

Amnesty International

Group 524

May 2023



No May In-Person Meeting Gun Violence Responses Clemency For Leonard Peltier

Welcome

I hope everyone is well. Due to a number of Covid cases at the Sister's residence, visitors are temporarily not allowed and our in person meeting this month is cancelled. We hope to meet again in June. This month's action is focused on clemency for Leonard Peltier and migrant issues.

Gun Violence and Assault Weapons Response

We have received positive responses to our letters concerning gun violence and the assault weapons ban legislation from Congresswoman Lee and Senator Casey and are reprinted on pages 2 and 3.

Urge Clemency For Native American Activist

Native American activist Leonard Peltier has been imprisoned in the USA for over 46 years, some of which was spent in solitary confinement, serving two life sentences for murder despite concerns over the fairness of his trial. He has always maintained his innocence. Details are on page 4 and a sample letter on page 5.

End of Title 42 and a New Asylum Ban

Amnesty issued a press release concerning their participation in a delegation monitoring the migrant situation at the border and is summarized on page 6.

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 6:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd.



Contact John Belch (joheb@aol.com or 412-766-1894) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA web site (www.amnestyusa.org) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site (www.amnestypgh.org).



Assault Weapons Ban Response from Senator Casey

Here's a response to our letters from last month.

Thank you for taking the time to contact me about S. 25, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023. I appreciate hearing from you about this issue.

Senator Dianne Feinstein of California introduced S. 25, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023 on January 23, 2023. This bill would outlaw the importation, sale, transfer, or possession of a military style assault weapon, as well as magazines or other ammunition feeding devices that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. This bill includes a grandfather clause that exempts all weapons lawfully possessed at the date of enactment, and it creates a fund for compensating individuals who voluntarily give back their military style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines under a buyback program.

Military style assault weapons have been used in most of our Nation's worst mass shootings, including the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the 2013 Aurora theatre shooting, the 2015 San Bernardino attack, the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, the 2018 Parkland shooting, the 2018 Tree of Life shooting, the 2022 Buffalo shooting, and the 2022 Robb Elementary shooting. In a review of nearly 120 mass shootings between 1982 and 2020 in the United States, law enforcement recovered 83 semiautomatic handguns and 94 assault weapons and weapons with high magazine capacities. Furthermore, an FBI study examining active shooter incidents between 2000 to 2013 discovered that approximately three quarters of the weapons used by perpetrators of mass shootings were obtained legally either through purchase or prior legal possession. I am a proud original cosponsor of the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023. Should this bill come before the full Senate for consideration, **I will support its passage.**

I support the Second Amendment right of private law-abiding citizens to possess firearms for lawful purposes like self-defense, sporting, and collection. Like the majority of Americans, I also believe we need commonsense gun legislation that will help prevent the tragic mass shootings, community gun violence, accidental deaths, and gun related suicides that take the lives of approximately 40,000 Americans each year. Among these commonsense measures, I support legislation to implement universal background checks, ensure the safe storage of firearms, prohibit the use of assault weapons, and establish risk protection orders to prevent those who pose safety risks to themselves or others from possessing firearms. I also support legislation to fund research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on firearms safety and gun violence prevention.

While addressing the gun violence epidemic unquestionably begins with commonsense gun reforms, it also involves treating the community roots of gun violence, including barriers to education and housing, as well as lack of economic opportunity. I am committed to addressing each of these root causes so that our communities are not only safer, but also released from the cycles of disinvestment and neglect that are associated with increased gun violence. We are a Nation of people who come together, roll up our sleeves, and solve difficult problems. We can pass smart measures to reduce gun violence while fully respecting the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens.

Again, thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future about this or any other matter of importance to you.

Sincerely,

Bob Casey
United States Senator



Assault Weapons Ban Response from Congresswoman Lee

Here's another response to our letters from last month.

Thank you for contacting my office regarding reinstating the Assault Weapons Ban – I appreciate the time you took to share your views with me. As your Representative, I am committed to taking meaningful action to address the epidemic of gun violence that plagues our region and our nation. I will continue to fight to protect your right to live freely, without fear of being gunned down everywhere from our schools, places of worship, or grocery stores.

Guns are the leading cause of death for children between the ages of 1 and 18 – not car crashes or illnesses – it's guns. Whether it be real school shootings or hoaxes like those at Pitt, Oakland, and Central Catholic, our kids are being traumatized. Furthermore, there were 2,163 reported instances of gun violence in Pittsburgh in 2022 and over 11,500 people killed from gun violence nationwide in 2023 alone. I am tired of talking about gun control; it's time that we actually do something about it in our district and across the nation. No other industrialized nation in the world suffers gun violence at the rates we do – we don't have to live like this.

That is why **I am honored to be an original co-sponsor of H.R. 698, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023**, which would make it a crime to knowingly import, sell, manufacture, transfer, or possess a semiautomatic assault weapon or large capacity ammunition feeding device. While the assault weapons ban was in place, gun massacres fell 37% and rose by 183% after the ban expired. Lives are at stake – we must reinstate the assault weapons ban.

I am also a proud co-sponsor of [H.R. 396, Closing the Bump Stock Loophole Act of 2023](#) – which would make it illegal to manufacture, sell, or process bump stocks for civilian use; [H.R. 1699, Office of Gun Violence Prevention Act of 2023](#) – which will create a gun violence prevention office within the Department of Justice; [H.R. 625, Keep Americans Safe Act](#) – which would ban the sale of magazines that hold more than 15 rounds of ammunition; and [H.R. 2403, Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2023](#) – which would increase the number of days given to perform a background check from three days to ten days.

This is just the beginning. As your Representative, I will fight for universal background checks, red flag laws, and to close loopholes in our current laws that put guns in the hands of people who want to do harm with them. I will not stop fighting until we have laws that protect people over pistols and guns. Moreover, I will work to reduce needless gun violence in underserved community by investing in divested areas, thereby decreasing poverty-based violence, and improving the safety and wellbeing of marginalized folks in Western Pennsylvania.

Thank you again for sharing your voice with me on this life-threatening issue. In sharing your voice with me, I can take deliberate action against the gun violence epidemic knowing that the people of Western Pennsylvania have my back.

In solidarity,

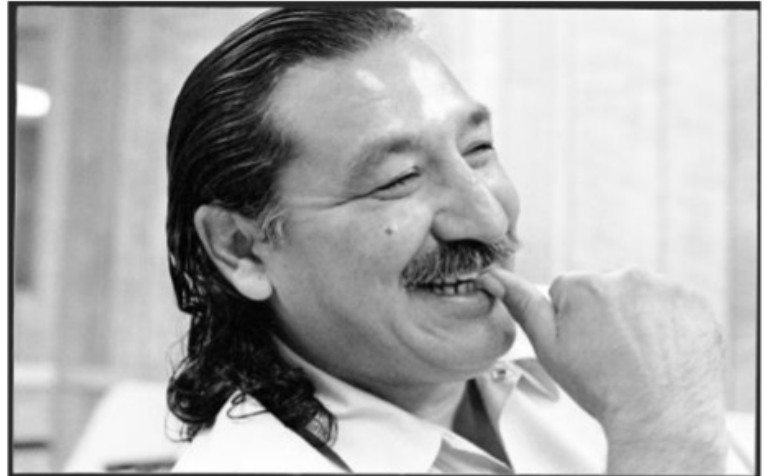
Rep. Summer Lee
Member of Congress



We have written in past years concerning Leonard Peltier and Amnesty has started a new months long campaign for his release.

NEW AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO FREE LEONARD PELTIER IN THE USA

On the anniversary of Leonard Peltier’s conviction 46 years ago on April 18, Amnesty International has launched a new campaign calling on President Biden to grant him clemency and release him on humanitarian grounds. Said Zeke Johnson, National Director of Campaigns & Crisis Response, “No one should be locked up, let alone for over 40 years, when there are serious concerns about the fairness of their trial. President Biden should right this historic wrong and grant Leonard Peltier clemency.”



Peltier, a Native American activist and member of the American Indian Movement (AIM) was convicted for the murder of two FBI agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams at the Pine Ridge Reservation. Amnesty International, an independent human rights organization, had observers at the trial, and has long raised concerns over the fairness of the legal proceedings and trial leading to the conviction.

Given these concerns and that Leonard Peltier has spent over four decades in prison and is in ill-health, Amnesty International is calling on President Biden to grant Leonard Peltier clemency and release him on humanitarian grounds and as a matter of justice. Amnesty is not alone: many others have called for Peltier’s release, including the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other Nobel Peace Prize Laureates; former FBI Agents Coleen Rowley and John Ryan; Indigenous Tribes, including the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, US Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren; and **even the U.S. Attorney, James Reynolds, whose team led the prosecution and appeal of Leonard Peltier’s case.**

Group 524
May 2023



President Joseph Biden

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500, USA

Dear President Biden,

Leonard Peltier is a member of the American Indian Movement (AIM), which promotes Native American rights. In 1975, during a confrontation involving AIM members, two FBI agents were killed. Leonard Peltier was convicted of their murders but has always denied killing the agents.

There are serious concerns about the fairness of proceedings leading to his trial and conviction, including for example the prosecution's withholding of evidence that might have assisted Leonard Peltier's defense. In light of these concerns, the former US Attorney who supervised the prosecution team post-trial, James Reynolds, has since called for clemency.

Leonard Peltier is now 78 years old, has spent more than 46 years in US prisons, and has been repeatedly denied parole. There are serious concerns about Leonard Peltier's deteriorating health, including potential re-exposure to COVID-19. His lawyers submitted a new petition for clemency in 2021.

I urge you to grant Leonard Peltier clemency on humanitarian grounds and as a matter of justice.

Yours sincerely,



AT BORDER, HUMANITARIAN DELEGATION WITNESSES AN END OF TITLE 42 WITHOUT CHAOS AND CRUELTY OF NEW ASYLUM BAN

May 12, 2023

Paul O'Brien, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA:

“After over 3 years and over two million expulsions of people exercising their human right to seek safety, Title 42 is finally ending. What should be a day of celebration is instead the start of new border measures that threaten the human rights of people seeking safety. The Biden Administration had over two years to invest in systems of welcome and safety so that people arriving at our border could enter in a humane and orderly fashion and pursue their asylum claims in communities, supported with legal and social services. Instead, the Biden Administration has turned its back on human rights and is planning on implementing new, draconian border measures that will threaten to return people to harm, increase immigration detention, and force people to wait in danger in Mexico until they are lucky enough to make an appointment via a problematic app. Amnesty International USA calls upon the Biden Administration to abandon the asylum ban and instead invest in systems of welcome.”

FINDINGS:

After bearing witness to human rights violations along the border, the delegation urgently calls on the Biden administration to uphold asylum and due process, rescind its new asylum ban, and welcome people with dignity and respect for human rights and racial justice. A humane border policy would instead focus on increased communication, coordination and support for humanitarian aid, shelter and reception at the border and in destination communities.

Many of the asylum seekers and migrants the delegation met with had been stranded in Reynosa and Matamoros by the Title 42 policy, and will now be left **stranded in highly dangerous and difficult conditions** by the new asylum bar's restrictions. In these areas, the level of violence and danger is so severe that the U.S. State Department advises that they are too dangerous for Americans to visit. Recent reports of escalated cartel violence make the areas even more dangerous for asylum seekers, migrants, and humanitarian workers. Black asylum seekers in particular face racist violence and compounded risks in Mexico, as human rights reports have documented.

The delegation and its experts heard accounts of the **difficulties that people seeking asylum face when attempting to secure appointments at U.S. ports of entry via the CBP One app**, the barriers some faced waiting and trying to seek asylum at ports of entry without a CBP One appointment, the squalid and inhumane living conditions migrants at the border lived in, and the violence and anti-Black racism migrants endure while waiting in Mexico.

Most people, after having traveled for months or years to seek safety, had already been waiting for many months in dangerous conditions. Overwhelmingly, they expressed confusion about changes to U.S. policy that are now in place and how to best access their right to asylum. Delegation members were unable to answer many of their questions because of the lack of transparency and information provided by the U.S. government.

The delegation **met with community, faith-based, humanitarian, shelter, legal and other organizations, groups and volunteers** working in tremendously challenging situations with a significant lack of resources and struggling to provide humanitarian aid to people seeking asylum in the United States.