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SAAMI recognizes the magnitude of the problem facing this nation's criminal justice and penal systems resulting from illegal drug trafficking. However, legislation which deprives law-abiding citizens of the right to acquire and possess firearms of their choice for recognized purposes will not solve that problem.

Resolution of this issue requires responsible and objective discussion. SAAMI, therefore, further recommends that President Clinton, through appropriate means, establish a forum for that purpose. SAAMI is committed to participation in that forum.

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SPORTING ARMS AND AMMUNITION MANUFACTURERS' INSTITUTE, INC.

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# **A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO LEGISLATION REGULATING "ASSAULT WEAPONS"**

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Background Paper #5

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In response to a growing public concern about violence and public safety, legislation has been proposed on federal and state levels to limit private ownership of all "Assault Weapons" and/or all semi-automatic firearms. The Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI) seriously questions the direction which that legislation has taken.

**In many instances, the term "assault rifle" is used as a substitute for "semi-automatic." This characterization of semi-automatic firearms is incorrect and irresponsible. As a result, many bills introduced at the federal, state and local levels purport to ban "assault rifles" but would, in fact, ban legitimate semi-automatic firearms owned by millions of law-abiding citizens for sports, hunting, collecting and personal protection.**

SAAMI believes it is in the best interest of all citizens of this nation, shooters and non-shooters alike, that this legislative debate be raised to a more responsible, more accurate level. If this is not done, lawful owners may be deprived of the ownership and legitimate use of traditional firearms **and the American public will be deceived into believing that realistic and effective solutions to our nation's crime problem are being discussed when, indeed, they are not.**

Semi-automatic firearms are not the same as "assault weapons" and are not machine guns. Semi-automatic firearms require a separate pull and release of the trigger each time the gun is fired, and the vast majority of semi-automatic rifles, shotguns and handguns are designed to fire a limited number of shots without reloading. For example, traditional centerfire semi-automatic rifles and shotguns generally have an ammunition capacity of 5 rounds, and semi-automatic shotguns used for waterfowl hunting must, by federal law, be capable of firing no more than 3 shots before reloading. The average semi-automatic handgun holds no more than 15 rounds of ammunition. In contrast, military "assault weapons" are intermediate-caliber machine guns which can fire fully automatically and are distin-

guished by large magazine capacities appropriate to their military usage. Such firearms are currently already strictly regulated by federal law and, according to FBI statistics, are rarely used in crime.

**Semi-automatic firearms have been popular for hunting and other sporting purposes since the early 1900s. They have been legal for use in hunting in 48 states since early in the century. It is estimated that over 20 million semi-automatic firearms of all types have been sold in this country since 1905.**

**Semi-automatic firearms are no more powerful or lethal than any other type of firearm that shoots the same ammunition.**

The debate over semi-automatic firearms has been engendered by the increasingly severe, often drug-related, crime problem now threatening our society. **The vast majority of these crimes are committed by criminals whose possession or use of firearms of any type is already prohibited by current law.**

**In light of the foregoing, SAAMI recommends the following public policy:**

- 1.** The nation's firearms dealers should be provided, as soon as is practicable, with a means of immediate electronic screening of firearms purchasers to identify individuals attempting to purchase firearms in violation of existing state or federal law.
  - 2.** The nation's media, particularly the major television networks and the film industry, should reconsider their production and distribution of films and television programming which emphasize, indeed glorify and romanticize, the use of rapid-fire or para-military type assault weapons.
  - 3.** There should be active enforcement of the existing Firearms Owners Protection Act, and similar state laws, which make it a federal felony, punishable by mandatory penalty, to use a firearm while committing a drug trafficking offense. Such authority should be augmented as necessary.
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