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GUN LAWS

Gun sales surge after Obama's election

November 11, 2008 | From Kevin Bohn CNN Senior Producer

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Bernie Conatser has never seen business this good.

The owner of a gun shop in the Washington suburb of Manassas, Virginia, Conatser said sales have doubled or tripled since this time last year.

On Saturday, he said, he did as much business as he would normally do in a week.

"I have been in business for 12 years, and I was here for Y2K, September 11, Katrina," Conatser said, as a steady stream of customers browsed what remained of his stock. "And all of those were big events, and we did notice a spike in business, but nothing on the order of what we are seeing right now."

Weapons dealers in much of the United States are reporting sharply higher sales since Barack Obama won the presidency a week ago.

Buyers and sellers attribute the surge to worries that Obama and a Democratic-controlled Congress will move to restrict firearm ownership, despite the insistence of campaign aides that the president-elect supports gun rights and considers the issue a low priority.

According to FBI figures for the week of November 3 to 9, the bureau received more than 374,000 requests for background checks on gun purchasers -- a nearly 49 percent increase over the same period in 2007. Conatser said his store, Virginia Arms Company, has run out of some models -- such as the AR-15 rifle, the civilian version of the military's M-16 -- and is running low on others.

Such assault weapons are among the firearms that gun dealers and customers say they fear Obama will hit with new restrictions, or even take off the market.

Virginia gun owner Kyle Lewandowski said he was buying a .45-caliber pistol to "hedge my bets."

"Every election year, you have to worry about your rights being eroded a little bit at a time," he said. "I also knew, because of the Democrat majority and because of the election, everybody would have the same reaction I did," he added.

But Peter Hamm, a spokesman for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, called the buying spree "goofy." He said widespread talk of banning guns is a "sales pitch."

"With the glacial speed that we make progress on sensible gun laws, savvy gun consumers should know better than to think they have to rush out and buy guns," Hamm said. Similar surges accompanied the election of Bill Clinton, the last Democratic president, he added.

Dealers in Colorado, Ohio, Connecticut and New Hampshire also reported seeing major increases.

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