

SUBJECT TO DEBATE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM



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Police, ATF, and Gun Interest Groups Explore Gun Issues at PERF Summit

MORE THAN 130 POLICE CHIEFS AND OTHER OFFICIALS came together on November 12 in Washington for a PERF Summit on the question of how firearms figure into local crime problems, and what can be done to reduce gun-related crime.

The Summit, the latest in the PERF/Motorola Critical Issues in Policing series, was attended by a wide range of local officials as well as federal leaders from the Justice Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF).

ATF Acting Director Kenneth E. Melson, joined by other top ATF officials, started off the Summit by noting that “the first step in trying to reduce gun violence is *partnerships*” among federal, state, and local law enforcement officials—a point that was echoed many times during the day by local chiefs who cited their joint investigations with ATF as one of their most effective types of operations.

Three representatives of gun-related interest groups also accepted PERF’s invitation to participate in the Summit: Lawrence Keane, senior vice president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation; John Frazer, director of research and information at the NRA Institute for Legislative Action; and Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

PERF’s intention in convening the Summit was to explore questions about how gun crime is affected by local and federal laws and enforcement strategies. There is no doubt that guns affect crime in U.S. cities in profound ways, but little work has been done to

collect national information about the issue and the many variations in local laws and policies.

SURVEY REVEALS VARIATIONS IN LOCAL PATTERNS

To prepare for the meeting, PERF conducted a survey of 166 local police departments, as well as a separate survey, with ATF’s cooperation, of all 25 ATF field divisions. Following are several of the survey findings:

Large-scale problem: Gun violence is a severe problem. The 166 agencies reported more than 109,000 violent gun crimes in 2008, including 5,103 gun homicides, 87,336 gun robberies, and 16,955 aggravated assaults with firearms.

Increase in large-caliber handguns: Many agencies reported noticeable increases in criminals’ use of certain types of guns. Fifty percent reported an increase in large-caliber handguns; 37 percent recorded an increase in use of assault weapons; and 35 percent reported an increase in semiautomatics with high-capacity magazines (10 or more rounds).

Gun recoveries: Chicago reported the largest number of guns recovered by police, with more than 13,000 in 2008. That included more than 8,000 guns obtained through gun “buyback” programs.

Guns moving to SW Border: When ATF field divisions were asked to name trends they are seeing in gun crime, many reported an increase in gun trafficking to the Southwest Border.

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Police Chiefs at PERF Summit Move to Break the Logjam on Gun Crime

SEVEN MONTHS AGO IN THIS SPACE, I WROTE about the everyday horror of gun violence in American cities, and the terrible sense of apathy in which shootings of school children and even mass killings like Virginia Tech have become “normal.” I called on police chiefs to lead the way out of the logjam over gun control issues.

Police chiefs have begun that work, and I believe we have taken the first steps. Earlier this month, PERF convened a Gun Crime Summit in Washington, and chiefs from across the country made time to travel here to discuss these issues. PERF members and ATF officials also responded overwhelmingly to a pair of surveys we conducted to gather background information, and a half-dozen departments provided us with in-depth information for case studies we conducted about gun crime. This issue of *Subject to Debate* begins to describe those events, and a forthcoming Critical Issues in Policing report will provide more details.

My take on everything we learned from the surveys, case studies, and the discussions at the Summit is this: We need to open a new front in the battle against gun crime. We won't let the players in Washington off the hook regarding national legislation to impact gun crime. At the same time, there is an enormous amount of work to be done at the state and local levels. Our surveys and Summit revealed some severe problems with local enforcement of laws against gun crimes. Many state laws weaken the deterrent impact of holding offenders accountable. We need to focus attention on these local problems as well as the federal issues.

For too long, local officials have gotten a free ride; they can ignore local gun crime issues, pass laws that hurt law enforcement, and then just “blame Washington” for the problem of gun crime. Make no mistake; Washington is a part of the problem. But on the gun issue, I think we become so preoccupied with watching Washington that we take our eyes off what is happening every day at the local level.

For example, in St. Louis, Chief Dan Isom has to deal with a law providing that anyone age 21 or older, except felons, can legally carry handguns in their cars! Thus, there is nothing police can do when they make a traffic stop and find known gang members carrying guns, as long as the gang members do not yet have a felony record. And criminals find it too easy to steal guns; all they have to do is break into parked cars, and there's a good chance they will find a firearm.

In South Carolina, Chief Jon Zumalt is working with some of the weakest gun laws in the nation—open carrying permitted, no registration or permits required. The state is even providing a 48-hour tax-free period for gun purchases after Thanksgiving Day this year.

The chiefs at the PERF Summit rose to speak, one after another, about the various weaknesses in their criminal sentencing for illegal gun possession or other gun crimes. If there was one thing that police chiefs agreed on more than anything else, it was that they are enthusiastic when ATF and U.S. Attorneys can take gun cases to the federal level, because the federal system has

significant penalties and real accountability.

This speaks volumes about the weakness of prosecutions at the state and local levels. Why else would everyone want to cede authority to the federal justice system to handle gun cases? Unfortunately, even though federal gun prosecutions have tripled over the last decade, the federal system can handle only a small fraction of these cases.

So clearly there are thousands of gun cases falling through the cracks. Police chiefs spoke of criminals being arrested eight, nine, ten times on gun charges and never receiving serious jail time—until eventually they shoot someone, or are shot themselves.

Many of you may be familiar with the case of John Hinckley as one of the most notorious examples of weak local gun laws. But I think the general public is not aware that Hinckley was stalking President Carter before he shot President Reagan. In fact, in 1980 Hinckley was arrested at an airport in Nashville, where President Carter was campaigning; handguns were found in Hinckley's luggage. Unfortunately, Hinckley was simply fined \$62 and sent on his way. A few months later, Hinckley shot President Reagan, Press Secretary James Brady, and two officers.

What we heard at the PERF Summit was that the Hinckley scenario is repeated countless times every day; the only difference is that no President is involved. Young men are picked up repeatedly for gun offenses, and they are cut loose because the local justice system is so inundated with murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults that mere gun possession is actually a relatively minor offense.

Several veteran chiefs recalled that when they started their careers, arresting someone on a gun charge was considered a “major collar,” but now a mere gun charge is comparable to disorderly conduct or public drunkenness.

This situation no doubt will get worse in coming years, as offenders are pushed out of prisons faster and placed back on the streets.

Our surveys also debunked a few myths, such as the idea that crime guns usually come from out of state. Our survey of all 25 ATF Field Divisions found that in most cases, ATF officials said that crime guns primarily originate from in-state. (Newark, Los Angeles, and New York were the three exceptions, where most crime guns come from other states.)

I believe that what the Summit taught us is that we can no longer simply accept the failures of our local



Chuck Wexler,
PERF Executive Director
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People in the News



Chief John Timoney

PERF President **John Timoney** has announced his retirement after a seven-year tenure as chief of the Miami Police Department. Chief Timoney began his policing career in New York City in 1967 and quickly climbed through the ranks, becoming the youngest-ever four-star chief of department in the city's history. He was widely credited with being one of the principal architects of the NYPD's successes in reducing crime in the 1990s. He also served as commissioner of police in Philadelphia before taking the top job in Miami. Chief Timoney's deputy in Miami, **Frank Fernandez**, also announced his retirement. Newly elected Mayor Tomas Regalado named Major **Miguel Exposito** as the city's new police chief.

Colorado Springs Chief and PERF Board Member **Rick**



Chief Rick Myers

Myers received the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice "Wall of Fame" Award on October 23. The honor is given to MSU alumni who have "distinguished themselves within the field of criminal justice, while maintaining the highest standards of integrity and character."

Dallas police chief **David Kunkle** has announced his intent to retire in April. He began his law enforcement career in Dallas in 1972, later served as chief in Grand Prairie and Arlington, Texas, and returned to Dallas as chief in 2004. The city has launched a nationwide search for a new chief, and Dallas City Manager Mary Suhm has stated that applications will be accepted through January.

Bernard Melekian, after 13 years as chief of police



Chief Bernard Melekian

(and briefly city manager) in Pasadena, has stepped down in order to head the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in Washington, D.C. The program funds community policing projects nationwide.

Charlie Beck has been named the new chief of police for the Los Angeles Police Department. Chief Beck began his career as a reserve officer with the LAPD in 1975, took over the troubled Rampart Division in 2003, and became deputy chief three years ago.

Frank Straub has stepped down as the Public Safety Commissioner of White Plains, N.Y. Commissioner Straub had served for the city of White Plains for over seven years.



Commissioner Frank Straub

Assistant Minneapolis Police Chief **Sharon Lubinski** was nominated by President Obama to be Minnesota's next U.S. Marshal. Chief Lubinski would be the first openly gay person to serve as a U.S. Marshal, and one of only two women currently serving.



Assistant Chief Sharon Lubinski

Former London Metropolitan Police Commissioner **Sir Ian Blair** has been appointed head of the Thames Valley Partnership, a crime prevention group. Blair remarked,

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Deputy Chief Frank Fernandez



Chief David Kunkle



Chief Charlie Beck



Sir Ian Blair

Most crime guns bought in-state: Most ATF field divisions said that most crime guns in their jurisdiction were originally purchased in-state. However, the ATF respondents in Newark, Los Angeles, and New York reported that crime guns in their jurisdictions primarily originated in other states, presumably because their local and state governments have strict gun laws.

Some local laws are stricter than federal rules: Many cities do not have strong local and state-level laws and ordinances regulating firearm purchases and possession. However, such laws are not unheard of. Of the 166 police departments responding to the PERF survey, 38 percent reported local requirements for background checks of gun buyers in “private” transactions, such as certain sales at gun shows and flea markets. Gun registration requirements were reported by 36 percent of the police agencies; and 30 percent require a permit to purchase a firearm.

Preventing straw purchases: Slightly more than one-fourth of the police agencies have local laws requiring gun owners to report any loss or theft of their guns. These laws are intended to prevent “straw purchases” of firearms, in which a person with no criminal record buys a gun on behalf of a felon or other person who cannot pass a Brady background check. Then, if the gun is later used in a crime, seized by police, and traced back to the buyer, that person typically tells police that the gun was lost or stolen. By requiring the immediate reporting of lost or stolen guns, police have a means of identifying and prosecuting straw purchasers who repeatedly buy guns for criminals.

Special units: Slightly more than half of the local police surveyed reported that they have special units devoted to crime gun enforcement. The units’ tactics include working with federal and state agencies, targeting known high-risk subjects or offenders, focusing directed patrols on gun-crime hot spots, and monitoring gun dealers for unlawful sales.

“Open carry” and “concealed carry”: Fifty percent of the local police agencies in the PERF survey reported that open carrying of firearms is permitted in their jurisdiction.

Regarding concealed carrying of guns, only 4 percent of the local police responding to the PERF survey said that concealed carrying is prohibited in their jurisdiction. 59 percent said that concealed-carry is allowed, but that permits are required and are given to all legally entitled applicants (a non-discretionary “shall issue” policy). Another 36 percent said that permits are required and are granted at the discretion of police (a discretionary “may issue” policy).

Joint efforts by ATF and local police: PERF asked ATF field divisions what local police can do to facilitate or complement ATF efforts, and ATF officials overwhelmingly called on local police to participate in gun task forces and other joint investigations. And PERF’s survey of local police found strong support for ATF; 92 percent of the local police said they conduct joint gun trafficking investigations with ATF, and nearly all said they found the investigations effective.

In fact, when PERF looked at the cities with high levels of gun crime and tried to identify the strategies to combat gun trafficking that local police conducted most often and found very effective, conducting joint investigations with ATF was one of the

highest-ranked types of initiatives, along with checking recovered firearms for ballistics matches.

One-third of the ATF respondents also recommended that local police trace all crime guns. On that point, PERF’s survey of local police found that nearly all police departments surveyed do trace recovered guns, at least under certain circumstances. That includes 62 percent who trace *all* recovered guns, 17 percent who trace guns “when needed” on a case-by-case basis, and 14 percent who trace all recovered guns associated with a crime.

Federal prosecutions: Because federal penalties for gun crimes are greater than most states’, many local police agencies and local prosecutors are eager to shift their worst offenders to the federal system. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the number of such cases has more than tripled over the last decade, from fewer than 2,500 in 1998 to 8,250 in 2008. However, many local officials said that is still a small fraction of the cases they *wish* they could “take federal.”

CASE STUDIES DEMONSTRATE WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES

In the weeks before the Summit, PERF also conducted case studies of the crime gun issues in a half-dozen cities. For example:

Strong laws in Los Angeles: Officials in Los Angeles told PERF researchers that local gun regulations there are relatively strict. Private guns sales are regulated, and every gun store in the city has its records checked regularly by the Los Angeles Police Department and ATF. Ammunition sales also are reviewed to see whether felons and others who cannot legally own a gun are buying ammunition.

And in an innovative program called the “Letters Campaign,” new gun owners receive a letter cosigned by the LAPD, the Los Angeles City Attorney, and the state Attorney General, which outlines the rules of gun ownership. This puts gun owners on notice that local officials expect them to act responsibly.

However, at the Summit, Los Angeles officials said that the strict laws in California are undermined by the fact that Californians often travel to Nevada or Arizona to buy firearms.

Weak laws in North Charleston and St. Louis: In North Charleston, S.C., officials reported that they worked against a background of weak state gun laws; state laws require no permit to buy a gun, no registration, and no background checks for private sales. Furthermore, open carrying of firearms is permitted in South Carolina; the minimum age for gun possession was recently reduced from 21 to 18; and the state has had “sales tax holidays” for gun purchasers. And local police complain of extremely weak state-level prosecutions for gun-related crimes.

However, North Charleston police reported that they have undertaken a number of strategies to reduce gun crime, including saturation patrols of violent neighborhoods with vehicle and pedestrian stops. Special efforts are made to prevent one gang shooting from triggering retaliation shootings, and areas are sometimes “locked down” immediately after a shooting. In addition, police report an increasing level of cooperation from federal prosecutors, who work with much stricter federal penalties for serious gun offenders.

The efforts appear to be having an impact, because gun crime is decreasing sharply in North Charleston; gun homicides declined 50 percent between 2007 and 2008.

St. Louis’s situation is very similar to North Charleston’s; homicides committed with firearms are declining, despite very weak state laws. St. Louis police cited an especially unusual law that

allows anyone age 21 or older, except felons, to carry a handgun in a vehicle. Thus, during vehicle stops, police must overlook the presence of guns, even by known gang members, unless they are known to be convicted felons. The law has resulted in a phenomenon in which criminals often obtain guns by breaking into parked vehicles.

The St. Louis Police Department has a Violent Offenders Unit that works closely with ATF, and gun-related homicides are down more than 55 percent this year compared to 2008.

SUMMIT PRODUCES SPARKS ON “MICROSTAMPING” ISSUE

Police chiefs and others who came to Washington for PERF’s Summit discussed how the issues mentioned above impact their operations and crime levels. A forthcoming book in PERF’s Critical Issues in Policing series will provide full details on those discussions.

Because there seems to be little or no appetite for gun control legislation in the U.S. Congress or the Obama Administration, at least for the immediate future, PERF aimed to place the focus of the Summit elsewhere: on what *local* police are doing to fight gun crime, and how they are hindered or helped by various local, state, and federal laws, and whether there are local issues that may actually be having a greater impact on gun crime than the issues that receive a high level of attention in Washington, such as reinstating the assault weapon ban.

As part of the effort to break new ground and perhaps find some other way of moving the gun issue forward, PERF invited the representatives of gun interest groups to share in the discussions with police chiefs and federal law enforcement officials.

The results were somewhat mixed. On the negative side, a

strong disagreement emerged on the question of whether firearms should be required to provide “microstamping”—leaving an identifying code on shell casings. Baltimore Police Commissioner Frederick Bealefeld said that such technology could be of enormous benefit to police—“game over,” he said, because officers responding to a shooting scene could pick up shell casings and within minutes be knocking on the door of the person who bought the gun that fired the shots. But Mr. Keane of NSSF said the technology has not yet been proved effective, and denounced the State of California for passing a law to require microstamping.

Mr. Helmke of the Brady Center said that in his view, a key problem is that some states *preempt* local regulation of guns. “The state legislatures step in and say they don’t want local communities doing any regulation outside of what the state does—and they don’t do much of anything,” he said.

On the positive side, Keane discussed NSSF’s extensive work in conjunction with ATF on programs such as “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy,” which educates gun retailers and the general public about detection and deterrence of straw purchasing of guns.

Keane told police officials that NSSF supports legislation to establish mandatory minimum sentences for straw purchases. That proposal was seen as a point of general consensus with support from the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence and a number of police chiefs and federal officials as well as the NSSF.

“Putting people in jail is a very good first step,” said Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis. “If the gun lobby sat down with us, we might be able to come up with some really good ideas on this and other issues.”



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Chief Boisse Correa

“Having shed the uniform and responsibilities of dealing with the consequences of crime, I am now eager to bring my experience to focus on preventing crime in the first place.”

Boisse Correa in August announced his decision to step down as Chief of Police of the Honolulu Police Department. The Honolulu Police Commission tapped **Louis M. Kealoha**, a 26-year veteran of HPD, to be the new chief.



Chief Louis Kealoha

Joseph Persichini, Jr., will be retiring from the FBI on December 25, after 33 years of service. He has been assistant director in charge of the FBI’s Washington Field Office since 2006. Previously he held FBI posts in Denver, New York City, Miami, and Cleveland. As one of the FBI’s experts in law enforcement corruption, he has conducted training on that topic throughout the United States and around the world.



Asst. Director Joseph Persichini, Jr.

Springfield, Missouri Police Chief **Lynn Rowe** has announced his intention to retire, effective January 15. Chief Rowe has led the Springfield police department since 1993.

Betsy J.S. Hard, police chief in Bloomfield, Conn., has been appointed the new deputy commissioner for the state Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, which



Chief Lynn Rowe

coordinates all resources and directs the statewide response to protect Connecticut citizens during a disaster or crisis.

Major **Barry M. Barnard** of the Prince William County, Va. Police Department has been promoted to deputy police chief. He has been with the Prince William County Police Department since 1976, and previously served as assistant chief for operations.



Milwaukee Targets Straw Purchasers At a Problem Gun Store

AT PERF'S GUN SUMMIT, CHIEF ED FLYNN DESCRIBED a successful initiative that the Milwaukee Police Department undertook earlier this year to deal with a local gun dealer with an extremely troubled history.

The effort was launched on June 11—two days after two Milwaukee officers were shot in the head, allegedly by an 18-year-old man who, just one month earlier, had obtained a .40-caliber Taurus handgun through a straw purchase at Badger Guns.

Chief Flynn:

Milwaukee has a population of 600,000, and we do about 2,200 to 2,500 illegal gun seizures a year. Gun crime has been a problem in Milwaukee for years. The 20-year average for homicides in our city has been 110. My first year there, we got it down to 71, and this year we're on track for the same pace as last year. So that's certainly positive, but nonetheless we get a lot of shootings, a lot of violence.

There is a gun store near the Milwaukee city line called Badger Guns, previously known as Badger Outdoors. Badger Outdoors was investigated by the ATF several years ago because it was the Number 1 crime gun seller in the United States of America. Nobody else came close.

The owner of Badger Outdoors decided to break camp and get out of town, so he sold the business to the son of his partner, who "reopened" it as Badger Guns at the same location. So now he has a clean-slate license, and none of the bad stuff from his prior history sticks to him.

But they've been a real problem for us. In the last two years, Badger Guns has been responsible for one-third of all the crime guns seized in Milwaukee.

To bring the point home even more: ***In 21 months, guns legally bought at Badger Guns were used in the shootings of six of my police officers. Every one of my officers shot and wounded in the line of duty from November 2007 until August of this year was shot with a gun bought at Badger Guns.*** One of the officers lost an eye, one suffered brain damage, one had to leave the job because of his wounds. The others fortunately are still with the department, but they certainly are walking wounded.

With the shootings of our officers in June, we finally had an "enough is enough" moment and tried a new kind of action. We had tried many times to do a straw-purchase sting at Badger, but it never succeeded; they're very cagey. So we decided to take the obvious approach. We parked our squads near their driveway and watched for the behaviors associated with the straw purchasing of guns. For example, a group of people arrive in a car, and one person goes into the store but keeps coming back outside to talk to people who stay behind in the car. Another sign of straw purchasing is a group arriving at a gun store and there's a female in the group who goes inside.

When the officers saw these kinds of behaviors that are associated with straw purchases, they used observable traffic violations to stop and question the occupants.

The operation ran Monday through Friday from 10 to 7, and Saturdays and Sundays from 10 to 4. On average we used six officers there on a daily basis—three on the day shift and three on the evening shift. We also deployed a portable pole cam for surveillance purposes.

After 15 weeks we did a data-dump on the operation. In the course of that period of time, we stopped 297 people, and arrested 23 of them. Eleven were arrested for being felons in possession of a firearm, eight were arrested for concealed-carry, and we had one felony drug arrest. We seized 20 weapons, and ended up with a total of 51 convicted felons stopped in that period of time.

ABSURDLY, GUN DEALER "PLAYS THE RACE CARD"

We also felt it was important to have a media strategy as well as a law enforcement strategy. It was our sense that data can help make a case, but compelling stories can help pass a law. So we embedded a reporter from a local newspaper in this operation to watch how we did it.

We also felt that we needed the reporter to serve as a neutral party to observe exactly how we conducted ourselves. And we were glad we did, because sure enough, this owner of Badger Guns cynically decided to play the race card. He's Caucasian, but he put a sign out in front of the store saying, "Racist Milwaukee Police Department Is Pulling Over African-Americans Leaving This Store." When the newspaper reporter wrote his story, he noted that he had seen four police stops—two black men, one Hispanic couple, and one white man.

So obviously we were not targeting African-Americans. A local newspaper columnist who is African-American, Eugene Kane, wrote the Badger Guns owner was "way off base" in accusing the police of racism, because "there has been so much despair and sorrow in the local black community as a result of illegal handguns."

AIMING FOR NEW LEGISLATION

The reporter did a major story on Badger Guns, and on the fact that in the first eight months of this year, we had 143 crime guns seized that were traced back to Badger.

This drew a lot of attention to the issue statewide, and we used this to make some suggestions for new legislation.

Our challenge in law enforcement is to try to alter the mental calculations of criminals about whether it is more dangerous to carry a gun or not carry a gun. The overwhelming majority of gunshot victims in Milwaukee are career criminals, as are the overwhelming majority of their assailants. Our problem is that for a guy who's actively in the criminal lifestyle in Milwaukee, his calculation is that it's more dangerous *not* to carry a gun. If he doesn't carry, he thinks he might get shot. If he does carry a gun and gets caught—well in Wisconsin it's only a misdemeanor to get caught with a concealed weapon.

Why is it only a misdemeanor? Because Wisconsin, like more than a few other states, is overwhelmingly rural. In these rural areas, access to firearms and carrying firearms are non-issues.

But then you get to Milwaukee, where carrying a concealed weapon means that someone gets killed. Yet the state passes laws that forbid Milwaukee from passing ordinances that are stricter than state law on the issue of firearms.

So here's how the DA and I have ended up being counter-intuitive. I never thought the day would come that I would become an advocate for a law providing for concealed carry permits. But my sense is that right now we've got the worst of both worlds, because in Wisconsin, you are permitted to carry a weapon openly, and concealed carry is an endless misdemeanor. If you get a second arrest for drug violations in my state, it's a felony. But a second arrest for carrying a concealed weapon, that's just another misdemeanor. Third arrest? Another misdemeanor.

So my local district attorney and I have made an array of suggestions. We suggested that perhaps in exchange for strengthening all of our other gun laws, we could offer the possibility of enacting a law to establish a concealed-carry permit system. We'd like unlicensed concealed-carry to be a felony on a second conviction.

We would like to make the state law regarding straw purchasing a felony; it's a misdemeanor right now. We want to restrict convicted felons from being within 1,000 feet of a gun store. And we want a records check of people using a firing range.

Regarding private gun sales, we would advocate that licensed dealers be used as brokers. So if you're a private citizen selling a gun to someone other than a family member, you would have to sell it at a licensed gun dealer, and a background check would be done on the buyer.

We also have a suggestion. There are some firearms manufacturers who are major suppliers to law enforcement—I think Glock, Smith & Wesson, a couple of others. I would like to see if we could negotiate with them that they would stop supplying licensed firearms dealers who have a history of selling large numbers of crime guns that ultimately are used to shoot police officers. If dealers risk losing their supplies of high-quality guns, they might think twice about selling the Taurus and Ravens to the people who shoot police officers.



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justice systems to handle gun crime. We need to hold local officials' feet to the fire. In recent years, the gun crime issue has been boiled down to a few pieces of national legislation. For example, we constantly hear about reinstatement of the assault weapon ban as if that were the cure-all to our gun problems. And while we recognize the danger of assault weapons, our survey showed that local police agencies are more concerned about recent increases in criminals' use of large-caliber handguns than they are about assault weapons.

That is not to say that an assault weapon ban is not an important goal. But when the entire focus is on one or two gun control issues in the U.S. Congress, what happens is that special interests line up and polarize around the issue, the issue becomes radioactive, and nothing gets done.

By opening a new front on state and local laws and enforcement measures, we may be able to achieve concrete results. For example, we know that in New York City, people generally do not go around carrying guns, because the costs of carrying a gun, in terms of the likelihood of arrest and prosecution, have been raised high enough to dissuade offenders from carrying. And this effect can snowball on itself, because if you have fewer people carrying guns,

you also have fewer people who believe they need to carry guns to protect themselves against people carrying guns. This phenomenon has contributed to an enormous reduction in homicides in New York City, from more than 2,200 in 1990 to fewer than 500 projected for this year.

At our Summit, we reached a strong consensus that certainty of punishment for gun crimes would be helpful. Officials from gun industry groups as well as the Brady Center and many chiefs endorsed the idea of mandatory minimum sentences for straw purchases of guns. I am hopeful that this will be seen as a small first step toward ending the paralysis on gun crime issues. We must look for a wider range of reforms that will actually make the greatest difference in ending the carnage in American cities.

But most of all I want to underscore this fact: For too long, police chiefs and police officers have carried the weight of gun crime on their shoulders alone. As I write this, there are horrific news media reports of four officers from Lakewood, Washington, having been shot to death. It is time for police chiefs to put a spotlight on this issue at the local level. The public has become too desensitized to the issue. Let chiefs lead the way with the evidence of what has become the unfortunate status quo, and let us challenge the status quo!



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