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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

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ROBERT B. RANDEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

April 25, 2005

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

As the chairman of the Committee on Armed Services in the U.S. House of Representatives, I would like to call your attention to a troubling legislative proposal in California that could have a harmful impact on the military readiness of our nation's armed forces and on homeland security.

As background, it is important to know that while some military ammunition is manufactured by a private contractor for the military at Lake City Arsenal in Missouri, the vast majority of military pistol ammunition -- and a significant amount of military rifle ammunition -- is produced by civilian firms that would be directly harmed by the following proposal.

It is my understanding that the California Legislature is currently considering a proposal mandating 1) that all "handgun ammunition" cartridges manufactured, imported, sold at retail, or possessed in the state of California have a serial number laser-engraved on the bottom of the bullet (projectile) and on the inside of the cartridge casing, 2) that all cartridges contained in a box of "handgun ammunition" would bear the same unique serial number, 3) that the packaging would also bear the serial number for the cartridges contained in that box, and 4) that each box of "handgun ammunition" and the cartridges contained therein would have a unique serial number.

I am a proud supporter of law enforcement's efforts to reduce the criminal misuse of firearms. That being said, at the present time, and based on information currently available, I am strongly opposed to this proposal because of the harmful impact it will have on the manufacturers of ammunition used by our nation's armed services and law enforcement agencies.

As a practical matter, ammunition manufacturers simply could not comply with the requirements of such a legislative mandate. The ammunition industry uses high volume processes to manufacture approximately eight billion rounds of ammunition each year. By implementing mass production processes, some factories are capable of, and do, manufacture over one million rounds of ammunition in a single day. The bullet serialization system

contemplated by this proposal, which requires manufacturing in separate batches of 25, 50 or 100 rounds of ammunition at a time, is the antithesis of mass production and would require nothing less than manufacturers having to build entirely new factories at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars.


The domestic small arms ammunition industry is a critical component of our nation's national security and homeland defense infrastructure. Any attempt by industry members to comply with the proposed requirements would result in a massive slow-down in ammunition production. A massive reduction in production translates into a massive shortage of ammunition as well as a reduction in sales and profitability. It is not an overstatement to say that attempting to comply with the mandate would result in bankruptcy for any ammunition manufacturer that tried.

Supporters of the proposal will likely point to exemptions for the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. That argument is simply a diversion because it only addresses possession and fails to recognize that ammunition produced for the military and law enforcement is made by the same firms, using the same machines and the same manufacturing processes, and at the same time as ammunition produced for civilians. In the ammunition industry, the civilian market supports research, development, and sales to the military and law enforcement markets. Sales to law enforcement and the military are too small to support the extremely high volume necessary for ammunition manufacturers to stay viable. California is a major market for handgun ammunition manufacturers. If manufacturers were forced to abandon the California market because of this proposal, many could face bankruptcy. Any manufacturers who may survive would suddenly find themselves facing dramatically increased production costs, and those costs would certainly be passed on to our armed forces, homeland security, and state and local law enforcement agencies. The end result of more expensive ammunition would be a reduction in cartridges available for target practice, which would leave our armed forces and law enforcement personnel vulnerable on the battlefield and on America's streets.

When subjected to the closer scrutiny this proposal deserves, it is completely unrealistic to believe that serialization can be accomplished on the various types of equipment being used by manufacturers. Furthermore, experts in this field are unaware of any study that attempts to estimate the feasibility of such a system or its costs to manufacturers.

Since our nation's armed forces and law enforcement agencies depend so heavily on manufacturers that produce ammunition for military, law enforcement, and civilian markets, and since this proposal clearly threatens the viability of those firms, I urge you to strongly oppose ammunition serialization on the grounds that it would harm our national and homeland security.

Sincerely,



Duncan Hunter

Chairman

House Committee on Armed Services