

Today the Committee will analyze the effects of federal gun legislation on the District of Columbia.

There are two competing bills we will be considering. One is H.R. 6691, a bill that would make sweeping changes to the laws governing the possession and use of firearms in the District of Columbia. The other is legislation that Congresswoman Norton will introduce that directs the District to revise its gun laws as necessary to comply with the Supreme Court's recent decision.

H.R. 6691 is called the "Second Amendment Enforcement Act," but that title is a ruse. The provisions in the legislation bear no relationship to the carefully crafted Supreme Court decision recognizing a Second Amendment right to possess a handgun in the home.

Instead, the bill is a wholesale evisceration of the District's gun laws. It is extreme legislation being pushed by the NRA that goes way beyond what the Court required in the Heller decision.

The reason we are holding this hearing is so that members can understand the homeland security impacts of legislation like H.R. 6691.

The District is a target-rich environment for terrorists. The President and the Vice President live here. The Congress and the Supreme Court are located here. Most federal departments have their headquarters in Washington. And hundreds of foreign dignitaries travel to D.C. each year.

Yet the NRA bill would repeal the District's ban on semiautomatic assault weapons. In fact, it would allow individuals to carry military-style rifles — like AK-47s, UZIs, and SKS assault rifles — on the streets of Washington.

Next January 20, the next President of the United States will be sworn into office. I don't know whether that person will be Senator Obama or Senator McCain.

But I do know that if the NRA bill becomes law, protecting him will become vastly more difficult.

On his first day in office, our next President will lead an inaugural parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. Huge crowds will assemble to celebrate. How can we expect the Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police Department to protect the new President and the public if it becomes legal to possess semiautomatic assault weapons in the District?

Some members of this Committee may know what 50-caliber sniper rifles are. The same weapons are currently being used by our military troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to kill enemy forces and disable vehicles. They have a lethal range of over one mile.

Yet under this bill, there would be no registration requirement for 50-caliber sniper rifles. There would be no limitations on carrying them in public. And armored limousines traveling across the District would face a perilous new threat.

Perhaps the greatest new threat is the repeal of the District's ban on semiautomatic handguns. These weapons are readily concealable. They have a history of being used in violent attacks like the Virginia Tech and Columbine massacres. And now they would be legal.

There are other important ways in which District law protects homeland security. Unlike federal law, the District requires background checks for all gun sales, including sales of weapons at gun shows. And District law requires the registration of all firearms.

Yet these essential safeguards would all be repealed. And the District would be effectively barred from enacting firearm regulations in the future.

My staff has prepared a legislative analysis of the impact of H.R. 6691, and I ask that it be made available to members and part of today's hearing record.

We are fortunate to have some of the nation's top experts at today's hearing to explain to us the

impact of repealing D.C.'s gun laws. Cathy Lanier is the Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department. It is her officers who clear the way for official motorcades and shoulder much of the burden of protecting federal and foreign officials.

Phillip Morse is the Chief of the Capitol Police. His officers are primarily responsible for the security of this building and the rest of the Congress.

Kevin Hay is the Deputy Chief of the U.S. Park Police. His officers maintain security in and around the National Mall and the extensive federal parklands in the nation's capital.

And Bob Campbell is the head of security for the Washington Nationals. His team of security experts protect Washington's newest venue from attacks.

We also invited the Secret Service and the U.S. Marshalls to testify, but the Bush Administration has blocked their appearance. The Marshalls had identified a witness who could have testified, but the Department of Justice refused to allow him to do so. They even canceled a briefing that had been scheduled for Committee staff.

The Secret Service told Committee staff that they didn't want their officials to testify for "political" reasons.

When the security of the nation's capital is at issue, there should be no political divide. We all have an interest in making the nation's capitol as safe and secure as possible.

Today's hearing will be followed by a Committee business meeting tomorrow. The bill I intend to call up will be Congresswoman Norton's bill. Undoubtedly, there will be an effort to amend her bill with the text of the NRA bill. The purpose of today's hearing is to ensure that when members vote on these two radically different approaches, they have a full understanding of the impacts of these bills.

Our nation has spent tens of billions of dollars to strengthen our homeland security. We should not jeopardize that investment and the security of our nation's capitol by passing reckless legislation that virtually eliminates all gun laws in the nation's capital.