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REAGAN for PRESIDENT NEWS

CONTACT: Nedra Carpel
202/861-5050

National Headquarters-

4411 Airport Blvd., Suite 1450
Los Angeles, California 90045
(213) 667-9901

Washington Headquarters

1401 16th St. N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 667-9901

GUN CONTROL DISARMS THE HONEST CITIZEN, NOT THE CRIMINAL

Los Angeles, Feb. 11, 1980---GOP presidential candidate Ronald Reagan issued the following statement concerning gun control from the national campaign headquarters:

Efforts are growing at the federal level to further control or even ban handguns, on the basis that such controls would reduce crime. I firmly oppose these proposals -- whether for registration or confiscation of firearms; they would not reduce crime, and could seriously restrict the freedom of law-abiding citizens.

Now I yield to no one in my concern about crime, and especially about crimes of violence. As Governor of California for eight years, I struggled daily with that problem. I appointed judges whom I believed would be tough on criminals. We approved legislation making it more difficult for persons with records of crime or instability to purchase firearms.

We also worked to bring about swift and certain punishment for persons guilty of crimes. In particular, we imposed mandatory sentences for persons convicted of using firearms in the commission of serious crimes. And we were able to reinstitute the death penalty for the most grievous crimes.

However, I was convinced then and I remain convinced today that gun control is not a solution to the crime problem. For instance, a Cambridge University study of Great Britain's ban on firearms found no ascertainable effect on violence. Similarly, a federally funded study at the University of Wisconsin -- the most sophisticated such study ever performed -- concluded that "gun control laws have no individual or collective effect in reducing the rate of violent crime."

Moreover, gun control laws primarily affect the law-abiding citizen. Criminals would not comply with anti-gun laws, and would be able to obtain firearms anyway. Thus, gun control would disarm the honest citizen, rather than the criminal. As St. Louis University Law Professor Don Kates has noted: "Study after study has shown that even if the average gun owner complied with a ban, the one handgun owner out of 3,000 who murders (much less the one in 500 who steals) is not going to give up his guns."

Finally, implementation of handgun controls could be only a first step toward further firearms controls, such as use restrictions or bans on long guns. Such guns are an essential part of the livelihood and recreation of sportsmen and hunters; the government has no right to take them away. Yet handgun controls could establish a significant -- and perhaps irresistible -- political precedent for their registration and ultimate confiscation.

Thus, while no one can deny that we are facing a serious crime problem, gun control is simply an unrealistic and dangerous panacea. The burden of reducing crime must be placed on the criminal--through swifter enforcement, stiffer and certain punishment--rather than on the law-abiding citizen. Gun control would reverse this burden, and should be rejected.