

**Testimony  
Of  
Laurent F. Gilbert, Sr.  
Mayor  
City of Lewiston, Maine**

**Forum  
Gun Show Loophole Closing Act of 2009”**

**H.R.2324**

**Wednesday, July 14, 2010**

**2:00 p.m.**

**2226 Rayburn HOB**

**Washington, D.C.**

Honorable members of Congress, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today on this most important issue.

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As Mayor of the City of Lewiston, Maine, I am a proud member of the bi-partisan coalition **Mayors Against Illegal Guns**. Our coalition began four years ago with just 15 members and has now grown to more 500 mayors across the country, who have diverse views and represent large cities, rural towns and who work to keep guns out of the hands of criminals

Even as I speak before you today, Maine is being recognized by Project Safe Neighborhood, a Justice department initiative, for its education campaign with gun sellers. But, we cannot rely on voluntary efforts to deter criminals from obtaining and using guns for illegal purposes.

Our coalition has long urged Congress to close the loophole in federal law that allows private sellers at gun shows to sell guns without conducting background checks. Today, I am here to speak in favor of **H.R.2324, “The Gun Show Loophole Closing Act of 2009.”**

In addition to my experience as Mayor, I am a former chief of police and the former United States Marshal for the District of Maine. Anyone who works in law enforcement will tell you that it is critical that we do everything we can to keep illegal guns out of the hands of criminals and other dangerous people. Allowing them to get a gun does nothing but put innocent lives at risk – including the lives of our police officers who have taken an oath to protect us all.

I firmly believe that we can adopt strong, common sense measures to cut off the supply of illegal guns – all without having any effect on the Second Amendment rights of law abiding Americans.

The simplest and most effective safeguard against gun crimes is the National Instant Criminal Background Check that screens for people who by law cannot own guns. When one buys a gun from a licensed dealer, one has to pass this background check. Every day, tens of thousands of times each year, law abiding Americans around the country pass this background check. It's straightforward. It's common. And it's effective.

But for too long, we've given people an easy way to get around it: simply go to a gun show and take advantage of a major loophole in our law. When one buys a gun from a private seller at a gun show, there is no background check, no paperwork, no questions asked. As a result, **gun shows have become a major venue for illegal gun trafficking.**

In a 2000 study, ATF found that gun shows were associated with more than 25,000 trafficked firearms connected to the prosecutions examined in the report. That means that **more than 30% of the trafficked guns studied by ATF were connected to gun shows.**

This trafficking can have serious consequences.

It affects the gun crime that cities across the country see every day. Police officers face criminals armed with guns that are bought illegally, and innocent lives are lost. Just a few months ago, John Bedell – who was prohibited by law from possessing guns – shot and injured two Pentagon police officers with a gun that passed through a private seller at a Las Vegas gun show.

Gun shows also feeds the violence that has seized our Southwest border. Mexican drug cartels that shoot each other in the streets over trafficking channels into the United States get many of their guns from illegal sales in the United States. ATF agents believe gun show sales are a major source of illegal guns flowing into Mexico.

Gun shows are also connected to terrorism. In 2001, a terrorist was caught attempting to ship to Hezobollah an arsenal of assault rifles and ammunition,

purchased at Michigan gun shows. Other investigations have linked gun shows to terror suspects in Florida and Texas.

The stakes here couldn't be higher. Tens of thousands of Americans lose their lives to gun violence every year, drug cartel violence is spilling across the border, and there is a troubling pattern of terror attacks and plots in America where guns were the weapon of choice.

Congress must act – now – to make it impossible for these dangerous people to exploit the gun show loophole any longer.

The bill pending in Congress is a simple fix that would close this loophole. It requires all firearm sales at gun shows to have the same background check that thousands of gun buyers pass each day. It will end the disparity between licensed gun dealers and private sellers who have no responsibility under the law.

This solution has wide, bi-partisan support. President Obama and Senator John McCain have both supported closing the gun show loophole. And in a poll by Republican pollster Frank Luntz and commissioned by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 69% of NRA members and 85% of non-NRA gun owners support requiring criminal background checks on all purchasers at gun shows

Some states have taken this step. Colorado, for example, closed the loophole by referendum in the wake of the Columbine tragedy. But the loophole remains open in so many other states that the risk of sales to prohibited persons at gun shows continues.

A report released by Mayors Against Illegal Guns in December 2008 found that states that have not closed the gun show loophole are the sources of crime guns recovered in other states at more than twice the rate of states that have closed this loophole.

It's clear that only a federal solution that requires background checks on all sales at all gun shows will address the problem.

For us mayors, public safety is our highest priority. It is simply wrong that this glaring gap in our background check system remains open. I strongly urge you to pass this legislation as soon as possible. Innocent people's lives depend on your action.

I thank you most sincerely for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.