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LIVE FROM THE HEADLINES

Assault Weapon Ban Up for Renewal Soon

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ANDERSON COOPER, HOST: Congress may decide after all to debate legalizing 19 military-style assault weapons. Now without a vote the ban on them will expire in September 2004, but the pros and cons of the ban aren't lining up as you might expect. CNN national correspondent Bob Franken now has details.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

BOB FRANKEN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Outside the capitol President Bush renewed his warm relationship with the Fraternal Order of Police.

GEORGE W. BUSH, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Officers train and prepare for many threats, yet preparation will never take the danger away from a hard profession.

FRANKEN: One of those threats, the deadly weapons police face daily. Inside the Republican speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, was stepping back ever so slightly from his majority whip, Tom DeLay. Two days ago, DeLay proclaimed that extending the existing ban against 19 different assault weapons would not even be brought up for a vote, but the speaker insisted he had not made that decision. He hasn't spoken with the president, who says he supports an extension.

Democratic leaders want him to prove it.

REP. NANCY PELOSI (D-CA), MINORITY LEADER: I hope the president will use his good offices and his considerable political capital to have the assault weapon ban brought up on the house floor.

CHIEF RON BATTELLE, ST. LOUIS COUNTY POLICE: He needs the support it fully. I think he needs to get behind it and get the Congress behind it.

FRANKEN (on camera): Many, if not most cops believe that the assault weapon is just another danger in a very treacherous world, but an extension of the ban is anything but certain because the world of politics is very treacherous, too.

(voice-over): The truth is members of both parties would just as soon avoid the issue.

GOV. MARK WARNER (D), VIRGINIA: I don't think shifting the rate back onto a gun control issue is going to at least in southern states and many Midwestern states is going to move the Democrats forward. Bill Clinton told the congressmen in '94 they'd be real popular if they did that. Ninety million gun owners deeply resented it and many, many congressmen were voted out of office.

FRANKEN: A not so subtle reminder from the NRA. And not every cop supports the assault weapons ban.

PATROLMAN BUTCH PUCCHETTI, KITTANING, PENN, RD: Somebody is intent on, you know, getting a police officer and they come after you with a knife, a handgun, a shotgun.

FRANKEN: So the president and the congressional leaders do their political dance. There's a good chance the assault weapons ban will expire. Those who oppose gun control seem to have the upper hand.

Bob Franken, CNN, Washington.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: Well, opponents of the ban will tell you assault weapons are rarely used for crime. Supporters of the ban will ask what possible legal use could they have.

Joining us with some specifics on what exactly these things do, we have Miami bureau chief John Zarella -- John.

JOHN ZARELLA, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Anderson, we are out in western Broward County at Marcam Park which is the home to the Broward sheriff's office firearms training range. And Sheriff Ken Jenny has been very gracious to join us. And sheriff, before we get into the demonstration, why is it that you believe that these guns need to remain banned?

KEN JENNE, BROWARD COUNTY SHERIFF: Because I know Floridians use shotguns like mine to shoot birds. Criminals use weapons like this to shoot Floridians and know that's a major difference between these types of weapons, as do most Floridians.

ZARELLA: So you don't believe that this particular weapon has a place on the street?

JENNE: Absolutely not. I mean this, has a weapon -- this has a place to shoot birds, to enjoy, but this is one that ought to be off the streets.

ZARELLA: Now, in our demonstration that we're going to show you right now, the -- Detective Worth, Chris Worth is going to shoot that AK-47, right, that you just gave us.

JENNE: That's right. It's an old Chinese AK-47 that has been banned.

ZARELLA: That is one of the 19 currently banned weapons.

JENNE: And you can see the destructive force. It's got 30 rounds in its magazine and he will be firing it now.

ZARELLA: OK. Now that was semi-automatic.

JENNE: Now this is automatic.

ZARELLA: Wow! That obliterated those blocks.

JENNE: Those blocks are gone.

ZARELLA: Absolutely obliterated it. And you can tell the difference.

JENNE: Now this weapon is the AK-47 also, but it's the civilian and it's the one that has not been...

ZARELLA: But this is legal right now.

JENNE: It is legal under the law.

ZARELLA: And Detective Worth is going to shoot that right there.

JENNE: Absolutely.

ZARELLA: Sheriff, that still carries a -- that still carries a tremendous amount of firepower. Those guns, though, as far as you're concerned, do you believe that other police departments, too, and that other members of law enforcement want to see these weapons stay off the streets?

JENNE: There's no purpose for these weapons on the street of Florida or any place else in the United States. We believe in having long guns, we believe in handguns, but it's a difference. These are weapons that are designed to kill.

And let me tell you, there's a difference between having a hunter the right to have the tools to hunt animals and the right to have a weapon that's going to kill people.

ZARELLA: Finally, sheriff, again on this particular weapon the difference in the legal weapons and the illegal primarily is the numbers of rounds.

JENNE: Absolutely. The banned in what would occur is you'd now have 30 rounds in the magazine as opposed to 10. And let me tell you something, that is a great danger to law enforcement on the street. It's a great danger to the public out there and that's why I think that they should be banned.

ZARELLA: Sheriff, again, you can take a look at those targets. They have been absolutely ...

JENNE: It makes a big difference. You can look there, you can see and you can see -- and that's the danger.

ZARELLA: And the holes that have been literally drilled through that bullet-proof vest that's designed to protect police officers is riddled.

JENNE: And you can see what would happen. And this is not a child on a stoop. This is not someone walking down the street. This is a vest that's designed to protect people from gunshots and this is the danger we see.

ZARELLA: Sheriff Ken Jenne, to you and to the deputies that have come out here to help us, we thank you so very much for your time and the efforts of everyone.

Clearly, Anderson, the example of the firepower that these weapons possess and why, at least here in Broward County, the Broward sheriff's office and Sheriff Ken Jenne want to see that ban remain in place. A powerful demonstration -- Anderson.

COOPER: John, the NRA, of course, opposes the assault weapon ban just as vehemently as these gentlemen here support it. Basically, what has the NRA thought of the argument?

ZARELLA: Let me ask the sheriff. Sheriff, you know the NRA has been basically opposed to the ban.

JENNE: Yes.

ZARELLA: What do you think the NRA's -- what's the NRA's reasoning for opposing this particular ban? Do you have any idea?

JENNE: Well, from a practical point, no, I don't because I heard the argument several years ago that we did not need a state law. We did not need local laws because there was a federal law in place that would prohibit this and that we should have one universal law.

I'm going to take those gentlemen that have had protested and said that local laws, state laws aren't necessary because there's a federal, so I would presume that that's a reason to keep it.

And, two, the second thing with the NRA I think they're honorable people who probably want to -- don't want to see any dent in the rights to bear arms, but this is more than about that question. These weapons are dangerous to people on the street. They're dangerous and we're talking about 30 rounds in a magazine. It's a serious question.

ZARELLA: So, and clearly, this has nothing to do with right and -- to bear arms. This is clearly an issue of there's no place on the street for a weapon that can do that kind of destructive damage.

JENNE: Again, I think I don't know anyone with a straight face that could tell you that these weapons were designed to hunt, that these weapons were designed to do anything but to be the killers they are.

ZARELLA: Sheriff again, thank you so very much. Anderson, there you have it, live from the firing range -- Anderson.

COOPER: John, thanks very much.

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