Locals react to proposed state, national legislation

Just days after President Barack Obama unveiled new legislation aimed at limiting gun violence, local legislators and congressmen are already acting to prevent what they call an attack on an American right.

Obama's main proposals he revealed Wednesday are:

- Requiring criminal background checks on all gun sales, including private sales.
- Banning "military-style" assault weapons.
- Limiting ammunition magazines to 10 rounds.
- Strengthening penalties for gun trafficking.

He also signed a series of 23 executive actions — free from Congressional approval — intended to strengthen existing laws, augment mental health measures, and promote federal research on gun crime. They also included stricter prosecution of would-be gun buyers who fail background checks as well as new requirements for federal law enforcement to trace guns recovered in criminal investigations.

Republican Congressman John Fleming, M.D. (LA-4) released the following statement after the White House announcement: “By his executive actions today, President Obama is pushing the government further into the exam room. He’s trying to press doctors into government service by pushing them to ask patients, even child patients, if there are guns in their home. After more than 30 years of operating a family practice, I can tell you it should not be the business of a family physician to take inventory of the guns in a patient’s home.

“There are existing laws which ensure that doctors alert law enforcement to criminal activities

that they become aware of in the course of their practice. And, we certainly need to be sure that people who are a known danger to others do not have access to guns. But, calling on doctors to ask patients if they have guns in their homes is another step toward the nanny state that Washington liberals dream about."

State Representative Jeff Thompson, R-Bossier City, said Obama's proposal hinders Americans' ability to defend themselves from "acts of evil."

"President Obama's proposal tries to demonize law abiding citizens who simply want to protect their families. The right of each Louisianan to keep and bear arms is fundamental. As the federal government attempts to infringe on that right, I will stand up and defend it," he said.

Thompson, an attorney, goes on to say that Obama's legislation is an attempt to remove the legislative and judicial branches of government.

"(He is) completely overstepping his authority, and his apparent disregard of the clear provisions of our constitution cannot go unchallenged."

Thompson said he plans to announce a statewide campaign to defend Louisiana resident's right to bear arms, which will allow citizens to get directly involved.

"As we begin to lay the foundations, you can follow @DefendLA on Twitter to get a sneak peak," he said.

Senator Robert Adley, R-Benton, classified himself as a supporter of the Second Amendment and said it exists for protection and recreation.

"My view is, if you don't like the Constitution, then change it," said Adley.

“What Obama wants to do with background checks, we've passed that, it been law for some time. I guess he wants to expand that to mental health, but the drawback is, people in marriage counseling would now fall under that category,” he explained.

Adley also said the identification of guns as “assault rifles” are incorrect and being used for the sake of the gun control argument.

“This concept of everything being an assault weapon because it looks like a military weapon is being used by one side for gun control,” he said. “I am a former Marine, I know what an assault weapon looks like and they're trying to classify semi-automatic weapons as an automatic weapon.”

“It amazes me, the lack of knowledge and willingness to provide information on this topic,” he added.

Adley said he currently drafting a bill he hopes to present this session that would prohibit publishing a list of gun owners and non-gun owners, after the New York-based Journal News published similar lists.

Prior to this week's announcement, Gov. Bobby Jindal unveiled state legislation that would also promote gun safety by enabling the state to report an individual’s eligibility to purchase firearms based on mental health records to the federally administered National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) database.

State Representative Henry Burns, R-Haughton, applauded Jindal's proactive approach.

“I think this is one of the most proactive things we can do to reassure the citizens of the state that we are going to provide an even higher level of confidence in concealed weapons background checks and gun ownership.”

Although, Burns said Jindal's bill legislation has a great idea but there's a disconnect in reporting mental illness on a statewide level. The NICS database shows only two people labeled mentally incapable when LSU Shreveport had more than 5,400 people committed into their care alone last year.

“We need to connect the disconnect on reporting that information without violating privacy. I think that will make the citizens feel much better about laws of gun ownership,” said Burns. “Mental illness is front and center, center stage now in terms of how it can impact our society and our safety.”

In a stroke of coincidence, Burns also filed a legislative bill request four hours before Jindal filed his plan. He had no knowledge of the governor's plans before submitting his own. He says he would like to speak with Jindal personally and would be willing to work with him.

“It's not about who does it first. It's about solving the problem,” said Burns.

He said the legislative bill is currently in the research stage – he has already discovered that 17 other states have an acceptable screening process in place. He hopes the state would consider implementing a private database that would honor the privacy and laws of confidentiality for each person screened.

“We wouldn't want to publicly embarrass someone. They would be in the database, but it would not be publicly known,” said Burns.

The local and national legislative measures come in the fallout of the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. where 26 people, 20 of them children, were killed by gunman Adam Lanza.

Burns said the Sandy Hook shooting had the same emotional impact on him, personally, as the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. did in 2001.

“When someone goes into a school, that's theoretically the safest place in the world, and you have a loss of lives to that extent, is beyond grasp.”