KEY POINTS ABOUT ASSAULT WEAPONS

1. Semiautomatic assault weapons like the Bushmaster AR-type assault rifle used in the shooting that killed 26 victims at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, are civilian versions of military assault weapons. Even though the gun industry prefers to call semiautomatic assault weapons “modern sporting rifles,” there are no significant differences between them and military assault weapons except for the manner in which they fire.

2. Military assault weapons are “machine guns.” That is, they are capable of fully automatic fire. A machine gun will continue to fire as long as the trigger is held down until the ammunition magazine is empty.

3. Civilian assault weapons are not machine guns. They are semiautomatic weapons. (Since 1986 federal law has banned the sale to civilians of new machine guns.) The trigger of a semiautomatic weapon must be pulled separately for each round fired. It is a mistake to call civilian assault weapons “automatic weapons” or “machine guns.”

4. The distinctive “look” of assault weapons is not cosmetic. It is the visual result of specific functional design decisions. Military assault weapons were designed and developed for a specific military purpose—laying down a high volume of fire over a wide killing zone, also known as “hosing down” an area.

5. Civilian assault weapons keep the specific functional design features that make this deadly spray-firing easy. These functional features also distinguish assault weapons from traditional sporting guns.

6. The most significant assault weapon functional design features are: (1) ability to accept a high-capacity detachable ammunition magazine; (2) a rear pistol or thumb-hole grip; (3) a forward grip or barrel shroud; and, (4) a folding or collapsible stock. Taken together, these are the design features that make possible the deadly and indiscriminate “spray-firing” for which assault weapons are designed. None of them are features of true hunting or sporting guns.

7. Although the gun lobby today argues that there is no such thing as civilian assault weapons, the industry, the National Rifle Association, and gun magazines enthusiastically described these civilian versions as “assault rifles,” “assault pistols,” and “military assault” weapons to boost civilian sales throughout the 1980s, and some continue to this day. The industry and its allies only began to use the semantic argument that a “true” assault weapon is a machine gun after civilian assault weapons turned up in large numbers in the hands of drug traffickers, criminal gangs, mass murderers, and other dangerous criminals.

8. The expired federal assault weapons ban defined “assault weapon” too narrowly and allowed gun manufacturers to make minor cosmetic changes but still make and market assault weapons. New legislation will define “assault weapons” by identifying the characteristics that are essential to a firearm functioning as an assault weapon.
**COLT AR-15 ASSAULT RIFLE**

- **Collapsible Stock**
  Makes gun more concealable and portable, increasing maneuverability in combat situations.

- **Pistol Grip**
  Allows shooter to better control the weapon during rapid firing, helps facilitate spray-firing.

- **Barrel Shroud**
  Allows shooter to steady the weapon with the non-trigger hand without burning it to facilitate rapid spray-firing.

- **Ability to Accept a Detachable Ammunition Magazine**
  Enables gun to be loaded with up to 100-round magazines and be quickly reloaded by switching in a new magazine.