

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

May 13, 2003

Welcome to this important Committee hearing to examine Project Safe Neighborhoods, President Bush's gun violence reduction initiative.

The problem of gun violence is a national tragedy which requires careful analysis and serious attention. Every year in this country, too many loved ones and family members are killed by criminals with guns. In 2001, criminals used guns to commit over one-third of a million violent crimes, including 63 percent of all homicides, resulting in over 10,000 deaths. For every fatal shooting that occurs, there are roughly three non-fatal shootings. Indeed, even those who dedicate their lives to the protection of America's citizens are tragically the victims of gun crime.

In 2001, 47 of the 51 American law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty died from gunshot wounds. This last fact should not go unnoticed this week as thousands of law enforcement officers from across the country gather here at the National Law Enforcement Memorial to pay tribute to all of the fallen officers. We owe an extra effort to our nation's police officers, and all of our fellow citizens, to make sure that those who illegally possess firearms are prosecuted and punished.

These numbers are dramatic and represent much more than cold figures. They underscore the terrible tragedies felt by countless family members, children, fathers, mothers, relatives and friends in communities across our country. Criminals with guns who shoot and kill are nothing less than domestic terrorists. They terrorize and attack law-abiding members of their communities, and for that they deserve stiff and severe punishment.

While pointing out the nature and extent of this problem, these numbers also are a call to action. Law-abiding citizens want swift and certain justice for gun criminals in their communities.

Project Safe Neighborhoods is the Bush Administration's gun violence reduction initiative which is being run by the Justice Department. Project Safe Neighborhoods focuses law enforcement efforts against criminals who illegally use guns. More than 70 percent of all gun crimes are committed by repeat offenders. Criminals who have skirted the courts and flaunted the law to prey on citizens and communities again and again.

President Bush has committed his Administration to this initiative in order to protect citizens and the rule of law. He has stated his commitment simply, clearly, and with honesty: "If you use a gun illegally, you will do hard time." Attorney General Ashcroft has implemented the President's directive by requiring each United States Attorney to develop and implement a program to address gun crime and gun violence in their districts.

The concept behind Project Safe Neighborhoods is simple: organize and bring together prosecutors, federal, state and local law enforcement, and the community to design and implement a coordinated and strategic approach to catch gun criminals, to deter criminals from carrying or using guns, and to build community support among law-abiding citizens who are sick and tired of being terrorized by violent, gun-toting criminals who wreck havoc in their neighborhoods.

The Administration has committed significant resources to Project Safe Neighborhoods, more than \$500 million to this initiative thus far, and they hope ultimately to devote more than \$900 million to this effort. Project Safe Neighborhoods has added 207 new federal prosecutors, and nearly 600 new state and local prosecutors nationwide to focus on gun criminals.

After almost two years, Project Safe Neighborhoods is showing significant tangible successes. The numbers speak for themselves. The number of defendants charged with federal firearms violations has increased significantly in the last two years, notably after the start of the PSN initiative.

As the numbers show, since this Administration implemented Project Safe Neighborhoods in May 2001, federal gun crime prosecutions have increased by over 40 percent, from a total of 8,054 for Fiscal Year 2001 to a projected 11,686 for Fiscal Year 2003. The conviction rate in these cases is nearly 90 percent. More than half of these gun criminals were sentenced to more than five years in a federal prison. In addition to the rise in federal prosecutions, state and local prosecutors have boosted their efforts as well B with the addition of nearly 600 prosecutors funded through Project Safe Neighborhoods.

While much has been accomplished, there is still much more to do to rid this country of scourge of gun violence. I am interested in hearing how the PSN program is working, and what additional steps are needed to make sure that we do all that is necessary to protect our communities from violent, gun-toting criminals.

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