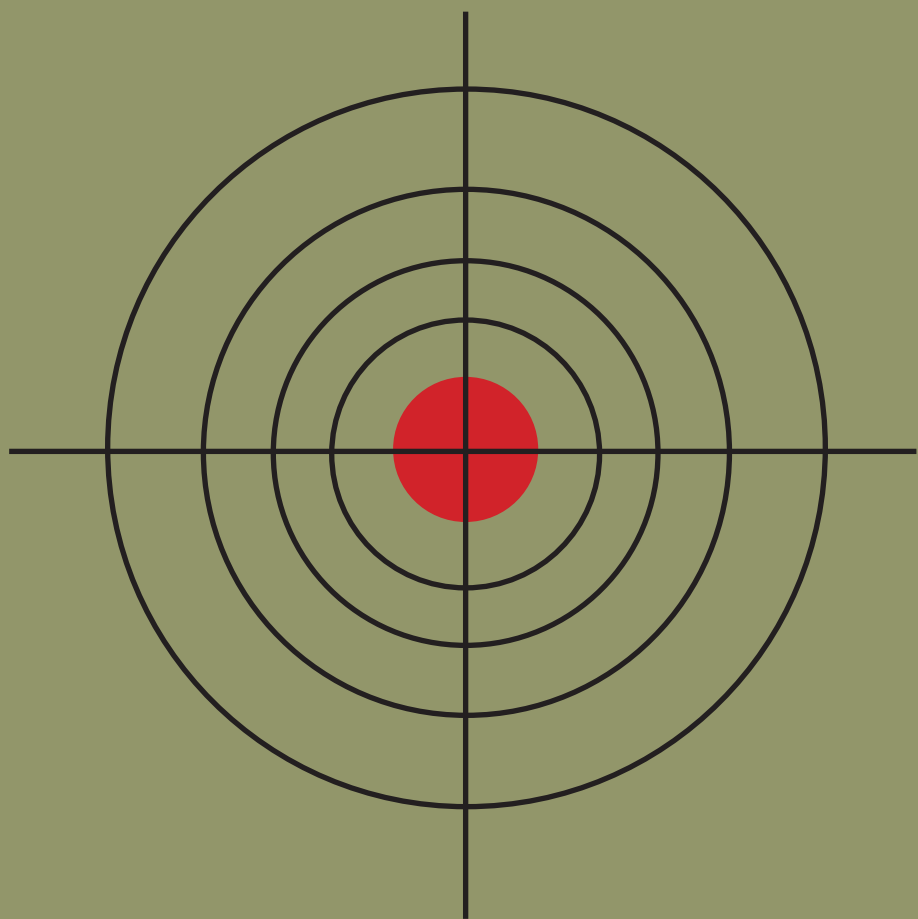


## FEATURES

PAGE 16

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BY JASON BLEVINS AND NANCY LOFHOLM  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

# Gun crazy

*The election of Barack Obama has triggered a run on gun shops in the US, as panicky buyers load up on guns and ammunition in the fear that the Democrats will curtail their 'firearm freedoms'*

John Faulkner and his wife, Brenda, thought Wednesday was a good day to buy a handgun. "I'm 37 years old and this is the first time in my life that I am really scared for our future," said Faulkner, an oil field worker, as he perused the collection of weaponry at A Pawn Shop in Grand Junction in western Colorado.

And at the Firing Line gun shop in the Denver suburb of Aurora, Steve Wickham was also purchasing. "Anything I can get my hands on," he said as he cradled a 9mm handgun with a price tag of US\$699.

Same thing in the Denver suburb of Lakewood. "I was selling guns before I even opened the door. It's gone completely mad. Everyone is buying everything I've got on the shelves," said George Horne, owner of The Gun Room. "Sales have been crazy."

By midday on Wednesday, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation's "InstaCheck" background check — which is required for the sale of a firearm and typically takes about eight minutes — was jammed with waits lasting more than two hours.

Gun shop owners and buyers said the urgency was fueled by Barack Obama's win and Democrats increasing their majority in the US Congress.

"I'm here because of Obama," Wickham said. "I think he's misinterpreted the Second Amendment [of the US Constitution]. It's not about the right to hunt. It's about the right to defend yourself."

The Grand Junction pawnshop is decorated with bumper stickers that read "Obama '08" with a hammer and sickle on each end, "Obama for President of Afghanistan" and "Don't be a Victim. Buy a Gun."

Buyers were mostly going for assault rifles and handguns. A list behind the cash register — issued by the National Rifle Association — outlines the potential threats a President Obama would have on Second Amendment gun rights. Prohibitive excise taxes on guns and ammunition, a ban on sales and transfers of all semi-automatic weapons, bans on right-to-carry permits and more.

One customer left with two new assault rifles and said he had already bought 30 weapons since Obama began his campaign for president.

"And look at this," he said, unwrapping a black rifle from a plastic cover. "I'm not talking BB guns."

Across Colorado, gun shops reported brisk business on Wednesday as hunters and gun enthusiasts began to stockpile in anticipation of a Democratic president and Congress whittling away Second Amendment gun rights.

The FBI is reporting that gun sales have increased 10 percent from sales at this point last year.

Jerry Stehman told an endless wave of customers at his Jerry's Outdoor Sports store in Grand Junction to come back in two hours to pick up their firearm purchases. Stehman said customers have been gathering cases of ammunition and multiple guns for the past 10 days. "We don't know where this character is coming from or what he's going to do to us," Stehman said of Obama. "But I can tell you it's been good for business."

The crush of business shows no signs of subsiding. "It will be extremely busy until Obama decides to do anything," said Richard Taylor, manager of The Firing Line, which bills itself as Colorado's largest gun shop and has seen its stock of assault rifles dwindle from several dozen to just a few in recent weeks. "And that's the real problem, the uncertainty of what he is going to do."

Obama, who reportedly has never fired a gun, has followed Democratic Party lines in his US Senate and Illinois statehouse votes regarding gun control. He supported the controversial handgun ban in the city of Washington, but the Supreme Court shot down that law earlier this year.

He has voted in favor of several gun-control measures and increasing taxes on ammunition and firearms.

The 4 million-member National Rifle Association dedicated US\$15 million of its US\$40 million campaign this year to painting Obama as a threat to the Second Amendment. In a mass fundraising letter sent to members this summer, NRA president Wayne LaPierre wrote, "Never in NRA's history have we faced a presidential candidate — and hundreds of candidates running for other offices — with such a deep-rooted hatred of firearm freedoms."

Obama's campaign, in a statement labeled "Supporting the rights and traditions of sportsmen," said Obama "will protect the rights of hunters and other law-abiding Americans to purchase, own, transport and use guns."

Gun owners worry that a Democratic administration and Congress would support a return of former US president Bill Clinton's gun ban, which lasted 10 years before expiring in 2004. That ban prohibited magazines capable of holding more than 10 rounds and certain semi-automatic assault rifles with features like lugs for attaching a bayonet.

"Not only are they likely to revisit the Clinton ban, they will possibly make it more restrictive by banning more types of firearms altogether," said Tony Fabian, president of the Colorado State Shooting Association, the state's division of the NRA.

Several gun shop owners contacted by the *Denver Post* on Wednesday said sales had been exceptionally brisk in the past two months.

"The avid gun owners are picking up items that were part of earlier bans or things the Democrats typically talk about when they talk about gun control. Anything semi-automatic. Magazines for more than 30 [rounds]. Assault-type guns," said Tim Brough, owner of Rocky Mountain Shooters Supply in Fort Collins.

"I think it's a legitimate concern. Democrats typically want to pass more gun legislation and now you've got a House, Senate and Democratic president so it seems likely we will see more gun regulation."

Top: A customer examines a bulpup assault rifle at the Cheaper Than Dirt gun store in Fort Worth, Texas on Thursday. The shop sold US\$101,000 in merchandise the day after Democrat Barack Obama's victory in the US presidential election, shattering its single-day sales record, and is having trouble keeping up with the demand for assault rifles. PHOTO: AP

Right: Curtis Irwin holds a .50-caliber rifle to show at the Cheaper Than Dirt gun store in Fort Worth, Texas on Thursday. Such guns, which have an effective range of 7,000m and can penetrate the 2.5cm-thick rolled-steel armor used on military vehicles from a distance of 180m, are as easy to obtain in the US as ordinary hunting rifles. PHOTO: AP

