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### **Proponents of gun control shooting blanks**

Ron Smith

April 24, 2009

Every so often I find myself stepping into the minefield that is public discussion of guns, gun violence, gun control and how these things relate to the Second Amendment to the Constitution. Because of misleading public statements by the president of the United States and his secretary of state, it's now time to do so again.

President Barack Obama said on April 16 that 90 percent of Mexico's recovered crime guns came from the United States. The comment came during a joint press conference with Mexican President Felipe Calderon addressing the raging violence south of the border, as Mexican drug gangs battle each other and the government in gruesome fashion. More people have been killed in this violence over the last year than the number of Americans killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined since those wars began. Mr. Obama also pointed out that the huge demand for mind-altering drugs among our citizenry is what keeps the drug cartels in business. In that, he was right. But the assumption that the bulk of weaponry used by narcotrafficantes in their bloody enterprise comes from the U.S. is not exactly so.

The 90 percent figure was earlier quoted by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Sen. Richard J. Durbin of Illinois and reported by a number of news organizations. However, factcheck.org finds this to be quite the exaggeration, saying the figure represents "only the percentage of crime guns that have been submitted by Mexican officials and traced by U.S. officials." These guns, it turns out, are ones bearing serial numbers that make them likely to be from north of the Rio Grande and represent a small percentage of the weapons seized by the Mexican government.

There is no doubt that many thousands of guns are purchased in the United States each year and wind up in the hands of Mexican criminals. But the exaggerated figure is being used to try to re-energize the somewhat dispirited gun control movement in this country. And those of us who believe in the right of self-defense are alert to any such propaganda.

Ten years ago, then-Maryland Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr. issued a 58-page report titled "A Farewell to Arms." In it, he called for an outright ban on private ownership of handguns. He said it was needed to end "an epidemic of violent yet preventable death." He became a lightning rod for Second Amendment enthusiasts and a prime example of someone swimming against the tide of public opinion.

The nation has moved decisively in the other direction when it comes to allowing citizens to effectively defend themselves. Thirty-nine states have laws mandating that local officials cannot arbitrarily deny a concealed-carry application. Maryland is one of nine that have "may-issue" laws. Some of these states have a bias in favor of issuing, but Maryland, New Jersey and Hawaii are considered "almost non-issue" states in that they rarely issue licenses to carry to ordinary people.

Years ago, I had a permit to carry a concealed handgun in Maryland. It was issued with visible reluctance by the state police and only because of FBI-authenticated threats against me. I never renewed it because the renewal process is purposefully made as difficult as possible. Contrast this with Pennsylvania, where any citizen with a clean record can apply for a permit, pay a small fee and pick up the license from sheriff's deputies who are happy to take your picture, put it on the card and hand it over to you.

Which state has the lower per capita rate of violent crime? It's not even close. Maryland, so eager to keep its citizens disarmed, had, as of 2006, a rate of 679 violent crimes per 100,000 population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

That ranked eighth most violent in the nation. Pennsylvania's rate was 439 per 100,000, ranking it 21st. Not a single state that has liberalized its carry laws has seen fit to repeal the legislation. Case closed.

Dan Rodricks, my fellow Baltimore Sun columnist, is right: That fight is over. He calls it an opportunity lost. I call it a win for reality over theory.

Joe Curran said only law enforcement personnel and a small number of people with "legitimate security needs" should be allowed to own handguns. One should ask - whose security needs are not legitimate?

Ron Smith can be heard weekdays, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., on 1090 WBAL-AM and WBAL.com. His column appears Fridays in The Baltimore Sun. His e-mail is [rsmith@wbal.com](mailto:rsmith@wbal.com).