

The Boston Globe

Founded 1872

P. STEVEN AINSLEY *Publisher*

MARTIN BARON *Editor* RENÉE LOTH *Editor, Editorial Page*

HELEN W. DONOVAN *Executive Editor*

Crime-fighters vs. Congress

THE NATION'S gun lobby has never been choosy about which party controls Congress. Although its contributions skew to the Republicans, plenty of Democrats have been held hostage to the demands of the free-spending National Rifle Association and its activist membership. This week in Washington, House leaders have a chance to show independence from the gun lobby by repealing an odious provision of the Justice Department's appropriations bill that prohibits police and local officials from seeing comprehensive federal data that traces guns used in crimes.

The so-called Tiahrt amendment, named for Kansas Republican Representative Todd Tiahrt, is a direct challenge to urban mayors who have banded together to reduce crimes committed with guns that cross state lines. Mayor Thomas Menino will be in Washington tomorrow with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and other mayors. They'll be calling for removal of the Tiahrt provision, which has nothing to do with the right to bear arms. "The Second Amendment we all understand," Menino said last week. "But this is about *illegal* guns. We need these tools to track them."

The Senate already has caved on the Tiahrt amendment; House Speaker Nancy Pelosi can show real leadership by repealing this gift to the National Rifle Association.

But the difficulty local police face in track-

ing guns used in crimes is just a part of the problem. Many people don't realize that fully half the gun sales in this country are in the unlicensed "private" market, purchases made either between individuals or at gun shows and flea markets. Guns of all kinds can be sold without any background checks, to anyone — people with criminal records, terrorist connections, or mental illness. Why shouldn't everyone be subject to the same safeguards as those in Massachusetts? Why can't Congress close the gun-show loophole? One answer: \$8 million in campaign contributions from the NRA since 2000.

Individual states — where the deadly effects of weak gun laws are felt most directly — are taking sensible steps to control illegal guns, including new laws in Connecticut and New Jersey requiring that lost and stolen firearms be reported to police. But gun trafficking is an obvious area where a uniform federal standard is needed. Sadly, too many in Congress believe the gun lobby's propaganda that votes for gun control are radioactive.

Along the Massachusetts Turnpike near Fenway Park, a 252-foot long billboard has offered powerful antiviolence messages since 1995, when local developer John Rosenthal co-founded Stop Handgun Violence. Tomorrow morning after an unveiling ceremony, the billboard will have a new message for Congress: The public wants you to end the wanton availability of guns that are killing 83 people in the United States every day.