

Assault weapon ban set to end

◆ **Little will change** in New Hampshire when the federal restriction on assault weapons is lifted.

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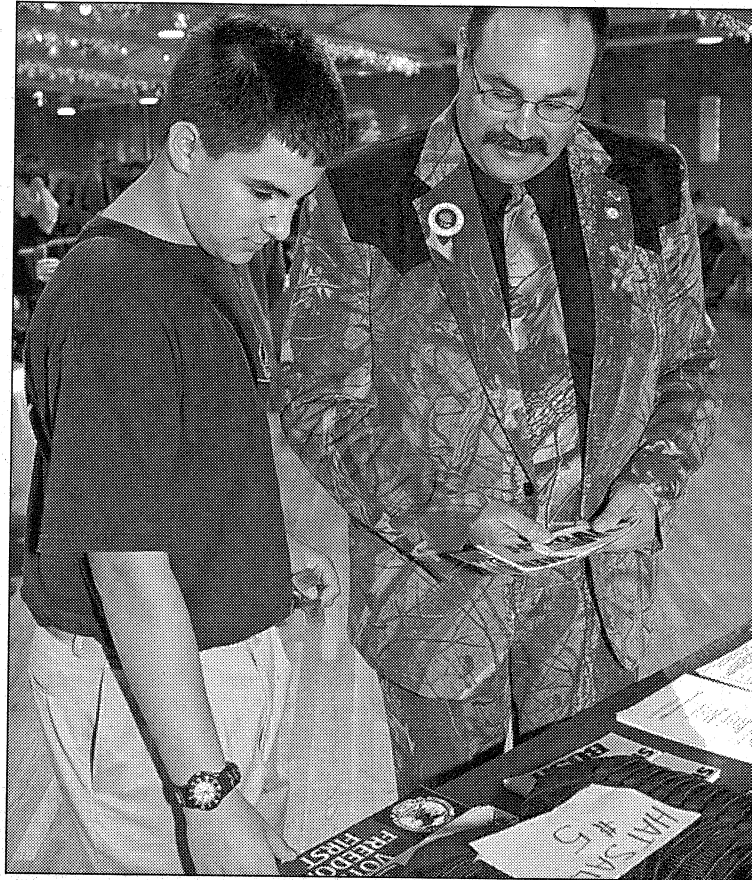
About the only material difference New Hampshire gun enthusiasts are likely to see after the federal assault weapons ban expires tomorrow are lower prices for high-capacity gun cartridges that hold more than 10 bullets, gun owners and dealers said.

Under the 10-year-old ban, semi-automatic assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips that hold more than 10 bullets were not allowed to be imported or manufactured. It was, however, still legal to own, buy and sell these guns and magazines that were already in the country before the ban took effect.

During the 10-year ban, there was still a supply of these guns and clips. It's just that the prices had gone up considerably, said Ralph Demicco, co-owner of Riley's Sport Shop in Hooksett.

"There was really nothing banned that you couldn't buy before or buy slightly modified," he said.

Demicco said some high-capacity gun magazines he's been



Evan F. Nappen and his son Ethan view some of the items at the National Rifle Organization table on display at the Gun Owners of New Hampshire 2004 Banquet held at the Center of New Hampshire last night. Nappen is wearing a dress suit that he reserves for occasions such as the banquet. It's made of ultra suede materials and is in a camouflage pattern. Nappen recently purchased a home in Bow and is the vice president of the NH Free State Project. He is an attorney concentrating on a practice in gun law and ownership rights.

BRUCE TAYLOR/UNION LEADER

selling for \$125 will now drop to about \$25.

"I'm going to be left with quite a few of them" that will be sold at a loss, he said.

Even so, Demicco is happy to see the ban go.

"It's the first time I'm happy

about losing money," said Demicco, who called the law a 10-year exercise in nothing.

"It never slowed our sales down a heartbeat, and the same guns were manufactured but just slightly differently," he said.

That's why he said the lifting

of the ban won't usher in new products or demand. "It's just business as usual," he said.

Colebrook Police Chief Stephen Cass said the law has not made a dent in the supply of assault weapons in his town.

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After gun ban, 'just business as usual' in NH

Ban

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"I don't know that it's had any effect because a lot of the crimes we see here are with assault weapons. I've taken M14s away from people, Colt Bushmasters, a lot of handguns with 15 shot magazines, everything," he said.

Cass estimated that in 35 to 40 percent of the cases his department takes a weapon away from someone that weapon is an assault weapon — a semiautomatic gun with magazines that can accept more than 10 bullets.

Even so, Cass opposes extending the ban.

"To me, it has not made a difference. It's just kept guns away from good people," he said.

To celebrate the ending of the 10-year-long ban, Gun Owners of New Hampshire (GONH) will be gathering from 10 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. tomorrow at the State House to highlight what they view as the rightful return of rights to gun owners in the country.

Elbert Bicknell, president of GONH, said, "It's just a hurrah for our side."

There appears to have been little opposition or debate in the state about the law expiring.

The New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police came out in favor of the ban 10 years ago. But so far this year, it has taken no position.

Plaistow police chief Stephen C. Savage, president of the association, said, "The association hasn't taken a stand at all in favor or against it."

Epping Police chief Greg Dodge, a former president of the association, said the issue had yet to be discussed by the association. But, he added, "I'd be inclined to support it."

Susi Nord of Candia, a board member of New Hampshire Million Moms March, is upset Congress has failed to renew the law.

"I wish the President would ask Congress to bring it to his desk so he could sign it like he said he would when he campaigned in 2000," she said.

Both of New Hampshire's congressmen said they would oppose extending the ban.

1st District U.S. Rep. Jeb Bradley spokesman T.J. Crawford said "Jeb doesn't support renewing the ban as he's a strong supporter of the Second Amendment."

Crawford also said it was highly unlikely a bill would surface in the house for a vote before it expired.

2nd District U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass also supports its expiration.

Gun rights advocates in New Hampshire count the impending death of the assault weapons ban as another victory in what they say has been a good year for New Hampshire gun rights advocates.

Rep. Sam Cohen, a member of GONH, said, "We are fortunate that we have freedom friendly government for the first time in many years and we've seen a lot of progress. There have been four significant pro-gun pieces of legislation that have passed the house and senate."

The first, HB766, clarified the procedure for issuing a license to carry a concealed weapon to ensure police and towns only require set information from applicants in issuing a license. The second precluded some types of lawsuits being filed against gun manufacturers, Cohen said.

The third explicitly stated that state law governing guns preempts local laws, which stopped towns from prohibiting the carrying of guns in certain places. The fourth enhanced noise protections to protect shooting ranges from lawsuits, Cohen said.

Nord, of the New Hampshire Million Mom March, said that despite all those changes, the most important bill gun advocates proposed failed. That was a bill that would have allowed people to carry concealed weapons without meeting any requirements for a license.

"Not passing Bill 454 is a victory," she said.

But not a secure victory, if Cohen has his way. He said he will reintroduce that bill, which had passed the Senate but died in the House.

Asked what upcoming issues GONH sees on the horizon, Rep. Sam A. Cataldo, R-Farmington, replied, "There's nothing really coming up on the next term that I can see. We're pretty happy right now."