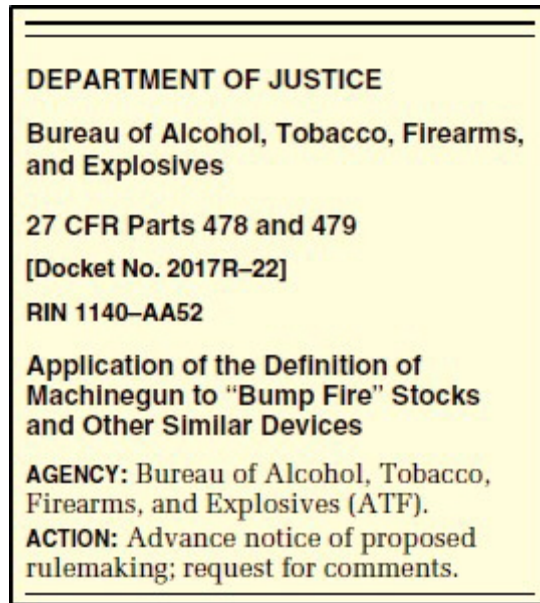


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## **AGAIN, KIDS DIE. AGAIN, OUR “LEADERS” PRETEND.**

*Like the Dem’s, the GOP addresses gun lethality with make-believe*



*By Julius (Jay) Wachtel.* It was January 17, 1989. President Ronald Reagan and Vice-President George H.W. Bush had three days left in office when Patrick Purdy, a deeply disturbed ex-con, used a store-bought AK-47 type rifle to [kill five children and wound twenty-nine others and a teacher](#) at a Stockton (Calif.) elementary school.

Bush then took over (those old enough to appreciate such things might remember his eminently forgettable V.P., Dan Quayle) Five-plus years later, on September 13, 1994 Bill Clinton signed the law commonly referred to as the [Assault Weapons Act](#) into effect. As a Yale Law School grad, the prez must have known that the measure, which was prompted by a series of shootings including the Stockton massacre, [had been craftily worded](#) to create the least possible impediment to the firearms industry. Indeed, the so-called “ban” was so easy to circumvent that when it expired ten years later the rabidly anti-gun Violence Policy Center [shrugged](#):

...immediately after the 1994 law was enacted, the gun industry evaded it by making slight, cosmetic design changes to banned weapons—including those banned by name in the law – and continued to manufacture and sell these ‘post-ban’ or ‘copycat’ guns.

How toothless *was* the Federal law? How weak were its suggested replacements? As we've discussed in prior posts (click [here](#) and [here](#)), the original "ban" and subsequent schemes tinkered with ammunition capacity and external baubles such as handgrips and flash suppressors. None dared address that one aspect that makes "assault weapons" so dangerous to citizens and cops: fearsome ballistics, which defeat police body armor, [pierce the front doors of homes](#) and kill cops, and force outgunned police to deploy armored cars.

On April 20, 1999, about half-way through the Federal ban's ten-year run, two teens [staged a massacre](#) at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, killing twelve fellow students and a teacher and wounding twenty-one others. [One of their guns](#), a Hi-Point 9mm. semi-automatic carbine (it was reportedly used to discharge nearly 100 rounds) came from a friend who got it from an unlicensed seller [at a gun show](#). Hi-Point had [purposely designed](#) and manufactured this rifle to avoid the prohibitions in the Federal assault weapons law, and [it remains in production](#) in assorted calibers and configurations (including "California Compliant") through the present day.

Columbine was followed by the [April 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech](#), where a senior used two pistols to kill twenty-seven fellow students and five staff members and wound seventeen others. Although a judge had once declared the shooter mentally incompetent, his status was never relayed to the Federal background check system, so he was allowed to buy the guns used in the massacre. This gap in reporting was corrected in a bill signed by President George W. Bush in January 2008, one year before he left office. (Although Congress was under Democratic control, both firearms were handguns, so the incident wasn't useful in supporting occasional attempts to renew the assault weapons law.)

But [the Sandy Hook school massacre](#) was different. In December 2012 a mentally-troubled (but not adjudicated) youth used his mother's Bushmaster XM-15 rifle (an AR-15 variant) to murder twenty children and six employees. To date the deadliest school massacre in U.S. history, it took place as President Obama was finishing the third year of his first term. As one might expect, this tragic event invigorated the Democrats' push for [a renewed assault weapons ban](#). Of course, just like Bill Clinton, Mr. Obama, who once edited the prestigious *Harvard Law Review*, had to know that the purposely built-in limits of assault weapons laws make them virtually useless in the real world of gun massacres. But as a good Democrat, he pressed for the measure [and attacked its GOP opponents](#) with gusto. As one might expect, although the proposal was [only slightly more restrictive](#) than the expired law, with the GOP running the House it predictably went nowhere.

Then came last month's massacre at [Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School](#). Now in control of both the presidency and Congress, the Grand Old Party faced a dilemma. Digging into its basket of excuses, it promptly redirected the conversation to the worst gun massacre in American history, last October's killing of fifty-eight persons and wounding of four-hundred eighty-nine on the Las Vegas strip. What enabled the carnage according to the GOP? Not the killer's arsenal of (legal) AK-47 variants but an unfortunate accessory: the "[bump stock](#)" that enabled him to mimic full-auto fire.

Wait a moment! There was no "bump stock" at Marjory Stoneman, only a legal AR-15 rifle. No matter. Whether to draw attention away from the real problem, or simply appease a bunch of high schoolers who ditched class for a day, President Trump finally suggested a ban. *On bump stocks:*

Just a few moments ago, I signed a memorandum directing the Attorney General to propose regulations to ban all devices that turn legal weapons into machine guns. I expect that these critical regulations will be finalized...very soon.

As luck would have it, the president's directive ran into a slight problem. Well aware of its shaky position regardless of who's at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, ATF, the agency charged with overseeing Federal gun control efforts (full disclosure: my one-time employer) has always been exceedingly careful to interpret firearms laws as narrowly as possible. Its desperation to "get along" was recently reflected in a [January 2017 "White Paper"](#) penned by the agency's associate deputy director, which (of all things) favored legalizing *firearms silencers* and loosening regulatory oversight. (For our post on point click on "Silence," below. For an in-depth news account click [here](#). Incidentally, some agency wags characterized the document as a job application for the Director's slot, which remains vacant.)

So what does ATF think about bump stocks? It [passed judgment on those](#) a decade ago. As far as the agency's concerned, they've always been legal:

"Bump fire" stocks (bump stocks) are devices used with a semiautomatic firearm to increase the firearm's cyclic firing rate to mimic nearly continuous automatic fire. Since 2008, ATF has issued a total of 10 private letters in which it classified various bump stock devices to be unregulated parts or accessories, and not machineguns or machinegun conversion devices....

These words came from ATF's December 2017 filing in the federal Register, which invited comments to a proposed regulation that would place bump stocks within the statutory definition of a "machinegun." Stung by the Las Vegas massacre, the NRA announced that it [favored studying the measure](#). At the same time, it also called for a

Federal law to extend right-to-carry throughout the U.S. Meanwhile our Twitterer-in-Chief [came out in support](#) of arming America's teachers. Just imagine the commercial possibilities! New lines of guns and holsters specially designed so that instructors can place highly accurate, devastatingly lethal fire from the chalkboard!

Sadly, when it comes to America and guns, ideology and selfishness have always ruled. Even in the most gun-hostile states, assault rifle "bans" emphasize everything except what really counts: ballistics. For an example of these laws' ineffectiveness one need go back no further than December 2015, when a self-styled terrorist couple used state-legal AR-15 clones to murderous effect, [killing fourteen and wounding twenty-two](#) at a workplace party in San Bernardino, California.

We usually like to close with a catchy sentence or two, but here that doesn't seem quite as important. In any case, let's hope that whatever happens with "bump stocks" and pretend gun "bans", neither courageous high-schoolers nor their elders will be fooled. As long as exceedingly lethal firearms continue being manufactured and sold while our "leaders" wink and nod, kids, adults and cops will keep being slaughtered. You can count on it.