

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 15, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to express my concern with the Administration's silence on critical gun issues and to seek some leadership to better protect the American people. The issues transcend partisanship and could attract bipartisan support.

In January, six Americans were killed and 13 injured, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, when Jared Lee Loughner fired 31 bullets in 15 seconds using a Glock with a high-capacity magazine. These magazines dramatically boost a weapon's firing power and lethality and have become the weapon of choice for the deranged. For that reason, they were prohibited from 1994 until 2004, when the federal assault weapons ban was in place. Since its lapse, high-capacity magazines have become easily accessible. There is no logical reason to encourage the proliferation of these weapons, which is happening. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, a staunch defender of gun rights, even commented recently about the magazine ban with: "We've had that in place before. Maybe it's appropriate to reestablish that kind of thing."

A second glaring vulnerability is the gun show loophole. At gun shows across the country, buyers can completely avoid background checks otherwise required by the Brady law. The Columbine High School shooters killed 13 people with weapons obtained at a gun show, and gun traffickers regularly patronize gun shows and buy weapons that wind up at crime scenes halfway across the country. Closing the gun show loophole would not prohibit anyone new from buying a firearm—it would simply make sure sellers at gun shows follow the same rules as gun sellers everywhere else. As you stated in a March op-ed to the Arizona Daily Star: "If we're serious about keeping guns away from someone who's made up his mind to kill, then we can't allow a situation where a responsible seller denies him a weapon at one store, but he effortlessly buys the same gun someplace else." The public agrees with you—recent polls found 89 percent of Americans and even 69 percent of NRA members favor eliminating the gun show loophole.

Finally, we must close the dangerous Terror Gap. Under current law, the government does not have authority to deny a known or suspected terrorist from obtaining firearms or explosives. This is not merely a theoretical problem—the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that since 2004, known or suspected terrorists have been cleared to buy firearms or explosives 1,321 times. This defies common-sense so much that 88 percent of Americans and 82 percent of NRA members support closing the terror gap.

I have introduced legislation to close these three gaps in our laws, but your Administration has yet to join us on these proposals and has not shown the leadership to combat gun violence. It was nearly two years before a nominee for the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) position was chosen. Earlier this year, the Administration convened a working group to examine strengthening our gun laws, but no findings or recommendations have been released. While the gun lobby is always opposed to legislation to curb gun violence, the White House cannot avoid its obligations to protect our people.

Experts have been warning about an increased threat from commando-style terrorism using guns or explosives, such as the 2008 Mumbai attack and the 2009 Fort Hood attack here in the United States. But the latest threat—and what should be the last straw—came earlier this month, when Adam Gadahn, an American-born Al Qaeda member, urged terrorists in a video to exploit weaknesses in U.S. gun laws to carry out terrorist attacks. Gadahn states, “America is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms. You can go down to a gun show at the local convention center and come away with a fully automatic assault rifle, without a background check, and most likely, without having to show an identification card. So what are you waiting for?”

The 9/11 terrorist attacks are often blamed on a failure to connect the dots—we cannot repeat such a failure again. I know that we both share the desire to stop senseless gun violence, and now is the time to act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank R. Lautenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.