

## **ASSAULT WEAPON BAN TESTIMONY**

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Today is the last day of school for my kids and thousands of other St. Paul and Minneapolis public school children. By the time kids go back to school in September, it's likely that more assault weapons will be available in our communities.

(Assault weapons are military-style guns and rifles designed to spray many bullets quickly. They're not used for hunting. They're not used for sport. They're used to kill lots of people in a short time. For the past ten years, there's been a ban on semi-automatic assault weapons like Ak-47s, UZIs, and Street Sweepers, as well as high-capacity ammunition clips that hold more than ten rounds. That ban will expire this September 13 unless Congress and the President renew it.)

Today, as summer starts for school kids, it may seem hard to think about September. But if we don't think about September now, we will end up with more assault weapons for sale and in our communities.

There's less than a 100 calendar days and less than 35 legislative days before the ban expires. If President Bush doesn't call on the House leadership to renew the assault weapons ban, the ban will sunset—the ban will end.

That's why I am grateful that Representatives Betty McCollum and Nora Slawik are holding this hearing. We need to show how effective the assault weapons ban has been. Over the past decade, crimes involving banned assault weapons have dropped by sixty-six percent. This "On Target" report, from the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, notes that assault weapons are the weapon of choice of criminals. Analysis of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearm data released before the 1994 ban took effect found that assault weapons were twenty times more likely than conventional firearms to be used in crimes.

I am not a law enforcement expert. I'm a mom. But I know we should not have these military style assault weapons on our streets. They should not be on sale in our communities for civilians to buy. Here in Minnesota, this spring, we Million Moms collected thousands of postcards like this (HOLD UP PINK POSTCARD). Virtually every person we asked to sign a postcard said yes. People cannot believe that the assault weapons ban could even be in danger of ending. I cannot tell you how many people asked me, "Who could possibly be for assault weapons?"

So who is for assault weapons? The answer is short, but not sweet--it's the NRA. The lobbyists for the National Rifle Association want the assault weapons ban to expire. The NRA has even taken the dramatic step of withholding its endorsement of President Bush until September 14. The President made a campaign promise to support the assault weapons ban. The public supports the ban. Too much is at stake to cave to the extreme agenda of the lobbyists at the National Rifle Association.

The majority of Americans --including the majority of hunters and every major law enforcement group in the country--have gone on record as saying we want the assault weapons ban to remain law. But that will only happen if more people tell Congress and President Bush to renew the ban. Today, when kids are thinking about summer, we adults need to be responsible. We need to look ahead to September, to look out for our kids' safety. We need to make sure that when they go back to school in September that assault weapons won't be going back with them.

If Congress and the President refuse to renew the ban, I hope our Minnesota Legislature will step forward to protect our state. I'd like to thank Rep. Slawik for introducing a bill this spring to ban assault weapons in Minnesota. Seven other states—California, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut and Hawaii—have already banned assault weapons. Ideally, Congress should renew the ban and protect all Americans from assault weapons. But if Congress refuses to stand up for sensible gun laws, I certainly hope our Legislature will do what it can to protect Minnesotans from assault weapons.

Because the fact is, assault weapons are used to kill people. Civilians using them to kill other civilians. People have used assault weapons to kill school children—it happened at Columbine High School. It happened at an elementary school in Stockton, California. Assault weapons have also been used to maim and kill our law enforcement. Here in Minnesota, assault weapons were used to wound six police in the line of duty in the past decade. Nationally, one in five law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty is killed by an assault weapon.

Assault weapons account for just one percent of the guns in this country, but they end up being used in a disproportionate number of crimes. In 1999, George W. Bush went on the record, saying, "It makes no sense for assault weapons to be around our society." I completely agree with what candidate Bush said. Now, I want President Bush to keep his promise. I want him to stand up and show leadership on this issue. I want the president to urge the congressional leaders of his party to renew the assault weapons ban. Our law enforcement, our kids, all of us deserve to be safe from assault weapons. We deserve to keep the assault weapons ban alive. Today, as the school year ends, we adults can do something quick and easy to help keep our kids and all of us safe. We can call Congress and call President Bush. Tell them you want the assault weapons ban renewed. Today, as kids' summer vacation starts, we need to take a minute to make September safe, for them and for all of us.