

THE ISSUE IS GUNS.

A Dialog with an NRA Endowment Member ...

by Vic Berecz

This posting will take a different format. I am writing only every other paragraph ... the blue ones, but don't read too much into the color. The red ones are written by my brother, a long-time gun dealer and *National Rifle Association* Endowment Member known in his Vermont digs as *Trader Fred*. I expect we'll leave more questions unanswered than answered, but here goes.

OK Trader, why don't you kick this off with your best shot.

Gun ownership, in this country, is a basic right, no different than freedom of speech, religion, or any other of our Constitutional rights. So why is it that more people would like to take this right from us (than say freedom of speech)?

The word "gun" never appears in the Constitution ... but semantics aside, let me start by saying I favor limits on the private ownership of arms (call that "gun control" if you wish), as well as limits on "speech" and limits on the practice of "religion." In my view the question should be how and where should those limits be imposed ... remember, this site is called *In Shades of Gray*. Don't give me the "slippery slope" argument. We are always on a slippery slope, that's why we must walk carefully.

There is no question that limits have to be imposed on all of our rights. The old "yelling fire in a crowded theater", or letting a certified nut case have a gun are good examples. Guess what? As far as guns go, this has been a law since the gun control act of 1968.

I know there are some basic controls in place at a national level. That's good, but it still leaves some issues open that need to be addressed. For instance, I have to question why licensed dealers must report gun transactions, but others are exempted. Giant billboards advertise gun shows here in Florida that practically shout out "Come and buy all the weapons you want without any records for the government." To me that sounds a lot like an invitation to criminals.

Many states allow gun sales between unlicensed individuals within their own states, provided they follow the same rules dealers must follow ... ie. 18 years old for long guns and 21 years old for handguns. These sales make up a miniscule amount of total sales. Driving down here on Interstate 95 and 75 in Florida I saw billboards advertising gun shows. This is not a bad thing (freedom of speech). As far as "practically" shouting "Come and buy all the weapons you want without any records for the government", it is quite obvious you have never attended a gun show. The same federal (and state) laws apply at gun shows as at a dealers store. You cannot purchase a gun from a legitimate licensed gun dealer at a gun show if you cannot purchase it at his licensed store.

What I and others see on billboard ads has no bearing on whether we attend gun shows ... and I have no problem with licensed dealers who follow the law at gun shows or elsewhere, it's the unlicensed "dealers" that are my concern. But, to avoid being adversarial, I'll go to my other major point. Communities are very different ... in population density, cultural values, etc. I believe state and local jurisdictions ought to be able to impose more stringent controls on guns than the minimums mandated by federal law ... if approved by a substantial majority of the people or their legislative representatives. Why does the NRA oppose freedom of choice for communities that desire restrictive laws regarding gun ownership and use?

I agree 100%. Different towns, cities, jurisdictions, and states are very different. There is no question that gun laws (and many other laws) should be different in different places. Florida is not like Wyoming, New York City is not like Thetford, Vermont. They should have different laws and restrictions on guns. These laws should be made by the state, not the Feds. As far as the NRA goes, they have only one agenda, the same one they have had for over 100 years, to uphold the 2nd Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, whether nationally, in states, cities, or small communities.

I'm glad to hear that you agree with my premise. I know you can't speak officially for the NRA, but by not directly answering my question on restrictive local legislation, you confirm the impression that I have ... that the NRA is a one-issue knee-jerk lobby. Like so many such lobbies, they see the world regarding their issue in black-and-white. That too often leads to polarization and lack of civility. I believe a better approach is to consider the *shades of gray* before espousing or fighting an issue.

Black and white, one issue? Not a bad thing. If you concentrate all your energy and resources on one subject and don't spread yourself too thin, you can really achieve results. In the NRA's case, it is protecting gun owner's rights. Hey, guns are not for everyone. If you don't want a gun in your house, that's your business. I respect that. But, in return, as a gun owner, I would hope you respect my Constitutional rights and leave my guns alone. The NRA has over 4 million members and is growing like never before. Yes, just to protect a single right.

It's been fun. As anticipated, we left many questions unanswered. But, civil dialog makes it a better world for all of us to live in ... that's good. Thanks Trader, for helping with this posting.