



Obama Driving Surge in Gun Sales, Firearms Groups Say

By Judson Berger

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President-elect Barack Obama's election has spurred a surge in gun sales, firearms retailers and enthusiasts say, as gun owners brace for what they believe will be a new era of gun control in Washington.

An electronic news service that covers outdoor news has even named Obama its "Gun Salesman of the Year."

Firearms associations began to suspect that political considerations were driving gun sales late last year as the number of background checks increased. But end-of-year figures showed a big spike in background checks for the last three months of 2008, and in November, the month Obama was elected, the number of background checks was 42 percent greater than in November 2007.

"It's not a hard tea leaf to read," said Jim Shepherd, publisher of the news service Outdoor Wire, which claims Obama's election has "frightened consumers into action."

Obama has repeatedly stated that he supports Second Amendment rights and will not crack down on gun owners, and in June he said he agreed with the Supreme Court when it overturned the District of Columbia handgun ban.

But gun groups are not convinced. They say Obama's legislative record in support of gun control, and his offhand remark during the primaries that small-town Americans are "bitter" and "cling to their guns," foretell a strict approach to firearms regulation during his presidency.

A December poll from Southwick Associates found that 80 percent of hunters and shooters expect the new administration and a Democratic Congress will make purchasing firearms more difficult.

"It's clear that gun owners and prospective gun owners are concerned about the incoming Obama administration and Congress," said Ted Novin, spokesman for the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

According to FBI statistics, there were 12.7 million background checks on prospective gun buyers last year, compared with 11.2 million the year before. While checks typically increase toward the end of the year, they spiked sharply at the end of 2008. The figures show a 27 percent increase in the last three months of 2008 over 2007.

"We always anticipate a spike This year compared to previous years, the last two months there was a significant increase," said FBI spokesman Paul Bresson.

He said it's "possible" that fears about the economy and the incoming administration played a role, though he said the FBI cannot track the actual reason behind the background checks. Also, background checks are not a direct reflection of gun sales -- but since statistics on national gun sales are not kept the background checks are typically used as an indicator.

"Speculation and conclusions that economic uncertainty or a certain political leadership spurs an increase in firearm sales is anecdotal," said one source at the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

But the ATF posted a notice recently saying it was running low on the self-disclosure forms needed when firearms purchases are made, "as a result of an unprecedented increase in demand" for the forms.

Firearms associations appear to be stoking the purchasing frenzy.

The National Rifle Association's Web site recently featured a column titled, "Ready to Defend Our Rights: Are gun owners going to be a high priority target for the Obama administration?"

The Web page linked to another site devoted to Obama's gun control positions. "Obama would be the most anti-gun president in American history," the site says.

Obama stated during the final leg of the campaign that he believes in the Second Amendment, and "I will not take your shotgun away. I will not take your rifle away. I won't take your handgun away."

But gun rights advocates say one of their principal concerns is that the new administration and Congress will eventually reinstate an assault-weapons ban. Vice president-elect Joe Biden, as a senator, was a strong supporter of the assault-weapons ban, which was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994.

Under the ban, which expired four years ago, domestic gun manufacturers were required to stop making semi-automatic assault weapons and ammunition clips holding more than 10 rounds, except for military or police use.

While in the Illinois legislature, Obama backed a ban on semiautomatic weapons.

Andrew Arulanandam, public affairs director at the NRA, said gun organizations are not urging members to stock up while they still

can.

"I think people are doing this on their own accord," he said.

"We hope that the president keeps his campaign promises. Nothing would make us happier," he said. "But we think he is going to have a tough time keeping those promises."

FOX News' Catherine Herridge contributed to this report.

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