



The Boston Globe

TUESDAY, JULY 10, 2007

City & Region



A rendition of the 252-foot billboard that gun control advocate John Rosenthal will unveil tomorrow on the Massachusetts Turnpike near Fenway Park. The ransom-note looking sign is backed by city and state officials.

Gun control message is put across

By Michael Levenson
GLOBE STAFF

It looks like a ransom note, but it is not being sent by kidnapers. It is being promoted by the Patrick administration, the Boston Police Department, and the State Police, and delivered to drivers on the Massachusetts Turnpike courtesy of John Rosenthal, a provocative gun control activist from Newton.

"We have your President and Congress," declares the message in letters that look as if they had been snipped from a newspaper. It is signed simply, NRA, referring to the National Rifle Association, and will be unveiled today on a 252-foot billboard on the Mass. Turnpike near Fenway Park.

The message is the latest from Rosenthal, founder of Stop Handgun

► Officers from smaller communities to boost Hub police force, B4

Violence, who has for more than a decade used the billboard, which he owns, to promote stricter gun laws. In the past, he has erected a mock road sign that declared, "Welcome to Massa-

BILLBOARD, Page B4

Gun control advocate puts message across

► BILLBOARD

Continued from Page B1

chusetts — You're More Likely to Live Here," because Massachusetts has "the most effective gun laws," and a display that featured photos of 15 children who were shot to death, under the slogan, "The cost of handguns keeps going up. 15 kids killed every day."

His latest message has drawn support from Lieutenant Governor Timothy P. Murray, Public Safety Secretary Kevin M. Burke, Boston Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis, and State Police Colonel Mark Delaney, all of whom plan to attend a press conference to unveil the billboard today.

It has also drawn the ire of gun owners' groups, starting with the NRA. "It's a shameless publicity ploy, and I think that's all we can say to describe it," said Andrew Arulanandam, a spokesman for the NRA.

He took issue in particular with the notion that the NRA is holding Congress hostage.

"The NRA works with members from both sides of the aisle, and we have supporters on the Republican side, as well as the Democratic side," Arulanandam said. "The simple fact is that gun control has been proven to be a

political liability. What you see happening in Congress is a reflection of how the country feels. The vast majority of American voters believe in what the NRA stands for."

Jim Wallace, executive director of Gun Owners' Action League of Massachusetts, called the mock ransom note "a scare message."

"I thought these guys were supposed to be an educational organization," Wallace said. "Are they now just a political organization?"

Rosenthal said he wants the billboard to draw attention to the so-called gun-show loophole, which allows buyers in 32 states to purchase a firearm without a criminal background check if they buy from a private vendor. Part of the billboard declares, "Guns kill 83 people every day in the US. Demand federal laws for background checks on all gun sales."

Rosenthal said that only buyers from federally licensed vendors must pass criminal background checks, even though private sellers, such as those at gun shows and on the Internet, account for 50 percent of all gun sales nationwide. He said the NRA is protecting the exemption with lavish donations to members of Congress.

"You need an ID to cash a

check at a supermarket, but you can buy an unlimited number of easily concealable handguns and military-style weapons in 32 states and at thousands of gun shows without even an ID," Rosenthal said. "Post 9/11, that is insane, and it's a big part of the problem with gun violence in this county and in Massachusetts."

Davis said gang members from Massachusetts have been known to travel as far away as California to take advantage of less stringent gun laws, making it more difficult to regulate the flow of guns into some of Boston's most violent neighborhoods.

The billboard "does point out the control the NRA has had over our congressional leaders and how difficult it is to have a common-sense conversation about guns," Davis said.

To date, 32 people have been killed in Boston this year, 26 with guns. Last year by this date, 37 had been killed, 26 with guns.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino most recently condemned the NRA after 8-year-old Liquarry Jefferson of Dorchester was shot

to death, apparently by a 7-year-old cousin who used a gun left within easy reach. Menino and Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York plan to testify before Congress today in support of tougher gun laws.

Arulanandam said past attempts to require background checks for guns purchased from private vendors have included a mandatory 72-hour waiting period. The waiting period is a problem because most gun shows run 48 hours, he said.

"Let's be realistic here: The real intent is to try to legislate gun shows out of existence," said Arulanandam.

But Peter Hamm, spokesman for the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence in Washington, said the billboard was on target.

"I don't think the billboard sounds like it overstates the political reality at all," Hamm said. "I'm sure it's going to generate a certain amount of controversy because of the nature of it, but that's good old John. He gets people's attention."

Michael Levenson can be reached at mlevenson@globe.com.

'I don't think the billboard sounds like it overstates the political reality at all.'

PETER HAMM

Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence