

Gun show question stirs controversy at MN State Fair

Written by Sharon Rolenc, Public News Service - MN
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As the Minnesota State Fair wound to a close with Labor Day, debate on gun control measures started heating up again. At issue is a polling question asked of fairgoers about whether a background check should be required for people who purchase firearms at gun shows. Opponents of proposed legislation to close the gun show loophole say the question masks an agenda to take away their guns.

Heather Martens, executive director of *Citizens for a Safer Minnesota*, says opponents of the proposed law are just trying to promote misinformation about the issue. She says the public has already shown overwhelming support for background checks for all gun sales at gun shows, and points to recent scientific polls, including a poll of National Rifle Association (NRA) members.

"So, if 69 percent of NRA members favor closing the gun show loophole, that's an issue where there's really not as much controversy as some might want us to believe," said Martens.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, gun shows and flea markets provide "a large market for criminals to shop for firearms anonymously."

Minneapolis State Rep. Jeff Hayden (DFL-61B) says he's seen the consequences of these sales first-hand in his district. He moved back to the Twin Cities 15 years ago, after attending the funeral of his closest friend, who was shot and killed at a local nightclub.

"Minneapolis had changed in that gang violence was up, and guns seem to be at the center of it," he said.

Hayden co-authored legislation to close the gun show loophole last session, and says it's common sense to have a uniform standard for firearms purchases. "We have federal legislation that says people need to have a background check, and we want to make sure to extend that to everyone going to buy a gun," said Hayden.

Opponents of gun show legislation say the law won't stop criminals from finding illegal ways to obtain guns, but Hayden doesn't buy the argument.

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Said Hayden: "I think if we govern from that perspective, then we wouldn't have any laws on the books. We have laws that say people can't drink and drive, but people still drink and drive. But we have a law that says, here's the punishment and here's the consequences if you do."

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nearly 1.8 million firearm purchases were stopped by background checks since the Brady Law Background Check system was put in place in 1994. The two most common reasons for denial were a felony conviction, and a domestic violence misdemeanor conviction or restraining order.

The gun show question is one of several in a poll taken at the State Fair by the Minnesota House of Representatives about issues that may be addressed in the next legislative session, including funding for a stadium for the Vikings professional football team, lifting the moratorium on nuclear power plant construction, and limits on tuition hikes at state colleges and universities, among others.

Poll results are available at www.house.mn . The NRA poll is at: bit.ly/cG1M3V . ATF report is at: bit.ly/aooK9f . Bureau of Justice statistics at: bit.ly/bHSzSm.