

Firearms Sales Surge, and Types of Buyers Have Shifted

By Patrik Jonsson

The Christian Science Monitor
What do an elderly Oklahoma homeowner, a Virginia Citizen Militia member, and a Texas airline pilot all have in common these days?

They're all part of America's massive gun-and-ammunition buying spree – a national arming-up effort that began before last year's election of President Obama and continues unabated. Across the United States, it has led to shortages of assault-style weapons, rising prices, and a broadening of gun culture to increasingly include older Americans, women and – gasp – liberals.

The causes are varied – from fears over crime, both rational and irrational, to the concern that Second Amendment rights will be curtailed by a Democrat-controlled Washington. With the stock market deeply uncertain, some buyers simply think guns are a good investment. The run on guns suggests a shift in public attitudes about gun rights, and it presents a snapshot of a country that has historically turned to powder and balls in times of turmoil.

"There's the sort of stereotype that gun owners were middle-aged, Republican, white men who were fairly easy to isolate ... in order to regulate them out," says Brent Mattis, a shooting instructor in Florida. "Now that more women are owning guns, more liberals are owning guns, and just average everyday people who want to keep themselves and their family safe. It's turning into an incredibly strong political phenomenon."

This is most evident on store shelves. Select types of ammunition – ranging from the .308 caliber typical in self-defense guns to the .223 caliber usually associated with assault-style weapons – are nearly impossible to get in many parts of the country. Prices are up by more than half over last year. Assault-style weapons are back-ordered for months. Springfield, Massachusetts, gunmaker Smith & Wesson is one of the few brights lights on Wall Street, its stock price up by 70% on the year. A few weeks ago, the gunmaker took orders of more than \$9 million in one day.

The FBI is hiring extra processors to deal with a glut of background checks that have increased by 25% year to year every month since November – a good indicator of sales. In the wheat-and-cattle corner of Oklahoma patrolled by Sheriff Bill Winchester, concealed-carry permit applications are up by

300%, including a request by an elderly man whose hands were so unsteady that he could barely scribble his name.

"There's just so many people that would never have knocked on our doors before that are now coming in," says Bob Roddy, a long-time clerk at Chuck's Firearms in Norcross, Georgia, outside Atlanta. "There's a level of desperation which I don't ever recall seeing before."

It is not uncommon for gun and ammunition sales to cycle, sometimes dramatically. They spiked after the election of Bill Clinton in 1992, for example. Mr. Clinton had promised more gun control, resulting in the 1994 assault weapons ban (which expired in 2004). Mr. Obama, for his part, hasn't made any overt gun-control gestures. To the contrary, he has expounded on his support for the Second Amendment. Even recent court decisions are in gun owners' favor: The Supreme Court upheld the right of homeowners to keep handguns for self-defense in the so-called Heller decision last year.

Some gun-control advocates are bewildered by the uptick.

"We find [it] disconcerting," says Juliet Leftwich, legal director for the Legal Community Against Violence in San Francisco.

Yet gun owners see some worrying signs. One proposed bill in Congress would mandate micro-stamping on bullet cartridges in an attempt to help law enforcement

officials more easily track bullets used in crimes. But it also has the potential to raise prices and outlaw home reloading shops. South of the border, the pitched narco-war battles, partly fueled by U.S.-bought military-style weapons, has brought renewed calls for regulation from gun-control advocates.

The buying trend, however, is far deeper and more prolonged than any knee-jerk reaction to an election or potential legislation, experts say. Although liberals still favor gun control at far higher percentages than conservatives, Americans as a whole are edging in the direction of more gun rights, according to a recent poll by Rasmussen Reports, an independent polling firm in New Jersey.

A major piece of the shift is the perception among many Americans that crime is rising rapidly. Nearly a third of Americans surveyed in the Rasmussen poll say crime has increased in their neighborhoods, and 72% say it's very likely that crime will grow in the near-term.

The FBI reported in January that, nationwide, violent crime was down 3.5% in 2008, robberies were down 2.2%, and car thefts declined by 12.6%. Those statistics contrast with 2006, when robberies, for example, jumped by nearly 10%.

The fears are in some cases taking on a Y2K-like fervor, forecasting total social meltdown. In times such as these, Americans have

always reached for their guns, says David Kopel, research director for the Independence Institute, a free-market-oriented think tank in Golden, Colorado. He digs up a clipping from a Massachusetts newspaper published three months before the "Shot Heard Around the World" that started the Revolutionary War. The article documented a vast gunpowder shortage blamed on "wolves and other beasts of prey" lurking about. Modern fears are fueled by the prospect of an apocalyptic economic failure.

"The logic is simple," says Tom Lee, a member of the Virginia Citizen Militia, which traces its roots to the Revolutionary War. "People are seeing a looming economic collapse that will lead to a prolonged and possibly worsening breakdown of law and order and, eventually, a We-the-People vs. armed-government-enforcers scenario. I'm sure I'm not the only one who sees through the Keynesian scam and sees the wisdom in preparing for the worst."

In Missouri, state police recently sent out a report on militia activity warning officers to be suspicious of, among other things, cars with Ron Paul bumper stickers. (The state subsequently removed references to politicians and political parties in response to an outcry.)

But while total numbers of guns

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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Alternative Energy as Earth Day Photo Op

The way politicians marked Earth Day last week was a far cry from when the annual celebration was started 39 years ago. These days, building turbines gets more hype than planting trees.

President Barack Obama flew out to Iowa (the presidential fleet of Air Force One and support/press planes left quite a carbon footprint) to visit a turbine plant and declare that wind generation is a "win-win" part of his alternative energy plan.

In Manistee, Govrenor Jennifer Granholm touted the state-aided \$4 million Windspire manufacturing facility that she said will create up to 140 jobs and "is in keeping with Michigan's plan to grow the renewable energy sector, create jobs, and reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil in the process."

In both cases, Obama and Granholm were at sites in the shadow of facilities they replaced – a Maytag Corporation appliances plant in Iowa, and, in Manistee, site of a partnership between Nevada-based Mariah Power and Michigan-based MasTech that puts an underused auto plant to work as a factory for the Windspire, a wind-power system for homes and businesses.

Granholm said, "Demand for wind-energy products will continue to grow as federal initiatives to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil advance. The Windspire, manufactured by Michigan workers using Michigan materials, will help Americans rely on energy made, literally, in our own backyards."

Obama said, "The nation that leads the world in creating new sources of clean energy will be the nation that leads the 21st century global economy."

More to the point in current debate in the nation he now leads, Obama said, "The choice we face is not between saving our environment and saving our economy – it's a choice between prosperity and decline."

That's also a theme sounded on last week on the Michigan gubernatorial campaign trail by Ann Arbor businessman Rick Snyder, who last week made stops in the Upper Peninsula and the northern lower. He's expected in about two months to formally announce for the GOP nomination.

In Traverse City, Snyder, who calls himself "a good green Republican," said, "the environment and quality of life are critical elements to having a vibrant economy."

Rick Who? Tom Who?

In early jockeying for 2010 nominations to replace term-limited Granholm, media attention has been focused on Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, clear frontrunner for the Democratic nomination, and on most prominent Republican contenders: Attorney General Mike Cox, Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land, and U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra, former chairman and now ranking Republican of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Hoekstra was a national media figure last week, as he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* and emphasized in interviews he supported the current CIA director, and four former chiefs, who said the Obama administration declassifying of memos on "enhanced interrogation" of suspected terrorists "will make it more difficult for the CIA to defend the nation."

Hoekstra is correct on this issue, has been a wise voice on security matters, and has a business background and a populist campaign touch that will help his gubernatorial run.

Meanwhile, two currently obscure Republican contenders, both from southern Michigan, have targeted northern Michigan for their initial campaign travels. Both are leaders in areas that could be issues in the gubernatorial campaign.

Snyder, a successful venture capitalist after running the Gateway computer company, is a leader in Ann Arbor economic development efforts and was the first chairman of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). He calls the economy "Issue 1, Issue 2, and Issue 3."

Health care is among issues that will be raised by Republican Senator Tom George, a former state representative and an anesthesiologist who has long practiced in the Kalamazoo area. He is former medical director for Hospice of Greater Kalamazoo Area.

While his announcement of forming an exploratory committee emphasized need to "fix" the Michigan economy, he said Friday: "We are an unhealthy people – that's a huge drag on the economy."

His latest plans on the GOP nomination trail include visits to Traverse City, Charlevoix, Elk Rapids, Cheboygan, and the Upper Peninsula.

Unusual Troika

The Three Amigos they are not. Ex-Govs John Engler, Jim Blanchard, and Bill Milliken had a joint commentary last week in the *Detroit Free Press* calling for "expanding Michigan's nuclear energy capacity."

The three have been advocates of nuclear energy, which "produces virtually no air pollutants [and] accounts for more than 87% of all carbon-free electricity generated in the state each year."

But I was curious about how the statement evolved, since Engler, whose name appeared first on the commentary, does not have chummy relations with fellow Republican Milliken and Democrat Blanchard, who was defeated by Engler in 1990.

Turns out the project was orchestrated by Paula Blanchard Stone, ex-wife of the ex-governor and president of Lansing-based The Paula Blanchard Companies, a public relations firm that has among its clients the Washington-based Clean and Safe Energy Coalition.

Reached Saturday about her PR coup, she said "all three" made it a pleasant project.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

Chamber Dinner Will Be May 13

The St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce dinner will be Wednesday, May 13, beginning at 6 p.m. at Little Bear East Conference Center.

Tickets are \$50 for two people and can be purchased from any of the following Chamber board members: Cathie Sposito, Elizabeth Brown, Cheryl Schlehber, Jane Weiss, Merv Wyse, Shirley Sorrels, Yvonne Della-Moretta, Rod Nelson, or Lora Brown.

The theme for the dinner will be "Explode Into Summer." Denise Hansen will be the guest speaker.

Lions Club To Host Breakfast Sunday

St. Ignace Lions Club will host a pancake breakfast Sunday, May 3, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Mackinac Grille.

The event is one of the club's fundraisers and the meal includes pancakes, sausage, and coffee. The all-you-can-eat breakfast is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children younger than 10.

'Spring Cleaning' as Busy Season Approaches



Doing their best impression of the roostertail of water that the company's ferries are known for, Star Line Operational Manager Chris Barker (right), with co-workers Craig Skutt and Mariah Cole in tow, hoses off the company parking lot at the main dock on North State Street in St. Ignace Thursday, April 16. The company opens for the season at its St. Ignace main dock Monday, April 27, and Friday, May 1, in Mackinaw City. It will open its railroad dock in St. Ignace Friday, June 19.

Straits Shooters Association To Meet

The Mackinac Straits Shooters Association will meet Saturday, May 16, at 1 p.m. at the clubhouse on Castle Rock Road in Moran. The meeting is open to the public.

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.