

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 12 June 1997 00:00

A Letter From Larry Pratt To The Directors Of The NRA June 12, 1997

Dear NRA Director:

I am writing to respond to the inevitable questions that will arise from Tanya Metaksa's unfortunate attacks upon Gun Owners of America in her letter dated April 23, 1997. My hope is that this letter will help clear up some of the false impressions that may have arisen as a result of her letter.

A Biblical proverb reminds me that, "A story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight." And thus I would ask for patience and thoughtfulness as you read this letter. Regrettably, several claims were made about GOA that were lacking in veracity. Many statements attacked our "no compromise" approach to lobbying. And thus, my intention is to prevent any ill-will from separating those of us who have dedicated our lives to defending and preserving the Second Amendment.

I should mention that I am thankful Mrs. Metaksa has stated that none of her quarrels concern me personally. I have no personal quarrels with her and will likewise refrain from any ad hominem attacks. I hope that in grappling with the important issues before us -- a "no compromise" defense of the Second Amendment -- we can come to unity in fighting for our precious liberties in an uncompromising manner.

GOA Candidate Ratings: "Just the facts"

To begin with, the April 23 letter claims GOA "considers non-firearms issues in their candidate evaluations." If true, this would be a tremendous breach of the trust that GOA members have given to our organization. But in fact, I can honestly report that to the best of my knowledge (and as Executive Director I should know), GOA has never used a non-firearms issue to rate any candidate.

One example which Mrs. Metaksa cites is GOA's support for Presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan. Regrettably, Mrs. Metaksa erects a strawman at this point. She states that we passed over Senator Phil Gramm "because when Gramm was Chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the NRSC paid an honorarium to former Soviet

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leader Mikhail Gorbachev when Gorbachev spoke at an NRSC fundraising event."

Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX)

I can unequivocally state that our rating of Sen. Gramm was in no way a result of the financial support given to Mikhail Gorbachev -- as regrettable as that was. To the contrary, GOA considered several Second Amendment issues in evaluating Sen. Gramm's record:

* Ammunition bans. In his Congressional rating, Neal Knox lists Sen. Gramm as voting anti-gun more than once. For example, on March 6, 1986, Sen. Gramm voted against the Symms amendment to remove rifle ammo from the armor-piercing bullet ban. On that same day, Sen. Gramm voted for the final passage of H.R. 3132, a bill to regulate the manufacture, importation, and sale of certain ammunition. This bill, according to Knox, was "opposed by all firearms groups except the NRA." (Source: The Firearms Coalition, Congressional Box Score, 1985-88.)

* Semi-auto ban. On November 19, 1993, Senator Gramm voted for the crime bill (H.R. 3355) which contained the Feinstein ban on semi-automatic firearms and magazines. This ban covered more than 180 types of firearms and represented a bold, unconstitutional assault against our Second Amendment rights.

* Omnibus gun control bill. On June 7, 1995, Sen. Gramm voted for a terror bill that contained the following anti-gun provisions: a) A provision to increase the BATF budget by \$100 million; b) A provision expanding the ability of federal officials to prosecute law-abiding gun owners for alleged Title II firearms registration offenses -- even though the BATF has admitted that 50% of their records are inaccurate; c) A provision to expand the ability of the military to enforce civilian law; and d) A provision to allow "roving wiretaps" without a court order -- a provision which could easily be used to target gun clubs, gun stores, or gun owners in general.

Of course, the above is only the tip of the iceberg. I could go into detail about his cosponsorship of S. 2305 in 1992, a crime bill restricting the sales of long-guns and expanding the ability of the BATF to conduct warrantless searches and seizures. Or his cosponsorship of S. Con. Res. 12 in 1993, a bill to "recognize the heroic sacrifice of the Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in Waco, Texas." The bill states that the "sacrifice and dedication" of BATF agents is "a cornerstone of our system of justice" and is a cause for pride.

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In contrast to these anti-gun actions, Senator Gramm has yet to introduce a bill repealing either the Brady bill or the semi-auto ban.

Subsequent to his participation in the Presidential race, Senator Gramm also voted for the final version of the terror bill on April 17, 1996. The final version authorized a \$40 million pay increase for the BATF (through the Treasury Dept.); federalizes many state crimes, thus tremendously increasing the scope and jurisdiction of the BATF; threatens to punish gun dealers and individuals for selling ammunition to someone they should have known would commit a violent crime; and much more.

And then on September 12, 1996, Senator Gramm voted for both the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans. As you know, the Lautenberg ban disarms millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens for minor infractions that occurred even 20 years ago or more. The Kohl ban treats gun owners' rights like privileges and makes them jump through government approved hoops before they can drive with a loaded self-defense firearm through a Gun Free Zone (defined as an area within 1,000 feet of the perimeter of any school in America, no matter what time of day it is.)

It is unfortunate that the letter you received from Mrs. Metaksa did not mention one of these anti-gun votes or cosponsorships, since GOA had publicly detailed much of his voting record in our newsletter, in our press releases and on our Web page. To single out a comparatively insignificant point, and imply that it was our sole factor in evaluating Sen. Gramm's position, may have given you a false impression in regard to the way GOA rates candidates.

The help that senators give to an anti-gun dictator is illustrative of what may be a problem in discernment when it comes to Second Amendment issues. But it is hardly the yardstick by which GOA rates its candidates.

Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK)

A second example cited by Mrs. Metaksa to bolster her claim that GOA uses "non firearms" arguments in rating candidates centers on Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK). Unfortunately, Mrs. Metaksa builds another strawman at this point. GOA has detailed almost four full pages of anti-gun votes and anti-gun cosponsorships by Sen. Stevens, and yet Mrs. Metaksa only chose to mention "his non-objection to various unanimous consent agreements" that allowed gun control bills to come to the floor. Again, what she neglected to mention was our public recounting of the following facts:

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* Firearms ban. On May 25, 1988, Sen. Stevens cosponsored the so-called "plastic" firearms ban with the infamously anti-gun Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH). The essence of this bill (S. 2180) was later signed into law, and helped establish the precedent where Congress would ban certain firearms, despite the clear language of the Second Amendment and despite a lack of authority in the Constitution to ban such firearms.

* Magazine ban. On March 13, 1991, Sen. Stevens cosponsored S. 635, a crime bill which banned the possession of magazines holding over 15 rounds. To own an otherwise banned magazine, gun owners would have to first be registered through the Department of the Treasury (that is, the BATF).

* Firearms bans and restrictions. Like Senator Gramm, Senator Stevens cosponsored the bill in 1992 restricting the sales of long-guns and expanding the ability of the BATF to conduct warrantless searches and seizures (S. 2305); he voted for the crime bill (which contained the semi-auto ban) in November of 1993; he voted for the anti-gun terror bills in June of 1995 and April of 1996; and he voted for the Lautenberg gun ban in September of 1996. (See above for explanations.)

Once again, to isolate a single point, and imply that it was our sole reason for opposing Sen. Stevens (who was being challenged by a 100% pro-gun candidate), may have again given you a false impression in regard to our political activity.

More Federal and State Races

Next, Mrs. Metaksa writes that,

GOA's stated philosophy is a purist defense of the Second Amendment. However, their actual motivations appear to be a desire to get to the "right" of NRA on any issue or any political race, regardless of their chance of producing any positive result.

First, I would caution against judging motives. I realize she qualifies her statement by saying that our motives "appear" to be one thing, but I firmly believe that only our Creator can accurately determine the motives of any one person. As for this charge, I'm sorry that she feels that way. If one were to check all the candidates GOA endorsed in the past, I would venture to guess that the overwhelming majority of them were given an A or were endorsed by NRA.

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Regrettably, there are those races where GOA and the NRA have gone their separate ways. But GOA's motives have not been to get to the "right" of NRA. Rather, our decisions are a good-faith attempt to support the candidate who will best support and defend the Second Amendment. For example:

* In 1992, GOA and NRA parted ways in the 6th Congressional District race in Maryland. GOA supported Roscoe Bartlett, a solid, pro-gun candidate, while the NRA supported state legislator Tom Hattery, a legislator with a gun control record. Hattery had voted for background checks and waiting periods to purchase so-called assault rifles. Bartlett won the race and has become one of the few legislators to introduce proactive legislation. He is the sponsor of the Citizen's Self-Defense Act, which now has more than 50 cosponsors.

* In 1994, GOA supported Steve Stockman in his race against Rep. Jack Brooks (TX-9). While NRA-ILA states they did not officially support Brooks, ILA's Executive Director did give Rep. Brooks a personal endorsement. Mrs. Metaksa flew into the district and met with gun owners to discuss the Brooks-Stockman race. *The Beaumont Enterprise* (10/6/94) reported that at the meeting Mrs. Metaksa said, "If I lived in Beaumont, I'd vote for Jack Brooks." Subsequently, Rep. Brooks used that sound bite in his campaign advertisements.

Activists in that district have also reported that the NRA-ILA sent a mailing into the district extolling (again, not officially endorsing) Brook's service to gun owners. In contrast, GOA decided to fully support Stockman because he was a solid pro-gun candidate, and Brooks had a gun control record. Brooks had vigorously worked to pass the crime bill, which contained the semi-auto ban, and had cast several other anti-gun votes as well. GOA-PVF stumped for Stockman and ran several editorials in the district detailing Brook's voting record. We did this, not in an effort to upstage any other firearms group, but, to support a rock solid candidate. Stockman won the race and went on to introduce legislation repealing the semi-auto ban. Moreover, he has been the only legislator in Congress to ever introduce legislation repealing the Brady law.

* Joe Scarborough (FL-1) faced an uphill battle when he ran for the Republican nomination in 1994. He was running against a state representative who in the past had shown a lack of commitment to the Second Amendment. Thus, GOA threw its weight behind Scarborough, while the NRA supported his challenger. Scarborough won, and I am glad to report that he has been one of the most consistent pro-gun voters in Washington. He even bucked his own Party in 1996 to vote against the anti-gun terror bill and the omnibus spending bill (which contained the

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Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans).

* In 1994, GOA and NRA again parted ways in the 24th state senate district of Oklahoma. NRA-ILA opposed Mrs. Carol Martin, who was supported by GOA because of her strong Second Amendment support. Another factor that forced us to support Martin was the fact that the incumbent had come out publicly for banning semi-automatic firearms and against a permit-style concealed carry law. Since her victory, Sen. Martin has become the Second Amendment champion in Oklahoma, as she has introduced legislation to move her state to model Vermont's concealed carry laws -- a state which requires no permits in order for law-abiding citizens to carry concealed. (See her attached [statement](#) at the bottom of this letter, plus the ["company on letter"](#) from Colorado.)

* In 1996, GOA strongly supported Ron Paul in the Republican primary. The NRA-ILA supported the incumbent Rep. Greg Laughlin (TX-14). Again, GOA's decision was not based on anything other than the records of the two candidates. Rep. Paul had shown himself to be a 100% pro-gun legislator in his previous service in Congress.

Rep. Laughlin, on the other hand, had supported such gun control measures as the anti-gun terror bill in April of 1996; and in May of 1994, had voted to prevent another Representative from offering an amendment to gut the ban on semi-automatic firearms -- a ban which later passed by TWO votes. Of course, there were other bad votes, perhaps the worst of which was cast in November of 1991. Rep. Laughlin voted for a crime bill containing a five day waiting period for handguns and an instant (registration) check before the purchase of all guns. This bill, which passed by TWO votes, would also have expanded the ability of the BATF to conduct warrantless searches and seizures.

Rep. Paul's victory has been one of the bright spots in the 105th Congress. He has shown his dedication to the Second Amendment by introducing legislation to repeal the ban on semi-automatic firearms and has cosponsored every pro-gun piece of legislation as well.

As seen from these examples, GOA's support for each of these victors was clearly rooted in principle. And in fact, each of these legislators have turned out to be a pro-gun champion.

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Mrs. Metaksa says we try to get to the "right" of NRA on any issue or on any political race, "regardless of their chance of producing any positive result." I would strongly disagree. I think the service of Roscoe Bartlett, Steve Stockman, Joe Scarborough, Carol Martin and Ron Paul have been very beneficial to this country. Clearly, there was no intention of being divisive. Our intent is to support the best candidate, and I think the leadership records of these legislators demonstrate the wisdom of having supported them in their initial races.

I wonder if perhaps there is a more fundamental difference in our rating approaches. Based on Mrs. Metaksa's April 23 letter, I wonder if our method of rating candidates conflicts with what she describes as her stated purpose of using grades and endorsements, in part, "to build positive relationships with legislators." I would like to ask her if this means she uses such grades and endorsements to build access to legislators. (Notice the pattern of support for the incumbents in the above races, despite the fact that all the challengers were more committed to the Second Amendment. On another front, I have read NRA Director Russ Howard's letter which shows how in my own state of Virginia, NRA-ILA gave "A" ratings to 15 Delegates after they had voted for the one-gun-a-month bill AND the shotgun ban. Forty-one delegates who voted for either or both bans got "A" ratings. Similarly, the NRA-ILA gave 26 incumbents an "A+," "A" or "A-" rating in the federal elections in 1994, even though all of them voted for the Brady bill and/or the crime bill, which contained the Feinstein gun ban.) If ratings are for building access, than that is clearly a different purpose for which we use grades and endorsements.

At the risk of mixing metaphors, we "let the chips fall where they may" and "call a spade a spade." We make a conscious effort to rate every candidate on their Second Amendment performance, even if the resulting grade might be upsetting to someone who was previously been considered pro-gun. If their voting behavior has taken a turn for the worse, it will be reflected in our rating.

However, if we try to build access into legislators' offices with the rating system, I fear it would become very tempting for us in certain cases to inflate a candidate's grade in an attempt to avoid any discontent on the part of the candidate. It would also make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to hold legislators accountable. If any of this is on the mark, I would simply submit that it reflects a difference in philosophy between Mrs. Metaksa and myself, not an attempt by GOA to get to the "right" of the NRA.

Federal legislation: GOA working to separate the wheat from the chaff

In her letter, Mrs. Metaksa takes great issue with GOA's work at the federal level. Mrs. Metaksa states that in 1995, "GOA worked to block a vote on H.R. 1488, Congressman Barr's gun ban repeal bill."

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First, GOA never worked to "block a vote on H.R. 1488." We did work to strip out a dangerous provision so that we could then get to the business of repealing the gun ban. For example, in the August 15, 1995 issue of *The Gun Owners*, we stated that, "GOA's position is that Section 3 of H.R. 1488 would greatly threaten the rights of gun owners, and that this section **MUST** be fixed." (Emphasis in the original.)

Roll Call, the newspaper of record on Capitol Hill, later reported in October of 1995 that GOA had "won a match" over forcing changes in H.R. 1488. As you can see, the focus was on improving the bill, not extinguishing the repeal effort. Thankfully, we were successful in deleting the dangerous provision which was in the original bill.

Second, there was a very dangerous provision in H.R. 1488. As noted by former Rep. Steve Stockman (R-TX):

I agree with Gun Owners of America that it is imperative to fix Section 3 of H.R. 1488. I have checked with my legal counsel and he assures me that Section 3 of the bill amends the part of the U.S. Code which authorizes the BATF. Unless we can fix Section 3, this bill will federalize virtually every significant state crime involving a firearm; will increase the jurisdiction of the BATF; and could subject law-abiding citizens to a twenty-year minimum jail sentence for using a firearm in self-defense.

In an effort to separate the wheat from the chaff, GOA lobbied hard to remove this provision from what otherwise was a worthy goal -- the repeal of the semi-auto ban. GOA alerted the grassroots to the problems in H.R. 1488 and also worked with the bill's sponsor.

During 1995 and 1996, GOA met with Rep. Bob Barr several times and had several amicable discussions. Among the legislation discussed was this BATF-enhancement provision in H.R. 1488. I am sure that Mr. Barr did not intend his provision to enhance the BATF's authority, and so in the end, we were able to persuade him to drop the provision.

Instrumental in this decision, of course, was the encouragement that the grassroots gave. In fact, Mrs. Metaksa refers to the "letters, faxes and phone calls received on Capitol Hill as a result of their [GOA's] alerts" on H.R. 1488. Rep. Barr also felt that GOA's grassroots efforts were instrumental in getting the BATF-enhancement provision deleted, as he told me, "You're mail has been very successful [on Capitol Hill]."

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Ironically, Mrs. Metaksa states that "the letters, faxes and phone calls received on Capitol Hill as a result of their [GOA's] alerts *caused confusion* among pro-firearms Members of Congress." (Emphasis added.) I would submit that "confusion" would only occur if these Members of Congress were being told by GOA that there was a Second Amendment problem in one section of the bill, but then were told elsewhere that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the bill.

GOA's no compromise approach resulted in improved legislation

I think that friends can disagree on strategy, and this case demonstrates one of those disagreements. GOA's approach to lobbying on H.R. 1488 was a "no compromise" approach. Our goal with any bill is to support pro-Second Amendment provisions and oppose any provision that is antithetical to that aim. Thus, we strove to get the grassroots involved by explaining to them the problems with the bill, by soliciting their help in getting the bill cleaned-up and by asking them to take action.

I would have to disagree with Mrs. Metaksa's description of our no-compromise approach as being "detrimental" on H.R. 1488. I think it worked wonderfully well. It got the BATF-enhancement provision deleted, and it let us get a vote on the repealing the semi-auto ban -- a bill which passed the House in March of 1996.

No compromise means holding legislators accountable

Finally, Mrs. Metaksa claims our approach is "to lash out viciously at any who don't adhere to whatever they are promoting as a 'pure' [sic] on a particular day." It is unfortunate that she feels this way, since it is simply not the case. Ironically, in the previous paragraph before this statement, she notes how I was featured on the cover of our newsletter discussing legislation with a pro-gun legislator who, in another part of the newsletter, was shown to have neglected a "pure" Second Amendment approach on a particular vote.

As her description shows, we can disagree with a legislator on a specific issue, and still work together on other issues with that legislator. I believe that what Mrs. Metaksa confuses for "lashing out" must simply be a difference in philosophy that she and I share. Holding an elected official accountable is not "lashing out" anymore than it is "lashing out" for a father to lovingly discipline (or hold accountable) his child for lying.

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I view my job, in part, as helping citizens to keep their public servants accountable for anti-Second Amendment votes. Such votes are a breach of contract, since the Constitution represents the powers that *We the People* have delegated to our public servants. When they disregard their authority from the people, then they need to hear from their constituents. Thus, my view is that votes which pass gun control legislation should be reported to the constituents.

Accountability on the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans

Mrs. Metaksa appears surprised that we would report the vote on the omnibus bill which contained the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans. She says that by listing the vote which enacted the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans in our February 28 newsletter, "GOA implies that all those legislators [who voted wrong] are anti-gun." This struck me as odd, because what GOA did here is no different than what NRA said it would do in 1994. NRA [and GOA as well] told Congress that year that a vote for the Crime Bill was an anti-gun vote. As you will recall, it was the Crime Bill that year that contained the ban on semi-automatic firearms and high capacity magazines.

So in 1994, we rated a larger bill because of gun control provisions that were stuck inside. Should the bill which carried the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans be viewed any differently?

Mrs. Metaksa also explains that Republicans had to vote for the bill, as "Republicans supported the bill to avoid a politically disastrous election-year government shutdown, despite the inclusion in the bill of provisions [they] did not support." Of course, one could argue that Democrats had to vote for the 1994 Crime Bill to avoid a politically disastrous election-year backlash since crime was one of the top issues among voters.

I don't see that my job is to make excuses for the Congress when anti-gun legislation is passed; my job is to report to the grassroots how their Congressmen voted. I don't mind explaining a particular Congressman's reasons for voting for a bill. But giving his side of the story is different than making excuses for him. Explaining his side of the story is courtesy and fairness, but the ultimate goal is to keep him accountable. Making excuses means representing the Congress to the people, rather than the people to the Congress.

GOA's opposition to the Lautenberg and Kohl bans

Congressmen knew what they were doing on Lautenberg and Kohl. GOA began alerting the grassroots to the dangers of the Lautenberg amendment in the summer of 1996. We sent several fax and e-mail alerts to generate opposition in the grassroots. We reported on the

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Lautenberg ban in our newsletter, warning our general base of this atrocious provision before the vote occurred. We repeatedly warned the Congress of both the Lautenberg and Kohl amendments, through letters, faxes and personal communications on the Hill.

But as Mrs. Metaksa has previously pointed out -- and I agree with her on this point -- the decision to pass this legislation was for many legislators a political decision, not a Constitutional one. That is unfortunate. They were warned in advance by GOA that these votes would be rated. We must assume, therefore, that they counted the cost. I specifically know that there were, in fact, legislators who voted *against* the omnibus spending bill *simply* because of the Lautenberg and Kohl gun bans that were included in it. So for those who did vote for the bill, we have held them accountable; we have recorded their votes; and now we move on -- we work to repeal the law.

It is not "lashing out." It is simply holding them accountable. I don't try to make excuses for them; we simply report the facts. GOA has never claimed that this one vote changed anybody from being pro-gun to anti-gun.

But if we are to preserve our Second Amendment freedoms in this country, it is imperative that we not "candy coat" someone's bad behavior. What happens if a father gives a lollipop to his child for lying? Or if his father simply ignores the lie altogether? The child soon learns that there are certain bad actions he can get away with. He will assume (rightly so) that there is no accountability, no sanction for bad behavior.

The same is true with our elected officials. If we ignore their votes which help enact gun control legislation, they will soon learn that there are times they can breech the Second Amendment and violate the Constitution without any "accountability." Legislators will learn that they can violate the Contract with the American people -- the Constitution -- which they have sworn before God to uphold. There will be no incentive for them to change their voting behavior.

Moreover, if the American people are not told when these breeches of the Contract occur, how will they hold their legislators accountable? How will citizens be able to exert the pressure needed to move legislators back into fully supporting the Second Amendment? Our response is that the people must be informed.

State Legislation: GOA pushing Vermont-style carry

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While I could probably write many more pages dealing with the attacks Mrs. Metaksa levied upon GOA in regard to our state activities, I think that those of us in the organization are willing to just turn the other cheek and let "by-gones be by-gones."

Some of the attacks, however, cut right to the heart of our "no compromise" message. As I stated at the beginning, I think it is extremely important to grapple with this issue. I firmly believe that the future of our gun rights depends not only on the "what" (having the right message), but also on the "how" (using the proper tools and strategy to defend our rights).

Mrs. Metaksa criticizes "GOA's legislative strategy" in the states, claiming it is "offensive." But what is really offensive are the politicians who continually press to restrict our rights when they've sworn an oath not to do so. Quite simply, our most important strategies in the states are to block anti-gun legislation and to push for Vermont-style concealed carry.

GOA believes that Vermont's laws most closely resemble the intent of the Second Amendment. Honest citizens should be able to carry concealed firearms without first getting a permit . . . without first paying any taxes whatsoever . . . and without getting any prior permission from the government. To do otherwise treats our Second Amendment freedoms as a privilege rather than a right.

Unfortunately, many of the "reform" bills that have been introduced in the state legislatures are more "control" than they are "reform." But like H.R. 1488 at the federal level, GOA's approach has been to inform the grassroots about the problems in any reform legislation. We work to remove the bad parts and then pass the good. To concede the bad provisions without a fight, to refuse to force recorded floor votes, is asking pro-gun legislators to give into the HCI strategy.

[HCI has put out a "strategy guide" detailing how anti-gun forces can water-down and restrict concealed carry bills to the point that few, if any, honest citizens will bother to run the gauntlet in order to get a permit to carry. HCI goes on to point out, that those who do endure the process and get permits will find their effectiveness limited by no-safety zones and onerous renewal training and costs.]

The best strategy gun rights activists can pursue in regard to concealed carry legislation is to introduce a clean bill and force the anti-gunners to water it down. Of course, they can only do

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this by publicly going on record in support of amendments to weaken a good bill. Such a strategy accomplishes two things:

- 1) Accountability -- It exposes those who are against the gun rights and safety of their pro-gun constituents before the next election. Compromisers and closet anti-gunners don't dare to cross their pro-gun constituents in an open, recorded floor vote.
- 2) Less restrictive bill passes -- The anti-gun forces have to expend their own political capital over each and every harmful provision put into the bill, if they even succeed in doing so.

Consider how this strategy worked in Virginia in 1995.

Virginia (1995): "No-compromise" strategy pushes CCW reform into law

GOA helped draft a CCW bill that would greatly improve the situation in Virginia and move the state closer to a Vermont-style system. Of course, we looked for a tough sponsor who would fight for a clean Personal Protection Act. Senator Virgil Goode (D) was the man to get the ball rolling.

It was unfortunate that at this point, one notable pro-gun lobbyist in Virginia proceeded to tell legislators and the grassroots that the Personal Protection Act never stood a chance. The "conventional wisdom" was that the pro-gun side needed to load the bill down with preemptive concessions to get the bill passed.

But GOA took a different approach. We mounted a huge grassroots campaign that flooded the legislature with postcards, letters and calls. We blitzed the media with talk-show appearances and editorials all across the state. The end result? The PPA blew away the conventional wisdom. The bill passed out of an anti-gun committee 9 to 6, and then the whole Senate after that. The grassroots had pushed the bill over the hump.

Jim and Sarah Brady were put on the defensive and even made personal trips to Richmond to lobby against the bill. Their strategy was to try and load the bill down with as many anti-gun amendments as they could.

But every attempt to water-down the bill resulted in a new floor vote. Legislators were put on record and they can now be held accountable for their votes. (That would have been impossible if we had written prior concessions into the bill.) In the end, the anti-gunners could only muster

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enough strength to get a couple of amendments to stick.

At that point, GOA lobbied Governor Allen to strike the anti-gun provisions from the bill. (Virginia law allows the Governor to make line item veto changes.) Contrary to what Mrs. Metaksa claims in her letter, GOA *never* urged the Governor to veto the entire bill.

The end result was that Virginians defeated almost every single anti-gun amendment and gained a huge improvement in the state carry law that year. This victory would not have been possible if we had preemptively allowed bad provisions to go on the bill. Perhaps we could have won votes in favor of the bill by watering-down the bill. But at what cost? And more importantly, one should ask: why do HCI's work for them? Why not force them to expend their energy to water-down our bill?

I think the victory in Virginia shows that getting the people in touch with their legislators is an effective way to win votes in the legislature. We don't need to rely on compromises to win the "middle of the road" legislators to our side. The grassroots heat is more than adequate to help them "see the light."

Sen. Goode compliments GOA's "no-compromise" approach

Sen. Goode noted how this no-compromise approach made the difference in Virginia. In an April 3, 1995 letter to me, he states:

I want to thank the staff of GOA and your members for all the hard work they did to pass the Personal Protection Act -- SB 744.

Gun Owners of America did a tremendous job mobilizing statewide support for this important legislation. It is clear from the volume of mail and phone calls coming into the General Assembly that your efforts to spread the word reached thousands and thousands of citizens concerned about the right to keep and bear arms.

Your input into the drafting of the Personal Protection Act (PPA) was most helpful as well. In fact the prior planning done on the bill was crucial in anticipating opposition arguments.

The PPA faced numerous attempts to water-down the legislation. GOA backed us 100% when we had to hang tough and not compromise on principle.

The efforts of GOA were critical, in my opinion, to the passage of the Personal Protection Act.

Compromise: Never justified when principle is involved

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I hope that my above comments can clear up any confusion as to our strategy and methodology both at the federal and state levels. Of course, if there are still unanswered questions, please do not hesitate to [contact](#) me. I would be more than willing to discuss these issues further.

Obviously, I haven't even tried to specifically engage every attack levied in Mrs. Metaksa's letter. While I was surprised that a full 40% of her performance review was spent attacking GOA, I think it would be counter-productive to engage in a wholesale bout of infighting. But what I have tried to do is answer those charges that would suggest gun owners should compromise their principles.

I would like to conclude with a quote from GOA's founder, Senator H.L. Richardson. While the quote is lengthy, I think he has really captured the essence of what compromise really does, and why those of us who are engaged in the fight for our liberties must not abdicate our principles at all:

Compromise? It's regrettable the word compromise has been so convoluted, because there are two basic kinds, often incompatible with each other. One is a physical compromise, the other, one of principle.

Let me give several examples. My wife and I want to go to a movie. She wants to see a love-'em-up and I want to see a shoot-'em-up. We compromise and pay to see a comedy. My buddy and I are going hunting together. He wants to eat breakfast at the Road Kill Cafe and I want to dine at Mae's Country Kitchen. We compromise by eating at one on the way and the other coming back.

There is no real principle involved in either example, each of us might be put out a bit by not getting their own way but no harm occurs to either one's principles. "Giving in" and taking others into consideration is a proper attitude for harmonious relationships; we all do it constantly.

There's not a marriage that can last more than two weeks if multitudinous physical compromises aren't made by both sides.

Physical compromise is a necessary good, often the mark of an understanding and gentle person.

On the other hand, compromising principle is another matter. Allowing oneself to be trapped into bargaining away rights is destructive to character and should be viewed as utter foolishness.

When an anti-gun legislator presents a bad piece of legislation and then offers to water it down, he's not really compromising now, is he? We must always ask, exactly what is being compromised? What is he giving up? That legislator first asks for 100 percent of our rights and then, through negotiation, takes only 10 percent. He may have compromised his original request, but we have forsaken principle by giving him that 10 percent.

If a thief sticks a gun in your ribs and demands your wallet, then decides, good naturedly, not to keep your credit cards and the pictures of your kids, no compromise is involved. He may be personable, even polite, but still a thief and you, the victim.

When the legislature decides to steal some of our rights and plans to use police force to

A Letter From Larry Pratt To The Directors Of The NRA - Gun Owners of America

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 12 June 1997 00:00

accomplish it, what's the real difference between them and the thief? Darn little!

They hide behind the excuse that they're legislating democratically. The fact they do it by a majority vote has no moral significance whatsoever. Numerical might does not constitute right, no more than a lynch mob can justify its act because a majority participated.

Democratically, we elect men and women to office but we have to ask . . . to do what? To abrogate our rights? Restrict our freedom? Destroy our ability to protect our lives, family and property? The answer is a resounding NO!

We elect representatives to uphold the Constitution and to protect our rights, not to negotiate them away in the name of compromise and democracy. Our forefathers understood that certain rights were inalienable, God-given, untouchable by mere men. That's why they delineated these uncompromising principles in the Bill of Rights. They weren't kidding when they said it was necessary to "bind men down by the chains of a Constitution."

We, at Gun Owners of America, are often asked why we aren't more amenable, willing to compromise. Our answer is that we are always willing to make concessions that are physical, but not of principle. When we politically compromise and allow anti-gun legislation to pass, no matter how insignificant it may appear to be, we have abdicated our responsibilities. Abdication is the work for surrendering our principles legislatively. Honor binds us to resist with all our might.

It is our duty to oppose ANY AND ALL attempts at watering down the principles embodied in the Second Amendment.

We are obligated by principle to vigorously oppose any move that diminishes the same freedom enjoyed by our fathers.

There are those in the gun movement who call out for pragmatism, bipartisan cooperation and dialogue with our opposition. It has been tried for decades and what has been our reward? Lost ground. Retreat. A few crumbs from the table. Many gun owners have been victims of their own decency, believing some hope exists in dealing with our implacable enemies. They have been intimidated by the names we are called when we refuse to abdicate our rights.

It's a mortal sin when a gun organization caves in and justifies any loss in the name of compromise. It's not compromise, it's abdication pure and simple; let's call it by its real name . . . abdication.

We should all concentrate on regaining the ground we have lost and begin by not giving another fraction of an inch. For those of us at Gun Owners of America, retreat is over.

Sincerely,

Larry Pratt

Executive Director [Joomla SEO powered by JoomSEF](#)