about.” He added that the ban was “passed as an experiment” and “has been ineffective.”

In the letter to Bush, the law-enforcement groups said the “proportion of assault weapons traced to crimes has fallen by a dramatic 66 percent.” But Cox said the assault weapons were rarely used in crimes before the ban was signed and its passage was a “symbolic measure.”

“Should Congress extend what has been failed policy?” Cox asked.

The issue has not risen to high profile status so far in this political cycle. Democratic presidential nominee Sen. John Kerry has largely stayed away from Second Amendment issues, although one of the few votes he cast this year was in support of the amendment extending the ban for another 10 years.

Cox said the last two elections have shown “the dominant force the Second Amendment and NRA members can be” in local and national contests. He added that it is “not surprising” and “intellectually dishonest” that Kerry is trying to camouflage his pro-gun-control voting record.

Brady said Kerry “has done as much as he can do” to get the ban renewed.

In the end, Brady said, gun-control proponents will prevail on the issue, adding that she hopes not too much time, if any, will lapse between the expiration of the current ban and passage of a new one.

The NRA’s decision on endorsing Bush is on hold until after the ban expires.

Bob Cusack contributed to this report.

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