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FYI

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Gun dealers will have to report multiple semiautomatic rifle sales

By James V. Grimaldi and Sari Horwitz, Updated: Monday, July 11, 12:18 PM

The White House on Monday gave the green light to a controversial new gun rule requiring dealers in Southwestern states to report multiple sales of semiautomatic rifles in a crackdown on gunrunning to Mexico.

The rule, which had been opposed by the National Rifle Association and members of Congress, takes effect immediately. It requires dealers to alert authorities when a person buys within five days two or more semiautomatic rifles greater than .22 caliber with detachable magazines.

Deputy Attorney General James Cole said the rule will help the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to detect and disrupt the illegal weapons trafficking networks responsible for diverting firearms from lawful commerce to criminals and criminal organizations.

All gun dealers must currently report to the firearms bureau a buyer's purchase of two or more handguns in a five-day period. The new rule will apply to about 8,500 dealers operating in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, where drug traffickers are known to acquire most of their new weapons.

The information reported to the ATF then will be used by agents to try to find drug cartels using straw purchasers, people who falsely claim to be the true buyers of firearms but are actually purchasing them for others.

The decision comes in the middle of a congressional investigation into a bungled ATF gun-smuggling investigation code-named Fast and Furious. Many current and former ATF agents said that if the new reporting rule had been in place, it might have prevented the types of mistakes made by the ATF in that investigation.

More than 34,000 people have been killed in Mexico since President Felipe Calderon took office in late 2006 and launched a sustained effort to eliminate violent drug-trafficking cartels. More than 70 percent of the weapons recovered in Mexico originated in the United States, according to a recent Senate report on ATF data. The rifles, such as those styled on AK-47s and AR-15s, are favored by the cartels.

In February, the House voted overwhelmingly, as part of a massive spending bill, to prevent the Obama administration from implementing the rule.

The gun lobby's allies in Congress often add dictates for the ATF and firearm policy to spending bills, and another amendment could come up in future bills.

Earlier this year, Chris W. Cox, the NRA's chief lobbyist, lambasted the plan as an attempt to create a national gun

registry.

◆ This administration does not have the guts to build a wall, but they do have the audacity to blame and register gun owners for Mexico's problems, ◆ Cox said. ◆ NRA supports legitimate efforts to stop criminal activity, but we will not stand idle while our Second Amendment is sacrificed for politics. ◆

The ATF has been trying to get the rule through for more than a year. Last year, the Obama administration shelved the proposed rule before the midterm elections. Sources, who asked to remain anonymous because they were discussing internal deliberations, said that the effort was shelved by then-White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, a veteran of battles with the gun lobby during the Clinton administration. The rule went through two comment periods.