

Commentary

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PERSPECTIVE ON GUN CONTROL

Facts Don't Back Anti-Gun Crew



Most small handguns are owned by law-abiding citizens. Wilson's veto of the ban is on solid ground.

By **CHUCK MICHEL**

Gov. Pete Wilson's veto of the so-called Saturday night special law that would have banned all small handguns has been criticized by all the usual gun-prohibition advocates. Wilson's critics say that his veto was illogical, a concession to the National Rifle Assn. By extension this must also apply to the 19 out of 22 cities that have rejected similar bans since last December, including Long Beach and San Diego.

But Wilson and those 19 cities only did what the anti-self-defense crowd would not do: listen and check out the facts. Both the state and local bans have been promoted as consumer safety and anticrime measures targeted only at cheap, unsafe "junk" guns that are disproportionately used in crime. But when Wilson actually read the law, he saw that "Saturday night special" was defined expansively to include all revolvers with under-three-inch barrels and all pistols under six inches overall as well as any pistol without an old-fashioned manual safety. Thus, Wilson noted, the law would ban "highly reliable, high quality weapons made by the most respected names in gun making—Colt, Browning, Smith & Wesson, Beretta, Ruger—[guns] used by peace officers as their service or backup weapons." These are "junk" guns?

The bill also misused Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms standards designed to determine only whether a gun is made for a "sporting purpose"—target sights and the like—as "safety" standards. But self-defense isn't

sport. The BATF "sporting purpose" factors are irrelevant to determining suitability for defending one's home and family.

Wilson also examined the "criminal's preference" and "consumer safety" claims on which the law was premised, and discovered, as 19 cities have, that those premises are false.

The cities that rejected local handgun bans found that such guns were used in at most about 16% of all gun crimes. Wilson confirmed that figure. The San Diego Police Department reported a 14.1-2% incidence of

less safe than others on the market; the safety problems are addressed through trigger locks or responsible storage. The recent decision by some manufacturers and the widespread availability of trigger locks and lock boxes address the safety issue. If handguns are uniquely unsafe, why do the laws allow police to keep using them? Why aren't California's trial lawyers suing the makers to extinction? Because gun ban advocates have yet to find a single case of a Saturday night special blowing up or melting, as they preposterously claim. These guns are tested for safety; they just aren't designed for prolonged heavy use at a target range. Unfortunately for the manufacturers seeking to defend their reputations, none of the defamatory statements made about these guns were directed to a specific brand outside the legal immunity of a legislative chamber. Why not?

The proponents of these laws know all this—and take great pains to conceal it. "Talk concept, not content" was the rallying cry at a recent conference in Washington. In other words, play on emotions and don't confuse them with the facts. Thus proponents advance their agenda to ban guns. Anything under 12 inches is a Saturday night special. Anything over 12 inches is an "assault weapon."

These points have been made repeatedly to reporters, who didn't even listen, much less print the opposing viewpoint logically. Luckily, Wilson and the 19 cities that have rejected this nonsense feel-good-do-nothing law did.

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inexpensive guns, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department reported 16% and the California Department of Justice reports a statewide rate in the 10% to 13% range. Wilson noted. But inexpensive guns comprise roughly one-third of the U.S. handgun market. Most of them are sitting in bedrooms (hopefully, in quick-access lock boxes) waiting to defend families against invaders. Actually, they're under-represented in crime. Several government studies have found that criminals prefer large-caliber handguns or sawed-off shotguns.

And safety: These guns are no