

Gingrich Promised NRA on Gun Control

Speaker Vowed to Ensure No Legislation Would Move Through House

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Shortly after taking charge of the House in January, Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) promised the National Rifle Association in writing that no gun control legislation would move out of committee or on the House floor as long as he is speaker.

Evidently confident of his grip on the House with its new Republican majority, Gingrich made the pledge in a Jan. 27 letter to the NRA's chief lobbyist, Tanya Metaksa.

A copy of the "Dear Tanya" note

was obtained by The Washington Post.

"As long as I am Speaker of this House, no gun control legislation is going to move in committee or on the floor of this House," wrote Gingrich.

The speaker's deputy press secretary, Lauren Sims, said yesterday: "The pledge still stands."

Gun control advocates expressed chagrin. "This letter dispels any doubts that Newt Gingrich and the Republican majority are owned lock, stock and barrel by the NRA," charged Rep. Charles E. Schumer

(D-N.Y.). "It's disappointing, but given the actions of the Republican majority, it's what I expect. I'm just surprised they put it in writing."

NRA influence in the new Congress, especially in the House, has been a recurring issue in recent weeks, with critics charging that the NRA heavily influenced Republican-led hearings into the Waco disaster and effectively stalled inquiries into the militia movement. The NRA has denied any undue influence.

The speaker wrote his note two days after meeting with NRA repre-

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sentatives concerning gun control issues, especially the ban on semiautomatic, assault-style weapons that was enacted last year as part of the 1994 omnibus crime bill.

The NRA and congressional opponents of the ban had been pressing for an early vote on repealing it, but Gingrich did not want a potentially contentious fight to interfere with the House GOP's hurry-up agenda for passing their "Contract With America."

Gingrich negotiated with the NRA, winning the NRA's assent to postpone a vote on repeal in return for early hearings at which gun owners and pro-gun groups could air their views. Metaksa told reporters

said yesterday that "I wouldn't characterize it as that at all."

She said the views Gingrich expressed in his letter were not that much different from those in his new book, "To Renew America." In it, Gingrich complains that "liberals neither understand nor believe in the constitutional right to bear arms" and he argues that "we should be concerned not with legislating against weaponry but with legislating against crime."

Some "educational" hearings were held in April by the House Judiciary subcommittee on crime on issues such as how ordinary citizens use firearms in self-defense, Metaksa said, "and there may be one or two more." She said she expects a House vote on repeal this fall. One key is-

at the time that Gingrich also promised a vote on legislation to repeal the semiautomatic weapons ban "near the end" of its 100-day schedule for the Contract With America.

The speaker sent the letter to Metaksa following news stories about the meeting. In it, he mentioned discussions he had been having with both the NRA and "other fire-arms freedom groups regarding repealing the gun ban and other issues affecting the Second Amendment Rights of law-abiding Americans."

"Let me say that this is both a discussion among friends but more importantly among like-minded individuals . . . there will be no further erosion of their rights," Gingrich continued. "What we are going to

sue will be the ban on domestic manufacture of ammunition clips holding more than 10 rounds unless they are made for the police or military.

"We'd like to get rid of that," Metaksa said. She said old magazines for semiautomatic weapons usually carry 15 to 30 rounds, "but these guns are hardly ever used in crime."

Handgun Control Inc., which supports the ban, said data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms show that although semiautomatic assault weapons make up less than 1 percent of the privately owned guns in America, they accounted for 8.4 percent of all firearms traced to crime during 1988-91.

"It appears the speaker has his mind made up and he, in essence, is

have is a partnership of strengthening laws against the criminal misuse of firearms, which everyone agrees is the real problem here, and eliminating harassment of law-abiding gun owners who are not the problem.

"Republicans want to demonstrate the Second Amendment is more about the fundamental rights of the people in a government of and by the people. Our purpose is to remove ill-conceived and unnecessary government interference with those rights. I look forward to working with you. Your friend, Newt."

Asked if the pledge against gun-control legislation was made in return for easing of demands for repeal of the weapons ban, Metaksa

not going to let any of the facts, such as the success of the Brady law, get in his way," Handgun Control spokeswoman Jamie Schor said of his letter. She said the Brady law in its first year of operation prevented 40,000 individuals from buying guns over the counter in states that previously had no waiting period.

Schumer said he also expects a vote on repeal of the assault weapons ban this fall and thinks those who want repeal "have a good chance of winning." But he said they will still fall far short of the number needed to override a promised veto by President Clinton.

Staff researcher Roland Matifas contributed to this report.