

## **Congressman Mike Quigley's Opening Statement at the Chicago Forum on the Gun Show Loophole**

Aug. 19, 2010

Thank you everyone for being here. I know some of you traveled a long way and I thank you for your efforts, your commitment to this issue, and I look forward to your testimony. I especially want to thank the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Representative John Conyers, for joining us this morning, as well as Representatives Bobby Scott and Jan Schakowsky, who have been fighting for common sense gun-control since long before I got to Washington.

I'd also like to note that we did extend an invitation to representatives of the NRA, but they chose not to join us. When we think about the tragedies of gun violence, often our first thought is why. Why did this happen? Why did a child, loved one, or innocent bystander have to lose a life?

But the more important question is how the perpetrators of these acts come to be in possession of deadly weapons. The answer in the case of the Columbine school shooting, last year's massacre at Fort Hood, this summer's shooting at the Pentagon, and countless more acts of violence across the country is the gun show loophole.

Gun shows are firearm flea markets, where private citizens sell all types of guns from pistols to assault rifles. In 17 states, sales require a background check. In 33 states no background check is required—and as you'll see today often times all that's needed to purchase a gun is a knowing smile.

This lapse in gun control law is what is known as the gun show loophole. It is a threat to our national security and the security of our cities' neighborhoods. It must be closed.

HR 2324, the Closing the Gun show Loophole Act, introduced by Representatives Carolyn McCarthy and Mike Castle, currently has 109 cosponsors in the House of Representatives and would do exactly that.

Closing the gun show loophole is not intended to end gun shows. Illinois, a state that closed its loophole, has nearly 20 scheduled for the remainder of this year. Rather, it is in sync with the Supreme Court's ruling that struck down Chicago's handgun ban earlier this summer.

The Court made a critical clarification, noting that the right to bear arms is indeed limited. The Court reiterated that communities can keep guns away from schools, and out of the hands of terrorists, felons, and the mentally ill. Yet, the gun show loophole makes a mockery of sensible restrictions like these.

A gun show audit conducted by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's organization revealed that 75 percent of sellers approached by investigators completed sales to people who admitted they could not pass a background check. So it comes as no surprise that 30 percent of all criminally trafficked firearms are bought and sold at gun shows.

Chicago, unfortunately, is no stranger to illegal guns and the communities they terrorize. The numbers, in fact, are equally staggering and heartbreaking. Five hundred CPS students involved

in a gun-related incident the past two years, 34 killed by guns alone last year, and in a single week this June, the city witnessed 60 shootings.

States that have not closed their loophole, like Indiana, are supplying guns to those that have closed it. Indiana is scheduled to hold more than 75 gun shows this year; each sale performed without a background check undermines Illinois law enforcement and contributes to the epidemic of illegal guns that are decimating our city.

This is simply unacceptable. We are here today because reasonable minds on both sides of the aisle feel that in their gut. Today, the rhetoric of Washington's gun lobbies must be recognized for what it is: extremist.

And we must recognize the undeniable truth that came out of the Supreme Court's decision: with a clearly established right to own a gun in the home, no longer can reasonable gun control bills be mischaracterized as a movement toward the revocation of all gun rights.

The slippery slope is now as flat as an Illinois cornfield.

It has been law in the United States since 1993 that there are three groups of people who should never be allowed to buy guns in this country: terrorists, felons, and the mentally ill. Yet, inexplicably, any of them can walk into a gun show tomorrow and buy a firearm.

Regardless of whether you think no one should own a gun or you sleep with a shotgun under your pillow, I am certain that we can agree on a few core principles: that we need to make sure terrorists like Nidal Hasan, mentally ill individuals like the Virginia Tech shooter, and the Hezbollah member and convicted felon who bought a firearm on September 10, 2001, can't have access to guns.

As Tom Vandermyde of the Illinois NRA put it: "No one wants bad guys walking around with illegal weapons."

This is a policy that mainstream America supports. Eighty-seven percent of Americans want the gun show loophole closed. A poll last year by Republican pollster Frank Lutz even found 69 percent of NRA members support closing the loophole.

If we as Americans agree on this, then why have we failed to change a policy that perpetuates senseless violence? We need to reconcile policy with common-sense. When terrorists aren't allowed on an airplane but we invite them to buy an AK 47, there is ample room for improvement.

The onus now lies with Congress to forge a new path, to reclaim the middle ground on gun control and pass responsible gun laws that make us more safe and more free.

Thank you.