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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman September 29, 2004

I rise today to speak in opposition to H.R. 3193, which I call the Assault Weapons for D.C. Act.

The Republicans pushing this legislation want you to think that this bill is about handguns. That's not what this legislation is about. If the Republicans wanted to repeal the District's handgun laws, they could have done that.

But this bill also repeals the District's laws on assault weapons.

I have a chart I want to show you. This is a semiautomatic 50-caliber sniper weapon. This is its actual size. It is capable of taking out an armored limousine from a mile away.

You can't own or possess this weapon in Washington, D.C., today. But if this bill passes, you could go out the next day and buy it.

And you could set it up in your apartment window overlooking Connecticut or Pennsylvania Avenue. You could even load it with armor piercing ammunition. Or you could bring it to your place of work and do the same.

We are spending millions of dollars trying to protect the nation's capitol from another terrorist attack. Yet we are passing legislation today that would invite terrorists to bring assault weapons into the heart of the nation's capital.

There is a real irony here. In our Committee — and in many other House Committees — we are spending the day marking up the 9-11 legislation. The whole goal of that legislation is to make our nation safe from terrorist attacks.

Yet in this bill, we are telling terrorists that it's okay for them to have assault weapons when they visit the nation's capital.

We are under an orange alert because someone working with al-Qaeda took pictures of the World Bank, the IMF, and other buildings in D.C. Think of the damage that person could have done if he or she had had a 50-caliber sniper weapon instead of a camera.

Two years ago, this city was gripped with fear when a sniper systematically stalked and killed ten people. The gun he used was the Bushmaster XM-15 assault rifle. Along with AK-47s and Uzis, the Bushmaster assault rifle is one of the guns that this bill legalizes.

The vast majority of people in this nation support the federal ban on assault weapons. But instead of taking up legislation to preserve the ban, the Republican leadership in the House has brought to the floor legislation that makes assault weapons legal in the nation's capital. It's not enough for Congress to ignore the will of the American people; the Republican leadership is intent on overriding local laws that restrict ownership of these lethal weapons.

This bill is being rushed to the floor to score political points with the NRA. There have been no committee hearings or markups. In fact, the bill is so poorly drafted that the rule has self-executing provisions to try to limit the ability of people to carry assault weapons around the streets of D.C. These last-minute changes are an admission that the bill doesn't make sense. But they don't address the fundamental flaws in the legislation.

There is one more reason why this legislation is so objectionable. It completely ignores the will of the residents of D.C. and their elected officials.

The bill says its goal is to protect the Second Amendment rights of D.C. residents to bear arms. Well, what about protecting their right to make their own laws? If we are so concerned about the rights of D.C. residents, we should be giving D.C. residents what they really want: the right to vote.

This bill is an abomination, and I urge all of my colleagues to oppose it.