

# National Journal

## Quick Takes on the News: Flamethrowers? Really? Again?

February 5, 2018

Alex Clearfield

Flamethrowers were formerly the province of movies and the drawings of angry children, but thanks to Elon Musk, you can now purchase one for \$500. Unsurprisingly, thousands have done that. Also unsurprisingly, Democrats want to regulate them.

Rep. **Eliot Engel** has dusted off his uniquely named “Flamethrowers? Really? Act” from the 114th Congress, which would treat the devices the same as machine guns, putting them under the regulation of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, and prohibiting their “transfer, transportation, or possession.” The bill would apply to any device that emits a flame longer than six feet.

In a statement, Engel said, “It’s only a matter of time until someone hurts themselves, others, or seriously damages property.” He is concerned about children and felons easily getting their hands on them through internet sales.

**Clark Neily**, the Cato Institute’s vice president of criminal justice, thinks that treating flamethrowers like weapons is “absurd.” He said the idea that anyone predisposed to commit crimes with a flamethrower would be deterred by this law is “preposterous.”

Neily says the bill would proscribe possession of flamethrowers for legitimate purposes like clearing brush and fighting forest fires; the bill does not contain an exemption for firefighters.