

Letter From Rockford

by Kelly P. Champlin

Ladygun Speaks Out



Firearms. A single word describes an almost infinite number of individual items and has the power to polarize an entire world. I have a personal stake in the debate. I own firearms and shoot not only for pleasure but on a competitive level. Why am I bringing this particular fact to light? Because I live in Rockford, Illinois, and our state is attempting to become the first statewide gun-free zone in the country.

The bill currently languishing in the state's Senate Rules Committee is SB1195, and it is only one of about a dozen "antigun" bills that were introduced in February of this year. SB1195 would make felons of a huge number of Illinois residents unless they destroy, render inoperable, hand over to law enforcement, or remove from Illinois a very long list of firearms and firearms accessories.

The bill reads, in part:

The General Assembly finds that the high rate of fire and capacity for firepower of semiautomatic assault weapons, assault weapon attachments, and large capacity ammunition feeding devices pose a significant threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of this State, that the use of these weapons, devices, or attachments for sport or recreation is substantially outweighed by the danger these weapons or devices present to human life, and that restrictions should therefore be placed on the manufacture, delivery, and possession of these weapons, devices, and attachments.

Semiautomatic means that one round is fired every time the trigger is pulled. This bill does not cover fully automatic weapons (which fire rounds continuously until the trigger is released), which were

regulated in 1968 by the federal Gun Control Act. Fully automatic firearms are still available from private collectors, but the government has a list of requirements for purchase, including holding a "Class 3 Firearms License" (unavailable in Illinois), fingerprinting, an extensive background check, and a \$200 transfer tax paid to the federal government by the purchaser each time the firearm changes hands. Automatic weapons are no longer manufactured for civilian sale to anyone who lives in the United States. These are not guns that will be used in drive-by shootings. Assault weapon attachments? Bayonets are not exactly drive-by material, either.

SB1195 states, after proscribing the "weapons, devices, and attachments," that

Any person who knowingly possesses a semiautomatic assault weapon, large capacity ammunition feeding device, or assault weapon attachment must, within 90 days after the effective date of this amendatory Act of the 93rd General Assembly, destroy the weapon or device, render it permanently inoperable, relinquish it to a law enforcement agency, or remove it from this State.

The bill makes no provisions for compensation, no "grandfather" clauses. Simply put, *Hand over the guns, or you will be arrested and charged with felony crimes.*

This is not the first weapons ban to hit Illinois. Cook County (Chicago) has had a ban in place for a number of years and is still a very high-crime area. The authors of SB1195—Senators Munoz, Martinez, and Sandoval—have obviously put quite a bit of thought into this bill. It would make criminals of those of us who shoot local, national, and international matches; historical reenactors; and those of us who hunt to help put food on the table. (In Illinois, deer hunting with firearms is only allowed using shotguns, muzzleloaders and, in certain municipalities, large-caliber handguns.) It would also make criminals of those thousands of us who just like to shoot at a target at the end of the range because we enjoy shooting.

The Brady Bill of 1993 was not this broadly written, and it did not decrease

the crime rates in such cities as Chicago and Washington, D.C., by any appreciable levels. It did, however, increase the value of pre-ban "assault rifles," high-capacity magazines, and certain components. A high-capacity magazine for a competition handgun may have cost, at the high end, \$40 before the ban. That same magazine, if you can find one, now runs \$80-\$150. They can be purchased if they were made before the Brady Bill took effect, but manufacturing them for civilian sale is illegal.

SB1195 would outlaw rifles and shotguns with a magazine capacity of more than five rounds, ending most rifle competition in the state. It would ban any handgun with a capacity greater than ten rounds—the majority of firearms manufactured—and would effectively eliminate handgun competition in the state. Strangely enough, there is also a weight limit. If the manufactured weight of a handgun is more than 50 ounces unloaded, it falls under this new bill. This would include the Ruger Super Redhawk and the Freedom Arms Cassull revolvers. Both of these are used for handgun hunting.

The bill would outlaw any firearm having a caliber of .50 or greater, which includes 20-gauge, 12-gauge, and 10-gauge shotguns, leaving only the .410 shotguns for hunting and recreational use, eliminating trap and skeet competition in Illinois. This particular part of the bill could also be interpreted to include many black-powder firearms, especially those that are not antiques. This would bid fair to eliminate historical battle reenactments using modern replicas of antique weapons. Antique black-powder firearms would be protected, but they are rarely fired: They are usually too valuable either monetarily or historically to risk damage.

This bill would be detrimental to the firearms industry in the state—not only to the firing ranges and gun clubs—but to the federally licensed firearms dealers and the firearms and components manufacturers in Illinois such as Les Baer Custom; Springfield, Inc.; Armalite; and Rock River Arms. Olin-Winchester, an ammunition manufacturer, would also be affected.

The trickle-down effects of the bill would also hurt anyone who sells anything even remotely associated with fire-

arms: clothing, shoes, luggage, rain gear, safety glasses, and hearing protection; target manufacturers, such as Arntzen Steel in Rockford; electronics companies such as Competition Electronics in Rockford.

Wal-Mart, Kmart, Gander Mountain, Dick's Sporting Goods, and MC Sports are just a few of the retailers which would see drops in business, particularly at the hunting and gun counters. After all, if there were only a few firearms left in the state, and most of those are low capacity or antiques, where would the business come from? Ranges such as Pine Tree Pistol Club in Rockford, PASA Park in Barry/Quincy and Tri-County Gun Club in Hazellhurst would no longer be able to host competitions, which would rob local economies of tourism dollars—and with just those three ranges hosting regional, national, and international matches, that could mean major losses for airports, hotels, shopping centers, restaurants, even gas stations.

The same applies to the several hundred other firing ranges in Illinois and the local economies to which they contribute. When competitors go to major matches, they bring their families. And those wives and children (and, yes, sometimes husbands) of competitors may not be out on the range. They are probably at the local shops, putting money into local coffers.

If the gun owners in Illinois decide to take their firearms out of state to keep them, how many families would move to

another, more gun-friendly state? How many property-tax dollars would be lost? How many sales-tax dollars would be lost? Gun owners are not flannel-shirt wearing, scruffy-looking hicks. Firearms and the shooting sports have never been inexpensive, and those of us who own guns legally do not buy our gear on the black or gray markets. We pay taxes on every item that we purchase, from the \$30,000 trap shotguns and \$3,500 custom handguns all the way down to those \$.18 soft earplugs.

All of this could be seriously detrimental not only to firearms owners in Illinois but to the financial future of the state. How many manufacturers and retailers will lay off workers because of a lack of business, or even close? Illinois already has a hefty unemployment rate and budget deficit.

Our elected representatives take an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution when they take office. If "We, the People" are willing to sit back and allow our duly elected representatives to throw the Constitution in the nearest garbage bin and burn it, we can no longer have the honest pleasure of saying, "We're Americans. We are free and proud." We will no longer be able to have a say in anything that our representatives do in the state and federal capitol buildings.

Why should you care? If you are a military or law-enforcement veteran, you were taught how to shoot using fully automatic and semiautomatic firearms. Why should you not be able to use, as a civil-

ian, what you were taught to use in defense of yourself, your family, your home, and even your country, should there be another attack such as the one perpetrated on September 11, 2001?

There are more than 22,000 firearms laws on the books now. How many of them are enforced? How often do we hear that a person was arrested for robbing a bank at gunpoint, then bow our heads and say a prayer of thanks when we hear that no one was hurt and shake our heads in disbelief that the person who committed the crime got a slap on the wrist? The firearms charges are usually dropped in the plea bargain.

Those of us who own guns legally are exhausting ourselves trying to fight a government that cares next to nothing about the rights of the law-abiding and makes kings of criminals. "If there is one bad apple, throw out the entire truckload," seems to be the prevailing attitude in state capitals. Given time, if the legislators would stop taking our rights away, those bad apples would eventually eliminate themselves by being legally shot and killed while breaking and entering the wrong houses.

Kelly P. Champlin is president of the Pine Tree Pistol Club in Rockford, Illinois, an NRA-certified instructor in basic pistol safety and marksmanship, and a USPSA/IPSC open division competitor.

Letter From London

by Andrei Navrozov

The Unbeliever



Suppose you are tired of hearing about roulette. Suppose the very thought of gambling, despite the metaphorist's efforts to depict it as the great commonwealth of epochal disillusionment and hence universalize the experience, strikes you as tedious. Suppose you are the sort of man who insists that the only thing duller than watching people take unnecessary risks at the gaming table is reading about them, and it just doesn't matter one whit whether the chronicler at the scene happens to be Ian Fleming, Pushkin, or Navrozov. Suppose you ex-

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