# Rhode Island House passes assault weapons ban amid historic U-boat discoveries



In recent weeks, Rhode Island has been buzzing with legislative activity and historical discoveries. Among the state's most notable stories is the recent approval of an "Assault Weapons Ban" by the Rhode Island House of Representatives on June 5, amid intense debate surrounding its implications. The legislation, which permits a ban on the sale, purchase, and possession of various assault-style firearms, passed with a vote of 43-28 and now faces scrutiny in the Senate.

The debate prior to the vote was charged, with Republican House Minority Leader Michael Chippendale calling the measure "misguided" and asserting that it posed threats both economically and constitutionally. Conversely, advocates, including lead sponsor Rep. Jason Knight, emphasized the urgency of the issue, showcasing deep emotional responses rooted in rising gun violence. Knight's assertion that “the vast majority of Rhode Islanders are sick of it” resonates with many constituents concerned about the community's safety, though the bill has already sparked opposition from several towns planning to contest it. The political landscape surrounding this initiative presents a significant test for the new Senate President, Valarie Lawson.

Complementing this contemporary controversy is interest rekindled in Rhode Island's naval history, particularly regarding the U-853, a German U-boat sunk during World War II. This U-boat is now a subject of research and exploration, revealing an intriguing link between the state and the historical impacts of the war. The U-853, located approximately eight miles off Block Island and resting about 125 feet beneath the waves, was ultimately destroyed by U.S. naval forces on May 6, 1945, a day after it torpedoed the American collier Black Point, marking the last U.S. merchant ship sunk in the Atlantic during the war. The wreck has since become a popular diving site, drawing maritime enthusiasts keen to explore the remnants of this pivotal naval engagement.

Recent explorations of the U-853, facilitated by scientists from various institutions, aim to delve deeper into the wreck's environmental impact and historical significance. These studies reflect a growing interest not only in the events that transpired during the war but also in the stories hidden beneath Rhode Island's seemingly tranquil waters. As Columnist Mark Patinkin highlights, the narrative of U-853 serves as a poignant reminder of WWII's reach, extending even to shores like Block Island.

In the backdrop of these discussions, Rhode Island's economic prospects appear affected, with a less optimistic summer tourism forecast anticipated for 2025. Local businesses, traditionally buoyed by summer visitors, may face challenges intensified by the political climate and the state’s evolving legislation.

The convergence of history and current events illustrates Rhode Island's ongoing struggle with safety, historical memory, and community resilience. As residents engage with both the legislative processes and the narratives of the past, the state stands at the intersection of progress and reflection.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/), [[6]](https://www.wpri.com/news/politics/mckee-to-include-assault-style-weapons-ban-in-budget-proposal/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/), [[5]](https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2025/02/gov-dan-mckee-includes-assault-weapons-ban-in-fy-2026-budget-proposal), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-supreme-court-wont-review-assault-weapon-high-capacity-magazine-bans-2025-06-02/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.historynet.com/u-853-went-down-fighting-the-day-after-world-war-iis-end/), [[3]](https://www.blockislandferry.com/the-battle-of-point-judith/), [[4]](https://www.wcvb.com/article/scientists-exploring-wreck-of-sunken-u-boat-off-rhode-island/8226294)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/), [[2]](https://www.historynet.com/u-853-went-down-fighting-the-day-after-world-war-iis-end/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/), [[1]](https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://eu.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2025/06/07/german-u-boat-sunk-block-island-rhode-island-assault-weapons-ban-truck-tolls-legal-fees-battle/84033864007/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.historynet.com/u-853-went-down-fighting-the-day-after-world-war-iis-end/> - This article details the final mission and sinking of German submarine U-853 during World War II. On May 5, 1945, U-853 torpedoed and sank the American collier Black Point off Newport, Rhode Island. The next day, the U.S. Navy, aided by blimps, located and destroyed the U-boat, resulting in the loss of its entire crew. The wreck lies approximately four-and-a-half miles east of Block Island, Rhode Island, at a depth of about 125 feet, and has become a popular dive site along the East Coast.
3. <https://www.blockislandferry.com/the-battle-of-point-judith/> - This resource provides an overview of the Battle of Point Judith, focusing on the sinking of German submarine U-853. The article describes the coordinated efforts of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard to locate and destroy the U-boat after it torpedoed the Black Point. It also details the wreck's location, approximately 8.1 miles off Block Island’s east coast in about 130 feet of water, and notes that the site is a popular location for experienced divers.
4. <https://www.wcvb.com/article/scientists-exploring-wreck-of-sunken-u-boat-off-rhode-island/8226294> - This article reports on scientists from the University of Rhode Island's Inner Space Center, Connecticut's Ocean Exploration Trust, and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy exploring the wreck of German submarine U-853 off the Rhode Island coast. Using submersibles, they aim to learn more about shipwrecks and their environmental impact. The U-853 was sunk in the Battle of Point Judith by Coast Guard and Navy ships on May 6, 1945, the day after it sank the SS Black Point, the last U.S. merchant ship sunk in the Atlantic during the war.
5. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2025/02/gov-dan-mckee-includes-assault-weapons-ban-in-fy-2026-budget-proposal> - This article discusses Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee's inclusion of an assault weapons ban in his fiscal year 2026 budget proposal. The proposed ban aims to prohibit the possession, purchase, sale, control, and manufacture of assault weapons in the state. This initiative marks the first time such a ban has appeared in the governor’s budget and reflects ongoing efforts to enhance gun safety in Rhode Island.
6. <https://www.wpri.com/news/politics/mckee-to-include-assault-style-weapons-ban-in-budget-proposal/> - This article reports on Governor Dan McKee's announcement that his fiscal year 2026 budget proposal will include a ban on assault-style weapons. The proposed ban would prohibit the purchase, sale, manufacture, and possession of assault-style weapons, including semi-automatic shotguns, rifles, and pistols, with exceptions for law enforcement and military personnel. Rhode Islanders who currently own such weapons would be required to register them with local police within a year of the ban taking effect.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-supreme-court-wont-review-assault-weapon-high-capacity-magazine-bans-2025-06-02/> - This article reports on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to decline hearing appeals challenging state bans on assault-style rifles and high-capacity magazines. The cases involved Maryland's 2013 ban on semi-automatic rifles like AR-15s and Rhode Island’s 2022 restriction on magazines holding more than 10 rounds. The Court's decision leaves intact lower court rulings that upheld these bans, maintaining the status quo on state-level firearm restrictions.