

Lessons Unlearned



The Gun Lobby and the Siren Song of Anti-Government Rhetoric



Violence Policy Center
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The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public. This report was authored by VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarmann and VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley. The study was funded in part with the support of the David Bohnett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

- *Target: Law Enforcement—Assault Weapons in the News* (February 2010)
- *Black Homicide Victimization in the United States: An Analysis of 2007 Homicide Data* (January 2010)
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- *The U.S. Gun Industry and Others Unknown—Evidence Debunking the Gun Industry’s Claim that Osama bin Laden Got His 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles from the U.S. Afghan-Aid Program* (February 2002)
- *“A .22 for Christmas”—How the Gun Industry Designs and Markets Firearms for Children and Youth* (December 2001)
- *Unintended Consequences: Pro-Handgun Experts Prove That Handguns Are a Dangerous Choice For Self-Defense* (November 2001)
- *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001)
- *Hispanics and Firearms Violence* (May 2001)
- *Where’d They Get Their Guns?—An Analysis of the Firearms Used in High-Profile Shootings, 1963 to 2001* (April 2001)
- *A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense* (January 2001)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry’s Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

Introduction

On April 19, 1995, former National Rifle Association (NRA) member Timothy McVeigh blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168, including 19 children at a day-care center in the building. Until the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Oklahoma City bombing stood as the worst terrorist attack to ever occur on U.S. soil. It remains the most deadly attack in our nation by domestic terrorists.

McVeigh had been an NRA member for at least four years prior to the bombing, an unprecedented period in the organization's history during which it began catering to increasing anti-government sentiment.¹ This animus was evidenced by a growing militia movement spurred by the election of President Bill Clinton, the subsequent passage of federal gun control laws such as the Brady Bill and federal assault weapons ban, and lethal, high-profile confrontations between civilians and federal law enforcement at Waco, Texas, and Ruby Ridge, Idaho.

During this period, the NRA adopted the anti-government language of the militias and other components of the "Patriot movement," a loose coalition whose adherents are "animated by a view of the federal government as the primary enemy, along with a fondness for antigovernment conspiracy theories."² Offering a soft embrace to many of the conspiracy theories that drove the anger and fear of the Patriot movement, the NRA declared in its official publications that "The Final War Has Begun," equated Federal Bureau of Investigation agents with goose-stepping Nazis, labeled other federal agents "jack-booted government thugs" in its direct mail, and repeatedly warned of conspiracies—allegedly concocted by forces ranging from the Clinton administration to the United Nations—to disarm American gun owners. Presumably undertaken initially to engage and activate its membership while opening the door to a new strata of potential supporters, the NRA's shift in rhetoric and action—as seen in the organization's magazines, public statements, and nascent on-line efforts during this period—had the ancillary effect of validating the most paranoid fears of the most extreme elements of American gun owner. Eventually, the NRA found itself exploring potential partnerships with militia leaders.

After the Oklahoma City bombing and stung by widespread public criticism including the resignation of Life Member President George H.W. Bush, the NRA acted quickly to make its public face appear more moderate. The anti-government "Final War" trumpeted in the NRA's publications prior to the bombing metamorphosed into the values-based "culture war" as articulated by eventual NRA President Charlton Heston. Through this rhetorical shift, the NRA sought to maintain its ability to tap into the same societal and anti-government anger that often drove the political engagement of many of those concerned with gun rights while appearing to distance itself from attacks on government itself.

¹ "NRA becomes militias' beacon; Gun lobby seen as nexus for paramilitarists, hate groups," *The Boston Globe*, August 13, 1995, p.1.

² Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right>.

While early this decade groups affiliated with the Patriot movement had largely disappeared from public view, by August 2009 there was a “dramatic resurgence in the Patriot movement and its paramilitary wing, the militias...”³ A March 2010 Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) report stated “that an astonishing 363 new Patriot groups appeared in 2009, with the totals going from 149 groups (including 42 militias) to 512 (127 of them militias)—a 244% jump.”⁴ The report observed:

As the movement has exploded, so has the reach of its ideas, aided and abetted by commentators and politicians in the ostensible mainstream. While in the 1990s, the movement got good reviews from a few lawmakers and talk-radio hosts, some of its central ideas today are being plugged by people with far larger audiences like FOX News’ Glenn Beck and U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn). Beck, for instance, re-popularized a key Patriot conspiracy theory—the charge that FEMA is secretly running concentration camps—before finally “debunking” it.

Last year also experienced levels of cross-pollination between different sectors of the radical right not seen in years. Nativist activists increasingly adopted the ideas of the Patriots; racist rants against Obama and others coursed through the Patriot movement; and conspiracy theories involving the government appeared in all kinds of right-wing venues. A good example is the upcoming Second Amendment March in Washington, D.C. The website promoting the march is topped by a picture of a colonial militiaman, and key supporters include Larry Pratt, a long-time militia enthusiast with connections to white supremacists, and Richard Mack, a conspiracy-mongering former sheriff associated with the Patriot group Oath Keepers.

What may be most noteworthy about the march, however, is its date—April 19. That is the date of the first shots fired at Lexington in the Revolutionary War. And it is also the anniversary of the fiery end of the government siege in Waco and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.⁵

Now, 15 years after the Oklahoma City bombing, it appears that the National Rifle Association and other members of the gun lobby are once again enticed by the grassroots potential represented by anti-government sentiment spurred by the economic collapse of 2008, the election of Barack Obama, and the perceived threat of a Congress controlled by the Democratic party. The gun lobby is once again embracing—and, equally important, validating—the anti-government rhetoric being offered by activists that range from Tea Party members, through pro-gun advocates, to members of the militia movement.

And as was the case with Timothy McVeigh, the risk lies not so much with the organized members of these groups, but with the “lone wolves” who not only embrace their rhetoric, but are willing to act on it with violence.

This reports offers examples of events, language, and individuals that illustrate this burgeoning relationship.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Section One: The Second Amendment March (SAM)

Perhaps the most high-profile, public display of the gun lobby's renewed embrace of anti-government language and validation of the views of the Patriot movement is the Second Amendment March (SAM), scheduled for April 19, 2010, in Washington, D.C., on the grounds of the Washington Monument. As stated on the Second Amendment March's website:

The mission of the Second Amendment March is to galvanize the courage and resolve of Americans; to petition our elected officials against establishing anti-gun legislation; and to remind America that the Second Amendment is necessary to maintain our right to self defense.

It is the one right that protects all others.

We will accomplish our mission by a peaceful march in Washington DC, the United States Capital, supported by satellite marches in cities all across America.⁶

Yet in a March 2010 article published by *Human Events* titled "Rattling the Second Amendment Saber," Second Amendment March founder Skip Coryell offers a more threatening vision of the March's purpose:

My question to everyone reading this article is this: "For you, as an individual, when do you draw your saber? When do you say "Yes, I am willing to rise up and overthrow an oppressive, totalitarian government?"

Is it when the government takes away your private business?

Is it when the government rigs elections?

Is it when the government imposes martial law?

Is it when the government takes away your firearms?

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating the immediate use of force against the government. It isn't time, and hopefully that time will never come. But one thing is certain: "Now is the time to rattle your sabers." If not now, then when?

When the government ignores the First Amendment, it is time to rattle the Second Amendment sabers. It's all about accountability. So long as our elected officials believe we will rise up and overthrow them under certain conditions, then they will not allow those conditions to occur. Their jobs and their very lives depend on it.

I understand that sounds harsh, but these are harsh times. Now is the time to rattle the saber. Now is the time to answer the very personal, very serious, very intimate question: "When do I remove the saber from its scabbard?"

⁶ See <http://www.secondamendmentmarch.com/mission>.

I hear the clank of metal on metal getting closer, but that's not enough. The politicians have to hear it too. They have to hear it, and they have to believe it.

Come and support me at the Second Amendment March on April 19th on the Washington Monument grounds. Let's rattle some sabers and show the government we're still here. We are here, and we are not silent!⁷

In addition to such organizations as the United States Concealed Carry Association and Second Amendment Sisters, supporters of the SAM include the following.

Gun Owners of America.

Prominently featured on the Second Amendment March website, Gun Owners of America is a "Gold" level sponsor of the event and its executive director, Larry Pratt, is scheduled to speak at the March. Author and researcher Leonard Zeskind⁸ has detailed the pivotal role played by Pratt at a 1992 meeting of extremists and racist leaders in Estes Park, Colorado, that he cites as "the birth of the modern militia movement, a movement that would tie well-armed radicals to gun advocates in a right-wing national network."⁹ As Zeskind wrote in a 1995 article for *Rolling Stone*:

Pratt recognized "the importance of having an armed militia able to organize quickly and effectively." But he also understood the need to work within the mainstream. "I think that all gun laws are unconstitutional," Pratt said, "so we need leadership in the Congress to articulate our position."

The change in strategy meant one other thing: It signaled the transformation of the gun lobby. Organizations like GOA or even the National Rifle Association, which were devoted to the single issue of firearms, would become the leading edge of a far right, multi-issue assault on government institutions and democratic rights. The gun lobby would be at the center of a web of right-wing warriors.¹⁰

⁷ Skip Coryell, "Rattling the Second Amendment Saber," *Human Events*, March 23, 2010, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=36108>.

⁸ See, for example, Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of The White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream*, (Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 2009).

⁹ Leonard Zeskind, "Armed and Dangerous: The NRA, Militias and White Supremacists are Fostering a Network of Right Wing Warriors," *Rolling Stone*, November 2, 1995, http://www.leonardzeskind.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75:armed-and-dangerous-the-nra-militias-and-white-supremacists-are-fostering-a-network-of-right-wing-warriors-&catid=21:articles-op-eds-etc&Itemid=35.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Pratt, a Tea Party member¹¹ who is linked to a number of right-wing organizations, is also the host of Gun Owners News Hour Radio, on which, “Pratt's interviews explore a wide range of second amendment issues, as well as other areas of life threatened by unauthorized incursions by federal, state and local governments. As the show's announcer proclaims, ‘It is not just about gun control, it is about control.’”¹² GOA also opposed the Obama administration’s health care reform efforts, stating, among other allegations, that passage would result in information on private gun ownership being collected in a federal database.¹³ In a March 2010 legislative alert, GOA bragged, “For almost a year, Gun Owners of America has been the ONLY gun group at the national level working to kill this legislation.”¹⁴

National Rifle Association

Although not an official sponsor, the NRA supports the Second Amendment March through on-line activities and contributions through a membership enrollment button on the SAM website. In February 2010, the Second Amendment March issued a press release offering its “heartfelt thanks” to the NRA “for agreeing to send out periodic reminders about the march to its members.”¹⁵ In April 2010, Second Amendment March founder Skip Coryell was interviewed by Cam Edwards on the NRA's *Cam and Company*, a “news” show available on-line on the NRA’s website as well as on Sirius Satellite Radio. The Second Amendment March website has a link to join the NRA and according to a SAM newsletter section addressed to “Fellow Patriots,” supporters can receive discounted NRA memberships (\$10 off the regular annual fee of \$35) with an unstated portion of the membership dues donated to the march.¹⁶

¹¹ Research conducted by Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights (IREHR), author’s conversation with Leonard Zeskind, April 9, 2010.

¹² See <http://gunowners.org/radio.htm>.

¹³ See <http://gunowners.org/a100909.htm>.

¹⁴ See <http://gunowners.org/a032210.htm>.

¹⁵ See <http://www.ammoland.com/2010/02/18/nra-receives-heartfelt-thanks-from-second-amendment-march/>.

¹⁶ Downloaded from http://www.secondamendmentmarch.com/system/files/SAM_News_Nov1109.pdf, April 8, 2010.

The Oath Keepers.

Listed as a “Patriot” level sponsor on the Second Amendment March website, the Oath Keepers website describes the organization as:

[A] non-partisan association of currently serving military, veterans, peace officers, and firefighters who will fulfill the oath we swore to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic, so help us God.

Our oath is to the Constitution, not to the politicians, and we will not obey unconstitutional (and thus illegal) and immoral orders, such as orders to disarm the American people or to place them under martial law and deprive them of their ancient right to jury trial.

We Oath Keepers have drawn a line in the sand. We will not “just follow orders.”

Our motto is “Not on our watch!”

If you, the American people, are forced to once again fight for your liberty in another American Revolution, you will not be alone. We will stand with you.¹⁷

Included in the “Orders We Will Not Obey” are:

6. We will NOT obey any order to blockade American cities, thus turning them into giant concentration camps.

7. We will NOT obey any order to force American citizens into any form of detention camps under any pretext.

In its 2009 study *The Second Wave: Return of the Militias*, the Southern Poverty Law Center describes the Oath Keepers as “a particularly worrisome example of the Patriot revival.”¹⁸ The growing influence of the Oath Keepers is summed up in the subhead to a recent *Mother Jones* magazine profile: “Glenn Beck loves them. Tea Partiers court them. Congressmen listen to them. Meet the fast-growing ‘patriot’ group that’s recruiting soldiers to resist the Obama administration.”¹⁹

According to their website, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, will be speaking at two protests on April 19, 2010. The first will be a Restore the Constitution Rally, an “open carry” protest to be held at Fort Hunt Park in Virginia (where the open carrying of handguns is legal). Larry Pratt, Skip

¹⁷ See <http://oathkeepers.org/oath/about/>.

¹⁸ *The Second Wave: Return of the Militias*, Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, Alabama, August 2009, http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/The_Second_Wave.pdf.

¹⁹ Justine Sharrock, “Oath Keepers and the Age of Treason,” *Mother Jones*, March/April 2010, <http://motherjones.com/politics/2010/03/oath-keepers>.

Coryell, and others, including self-described militia leaders, are also scheduled to speak.²⁰ The second will be at the Second Amendment March.²¹

A fellow Oath Keeper who will be speaking at the Second Amendment March is former Arizona Sheriff Richard Mack. Described by the SPLC as a “longtime militia hero,”²² Mack—recipient of the NRA’s Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award—is perhaps best known for suing the federal government over implementation of the Brady Bill.²³ ²⁴ On his website, Mack states:

The greatest threat we face today is not terrorists; it is our own federal government. If America is conquered or ruined it will be from within, *not* a foreign enemy.

The founders of our nation were afraid of one thing more than any other... government having too much power! Remember, they escaped from the tyranny of an oppressive and controlling government when they established this nation. They fought and died for it, and now we are letting these same freedoms they fought for slip away little by little, without a second thought.

Please join me in the fight to regain our rights, while the price to pay is less than death. I am committed to doing all we can peacefully to get our country back.²⁵

²⁰ See <http://restoretheconstitution.wordpress.com/>.

²¹ See <http://oathkeepers.org/oath/2010/04/03/urgent-calling-all-oath-keepers-time-to-take-a-stand-this-april-19-in-washington-dc-and-virginia-in-defense-of-the-constitution/>.

²² *The Second Wave: Return of the Militias*, Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, Alabama, August 2009, http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/The_Second_Wave.pdf.

²³ Leonard Zeskind, “Armed and Dangerous: The NRA, Militias and White Supremacists are Fostering a Network of Right Wing Warriors,” *Rolling Stone*, November 2, 1995, http://www.leonardzeskind.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75:armed-and-dangerous-the-nra-militias-and-white-supremacists-are-fostering-a-network-of-right-wing-warriors-&catid=21:articles-op-eds-etc&Itemid=35.

²⁴ *Mack v. United States*, 66 F. 3d 1025 (9th Cir. 1995).

²⁵ See <http://sheriffmack.com/>.

Section Three: The NRA's Anti-Government Language Returns

Faced with a constant demand to engage, activate, and enroll a continually shrinking pool of gun owners as measured by household gun ownership,²⁶ the National Rifle Association routinely presents the election of Barack Obama as a virtually apocalyptic threat to not just gun ownership, but to the future of the country itself—with much of its language echoing that of the Patriot movement. In its publications, the NRA has presented a litany of supposed conspiracies being undertaken by federal agencies targeting gun owners. At the same time, the NRA has once again raised the spectre of a global gun control conspiracy, often involving United Nations or other international treaties, allegedly targeting U.S. gun owners. Such a proposition, says NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, “boils down to one thing: The power of the American people—of individuals—is crushed by the power of the international super-state.”²⁷

Speaking at the 2009 CPAC convention, LaPierre told cheering attendees that “our Founding Fathers understood that the guys with the guns make the rules.”²⁸ In a December 2009 direct-mail letter, echoing the language of both the Tea Party movement and the Oath Keepers, LaPierre urges the reader to join an “army whose highest allegiance is not to any individual or any political party but only to the cause of freedom.” In the letter, LaPierre warns of:

...massive armies of anti-gun, anti-freedom radicals marshaling against us for an attack that could make every other battle we've ever fought look like a walk in the park...an attack aimed at completely rewriting our nation's values and the future of our country in ways that you and I won't even recognize.

Everywhere you look, the writing is on the wall—that the next three years will be the most dangerous days of our lifetimes, not just for the Second Amendment but for freedom itself...

We're going to see gun-banners along with the media and anti-gun special interests steer our country far away from our founding principles—and build a “new” America where freedom and privacy and self-defense are things of the past.

And I can guarantee you that in this “new” America—an America unlike anything you can even imagine—your firearms and your Second Amendment rights WON'T be welcome.

The bottom line is this: These next three years are going to decide whether our heritage of freedom will be handed down intact to future generations, or whether citizens like you will be forced to surrender your freedom...

²⁶ *A Shrinking Minority: The Continuing Decline of Gun Ownership in America*, Violence Policy Center, April 2007, <http://www.vpc.org/studies/gunownership.pdf>.

²⁷ See, for example, “The First Step in Trampling Our Rights,” *America's 1st Freedom*, February 2010, pp. 8, 55, and “The OAS Treaty: Blueprint for Dismantling the Second Amendment,” *America's 1st Freedom*, August 2009, pp. 23-25.

²⁸ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSEnHJmurlE>.

And even though we've been criticized for it by the elitist media and by gun-ban politicians, we're not afraid to say that the ultimate, bedrock guarantee of freedom, for ourselves and for future generations, is the right of law-abiding citizens to keep and bear arms.

This mailing is just one component of a consistent drumbeat of NRA fear-mongering, a constant theme of which has been that the Obama administration is moving to employ a wide range of government agencies against civilian gun ownership. In the first four months of 2009, the NRA's flagship activist magazine, *America's 1st Freedom*, profiled key members of the Obama administration, likening them to a "'who's who' of gun-ban advocates."²⁹

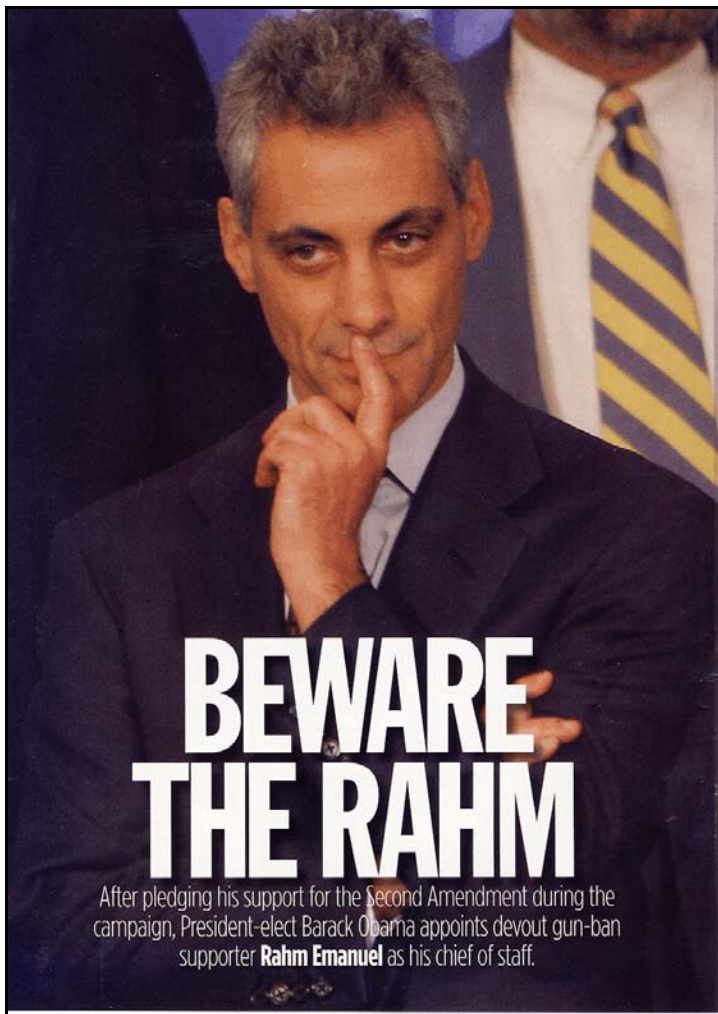
Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. An article in the January 2009 issue of *America's 1st Freedom* titled "Beware the Rahm" opens with, "Barack Obama's children may be getting a new puppy, but American gun owners will soon be the targets of an attack dog named Rahm Emanuel. On Jan. 20, this fierce enemy of the Second Amendment will become the chief of staff to the president of the United States." The article's conclusion states, "Will Rahm Emanuel be able to stab a knife into the Constitution and scream that the Second Amendment is 'Dead! Dead! Dead!?' That answer depends mainly on whether American gun owners and other friends of the Constitution become active, and stay active, for the next four years."

Attorney General Eric Holder. The cover of the February 2009 edition of *America's 1st Freedom* features Attorney General Eric Holder. Under the headline "The Holder Distortion," the magazine states, "Contrary to his claim of support for the Second amendment, Barack Obama selects former Clintonite and anti-gunner Eric Holder as his attorney general." Inside, the reader is told that the appointment of Holder as attorney general "is terrible news for the Second Amendment—and for the rule of law." The bulk of the article attacks Holder for his record under Clinton's attorney general, "the infamous Janet Reno" (Reno is widely blamed in pro-gun circles for the stand-off at Waco that helped galvanize the militia movement in the 1990s).

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The cover of the March 2009 edition of *America's 1st Freedom* features Secretary of State Hillary Clinton looking out over the headline, "The Whole World is Watching—Hillary Clinton Takes the Reins: Will the new secretary of state defend the U.S. constitution, or will she invite the global gun-ban movement into the corridors of power?" Inside, the article states, "As a presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton caused a scare for gun owners. Now named Barack Obama's secretary of state, the Clinton anti-gun nightmare has returned."

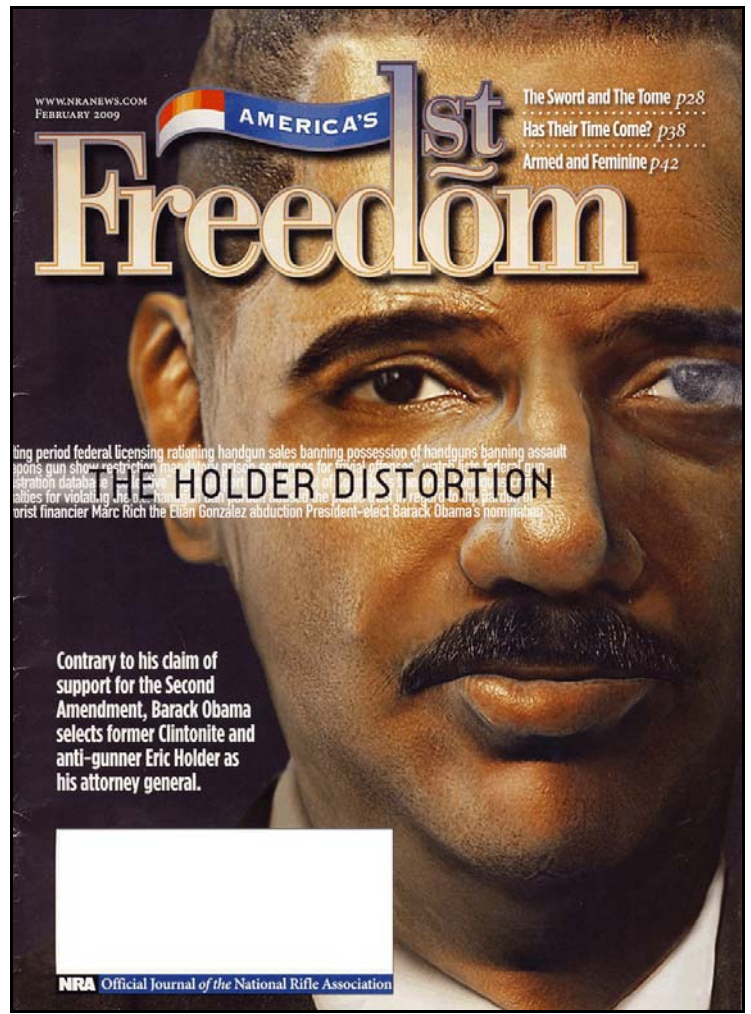
Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The cover of the April 2009 issue of *America's 1st Freedom* features Secretary of Education Arne Duncan with the headline: "What would this man teach your kids? Anti-gun extremist Arne Duncan takes over as Secretary of Education." The article opens with, "Who is the most extreme anti-gun member of President Barack Obama's Cabinet? That's sort of like asking who is the greatest quarterback in the Pro Football Hall of Fame—there are so many strong choices, it's hard to pick just one. But I think the prize has to go to the new Secretary of Education Arne Duncan." The article concludes, "There is every reason to be concerned that Duncan will turn the Department of Education into a tool to promote a gun-ban agenda in America's public schools. And we can fully expect that the 'mainstream' media, which was so viciously hostile to the Bush administration, will fawn over Duncan's public demands to repress the Second Amendment, 'for the children.'"

²⁹ "Arne Duncan: Education at the Extremez," *America's 1st Freedom*, April 2009, p. 33.



BEWARE THE RAHM

After pledging his support for the Second Amendment during the campaign, President-elect Barack Obama appoints devout gun-ban supporter **Rahm Emanuel** as his chief of staff.



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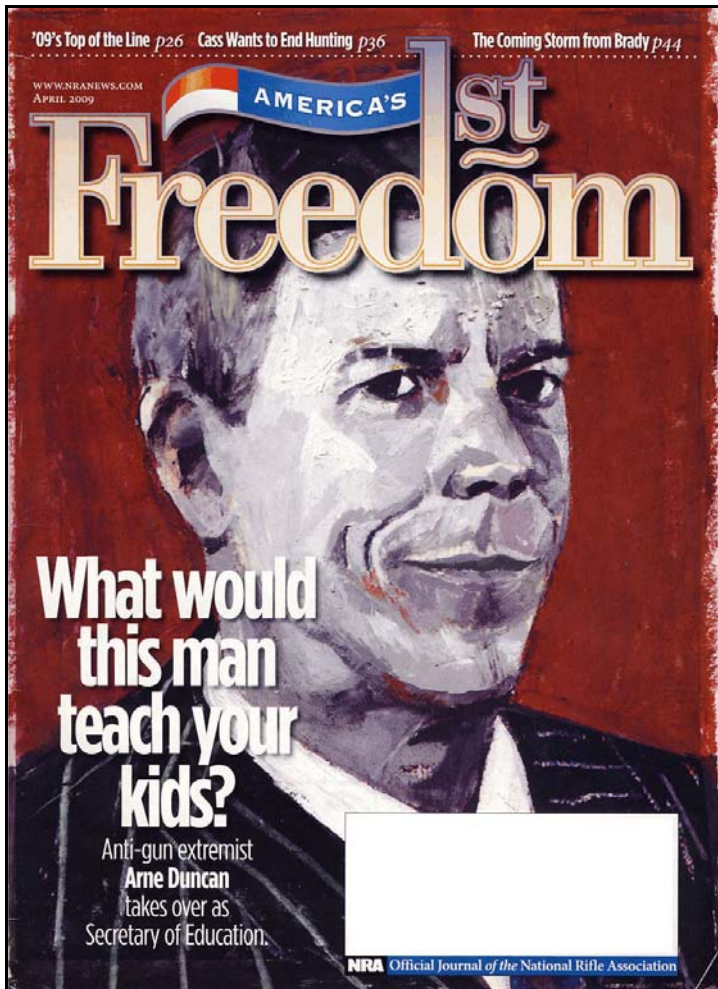
AMERICA'S 1st Freedom

The Sword and The Tome p28
Has Their Time Come? p38
Armed and Feminine p42

...ing period federal licensing rationing handgun sales banning possession of handguns banning assault
...ing gun show restriction major anti-gun movement for Obama election
...igration database
...alities for violating the law
...rist financier Marc Rich the Elián González abduction President-elect Barack Obama's nomination

Contrary to his claim of support for the Second Amendment, Barack Obama selects former Clintonite and anti-gunner Eric Holder as his attorney general.

NRA Official Journal of the National Rifle Association



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AMERICA'S 1st Freedom

What would this man teach your kids?

Anti-gun extremist **Arne Duncan** takes over as Secretary of Education.

NRA Official Journal of the National Rifle Association



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AMERICA'S 1st Freedom

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Is the Militia Obsolete? p38

Hillary Clinton Takes the Reins: The Whole World Is Watching

Will the new secretary of state defend the U.S. Constitution, or will she invite the global gun-ban movement into the corridors of power?

NRA Official Journal of the National Rifle Association

Section Four: NRA Activist Involvement in the Tea Party Movement

In a column published in the November 2009 issue of the NRA's *America's 1st Freedom* magazine titled "Shout It From The Rooftops," editor Mark Chestnut wrote:

In recent months we've seen politicians put down—even berate—average, law-abiding U.S. citizens for voicing their opinions at town hall meetings. They've called active citizens "zealots" and "insurrectionists" for attending local political rallies, and inferred that if we don't agree with the Obama administration on every important issue, we're nothing but a bunch of "rabble rousers" and "rubes..."

The battle against our Right to Keep and Bear Arms is waged along the same lines...When we tell our side of the story, we're derided as "gun nuts," or minions of the powerful "gun lobby," with the insinuation that we should just sit down and shut up.

Together, we'll have our say. And together, we'll be heard.³⁰

Among these "active citizens" are, of course, Tea Party members. And Chestnut's column stands as yet another example of the NRA's efforts to tie itself to anti-Obama anger and exploit the pro-gun views of Tea Party members and other components of the Patriot movement for its own political interest.

A more blatant entreaty is the recent marketing of NRA clothing products emblazoned with the Gadsden "Don't Tread on Me" flag, which has become the symbol of the Tea Party movement.

The description for the NRA Gadsden tee shirt states:

What goes around comes around. In the late 18th century, oppressed American patriots voiced their defiance of tyranny by exclaiming, "Don't Tread on Me!" Perhaps it's time once again for Freedom-loving citizens to rally 'round the legendary slogan of the famous Gadsden flag. Our tee is heavy, 6.1 oz., 100% cotton with "NRA" boldly screened on its chest and the "Don't Tread on Me" coiled rattler splashed across its back. Pair with our wildly popular Gadsden Hat!³¹

The shirt comes in sizes up to XXXL. The description for the NRA Gadsden hat states:

Proudly display your national pride with this cap, featuring an original American icon—the coiled rattlesnake, embroidered with the motto "Don't Tread on Me." Featured on many Revolution-era flags, including the first state flag of South Carolina, the image reflects American pride and defiance in the face of tyranny. This cap also features an embroidered NRA logo on the bill and across the back of the cap....Pair it with our matching Gadsden T-shirt. Imported.³²

³⁰ "Shout It From The Rooftops," *America's 1st Freedom*, November 2009, p. 6.

³¹ See <http://www.nrastore.com/nra/Product.aspx?productid=CT%20275>.

³² See <http://www.nrastore.com/nra/Product.aspx?productid=HT%2024172>.



Left Chest

NRA

The NRA package arrives with an insert containing a “Special offer” from the conservative organization Focus on the Family to subscribe to its *Focus on the Family Citizen* magazine, which offers, “Pro-family, pro-American insight on everything from terrorist threats to threats against the constitution, and smoking guns to smokescreens.”

The most public consummation of this effort will occur at the NRA’s annual meeting on Friday, May 14, 2010, in Charlotte, North Carolina, where Tea Party favorite Sarah Palin is scheduled to speak at the organization’s Celebration of American Values Leadership Forum.³³

Yet, by embracing one aspect of the Tea Party movement, the NRA again runs the risk of validating the full gamut of conspiracy theories that define the fringe of the Patriot movement—especially when it paints its anti-government rhetoric and attacks on the Obama administration with such broad brush strokes.

A VPC review of the NRA’s state Election Volunteer Coordinators (EVCs) reveals direct links between these NRA-sanctioned grassroots activists and the Tea Party movement. According to the NRA Institute for Legislative Action (NRA-ILA):

NRA-ILA's Election Volunteer Coordinators (EVCs) act as the liaison between pro-gun candidates and NRA members and gun owners in their districts. EVCs work to spearhead ILA's volunteer activities to ensure that pro-freedom candidates have sufficient volunteers for campaign-related activities.³⁴

According to NRA-ILA, “EVCs are in continuous contact with NRA-ILA’s Grassroots staff at NRA Headquarters, constantly exchanging ideas and information.”³⁵

These links raise questions not only regarding the grassroots role of the NRA’s activists on issues beyond gun control, but also whether the independence of Tea Party activists will conflict with their expected support of the NRA’s preferred candidates. Violence Policy Center research has identified the following NRA Election Volunteer Coordinators who appear to have Tea Party or other links to the Patriot movement.

Arizona

Laramer (LG) Mace of Prescott, Arizona, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the First Congressional District in Arizona.³⁶ Laramer Mace is also listed as a member of ResistNet.com, “home of the patriotic resistance” and the “social networking platform

³³ See <http://www.nraam.org/events/cavlf.html>.

³⁴ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCByState.aspx?st=CT>.

³⁵ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GrassRootsActivism.aspx?ID=27>.

³⁶ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=AZ>.

for Grassfire Nation and citizens who oppose the rising tide of socialism.”³⁷ That District’s Representative, Democrat Ann Kirkpatrick, was also one of the 20 members of Congress targeted with a rifle-scope graphic by Sarah Palin’s SarahPAC.³⁸

Kirk Ferst of Yuma, Arizona, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Seventh Congressional District in Arizona.³⁹ An April 15, 2009, article from the *Yuma Sun* featured on the website of the Colorado River Tea Party contains an interview with Kirk Ferst of Yuma:

With signs, American flags and tea bags dangling from ears, shirts and even dogs, some of the peaceful protesters expressed their unhappiness visually.

One of them, Kirk Ferst of Yuma, wore his Australian bush hat with corks dangling from the brim. He said the corks are to keep the man-eating flies and mosquitoes away.

But Ferst’s hat had a new addition: tea bags, he said, to keep away the corrupt politicians.

Ferst said he came to the tea party because he’s tired of a “double standard.”

“I am fed up with being lied to. Politicians, with the exception of a very few, never keep their word.

“We are held accountable when we do something wrong, but they are not. Injustice breeds revolution.”⁴⁰

A comment attributed to Kirk Ferst is also posted on ResistNet.com.

Illinois

Marc Albertario of Prospect Heights, Illinois, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Tenth Congressional District in Illinois.⁴¹ In a comment on a Northern Illinois Patriots Meetup page promoting a pro-gun rally in Illinois, Albertario states, “This was the event that started me and a lot of tea parties in motion.” Under the headline “This Meetup Group is about...” are listings for the 9/12 Project and Tea Party Patriots.⁴² Marc Albertario also

³⁷ See [http://www.resistnet.com/notes/FAQ_\(Facts_and_Questions\)](http://www.resistnet.com/notes/FAQ_(Facts_and_Questions)).

³⁸ See <http://www.facebook.com/notes/sarah-palin/dont-get-demoralized-get-organized-take-back-the-20/373854973434>.

³⁹ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=AZ>.

⁴⁰ See <http://coloradoriverteaparty.com/415SunArticle.html>, “Tea bags symbol of spending protest,” *Yumasun.com*, April 15, 2009.

⁴¹ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=IL>.

⁴² See <http://www.meetup.com/Northern-IL-Patriots/messages/9332941/>.

appears in a photo accompanying an article in the *Prairie Advocate* headlined “Excellent Turn-Out at Chicago Tea Party.”⁴³

Mississippi

Howie Morgan of Oxford, Mississippi, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the First Congressional District in Mississippi.⁴⁴ Howie Morgan is also listed as the National Political Advisor for Jim Gilchrist’s Minuteman Project.⁴⁵ Gilchrist was a founder of The Minuteman Project, described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a “nativist extremist” group, “organizations that go beyond mere advocacy of restrictive immigration policy to actually confront or harass suspected immigrants.”⁴⁶ After an internal dispute in 2007 amidst allegations of embezzlement, Gilchrist left The Minuteman Project to form his own organization.⁴⁷

Montana

Vince Vaccaro, of Townsend, Montana, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for Montana and is also the Montana coordinator for the Second Amendment March.⁴⁸ Writing in the Second Amendment March Forum in June 2009, Vince Vaccaro stated:

I have meet with the Tea Party organizes & the Multiple Use Lands folks tonight. Good meeting, they will back up our efforts.

I will be at the Tea Party in Helena at Memorial Park on the 4th of July to give a speech to help advance the SAM cause. Hope to see you all there.

⁴³ “Excellent Turn-Out at Chicago Tea Party,” *Prairie Advocate*, http://www.prairie-advocate-news.com/tea_party_4_15_09/tea_party_4_15_09.html.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=MS>.

⁴⁵ See http://www.minutemanproject.com/organization/contact_us.asp.

⁴⁶ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right>.

⁴⁷ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, Summer 2007, Issue Number: 126, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2007/summer/minute-mess>.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=MT>, downloaded from http://www.secondamendmentmarch.com/system/files/SAM_News_Dec1609.pdf.

The next month, Vaccaro wrote:

Had a wonderful time at the Tea Party in Helena. Met a lot of great like minded people & passed out a lot of fliers. I am hoping to get a booth set up at the Gun show in Bozeman for the 10, 11, & 12th. Hope to see you there (& I better leave my wallet at home or I will be broke when I leave).⁴⁹

New Jersey

Charles Lukens of Ventnor, New Jersey, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Second Congressional District in New Jersey.⁵⁰ Lukens has a page on ResistNet.com⁵¹ and is also active on the FreedomWorks web site.⁵² A 2009 letter to the editor announced Charles Lukens was selected as a delegate to:

represent the state of New Jersey at the Continental Congress 2009 on Nov. 8-22 in Illinois. The congress represents a growing grass-roots movement of organizations and individuals, like the "tea party" attendees (which recently drew an estimated 2 million people to Washington, D.C.), Ron Paul's Campaign for Liberty, Glenn Beck's 9/12 groups, Bob Schultz's We The People, and New Jersey's Liberty and Prosperity, etc., who recognize our government is out of control.⁵³

Anthony Colandro of Belleville, New Jersey, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Eighth Congressional District in New Jersey.⁵⁴ In February 2010 Colandro gave a presentation on the Second Amendment sponsored by Americans For Liberty—A Tea Party Initiative.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ See <http://secondamendmentforum.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=38&t=331>.

⁵⁰ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=NJ>.

⁵¹ See <http://www.resistnet.com/profile/CharlesLukens>.

⁵² See <http://teaparty.freedomworks.org/profile/CharlesLukens>.

⁵³ See http://www.phillyburbs.com/opinions/blog_post/article/113/2009/november/04/delegates-elected.html.

⁵⁴ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=NJ>.

⁵⁵ See <http://www.americans-for-liberty.com/pastevents.html>.

Ohio

Linda Walker of Alexandria, Ohio, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Twelfth Congressional District in Ohio.⁵⁶ A July 2009 article on the Buckeye Firearms Association home page features the headline, "Buckeye Firearms' Linda Walker to speak at Statehouse Tea Party featuring Judge Andrew Napolitano."⁵⁷

Oklahoma

Michael Phillips, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the First Congressional District in Oklahoma.⁵⁸ Phillips' "profile" on the *Tulsa World* website contains the following two comments regarding Tea Party members posted in response to a letter to the editor.⁵⁹

There were no racial slurs shouted at Rep. Lewis and there were no "Gay hating names" used against Barney Frank. That was a hoax perpetrated by the left wing media to deny the Tea Party members the respect they need. Cameras were every where and not a single camera was able to pick up a single instance of a single Tea Party member showing that kind of disrespect. You shouldn't confuse anger with hate.

[Y]ou apparently attended different Tea Parties than me. We Tea Party members are angry, but...we do a much better job of being civil than those on the left.⁶⁰

Heather Fitzgerald of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Fifth Congressional District in Oklahoma.⁶¹ In the October 28, 2009, entry on her blog NRA-ILA EVC's Blog she posted "some pictures of the Tea Party in Washington, D.C. that you won't see in main stream media."⁶² Included in the photos are one of a Tea Party protester holding a sign reading "DHS [Department of Homeland Security] Certified Right-Wing Extremist," with a drawing of a pistol with a flag of the Constitution protruding from its barrel and

⁵⁶ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=OH>.

⁵⁷ See <http://www.buckeyefirearms.org/node/6785>.

⁵⁸ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=OK>.

⁵⁹ See <http://www.tulsaworld.com/profile/profile.aspx?id=128723>.

⁶⁰ See http://mobile.tulsaworld.com/article.aspx?articleID=20100331_62_A18_hHavea919765&subjectID=opinion.

⁶¹ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=OK>.

⁶² See <http://nrilaevc.wordpress.com/2009/10/28/tea-party-pictures/>.

another holding a “Don’t Tread on Me” Gadsden flag and a sign reading “Impeach Comrade Obama” (with the C in comrade composed of a hammer and sickle).

Texas

Clyde Siebman of Sherman, Texas, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Fourth Congressional District in Texas.⁶³ A March 2010 article headlined “Tea Party Planned in Sherman,” states: “This is a country of the people, for the people and by the people. We’re not going to tolerate this,” said Tea Party Organizer, Clyde Siebman.⁶⁴

Liz Foley of Conroe, Texas, listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the Eighth Congressional District in Texas⁶⁵ is also the national media director for the Second Amendment March and according to its website is also a member of the North Houston Tea Party Patriots, “most recently serving on the Board and as the Event Chair, now in a consultative role for events, planning, volunteers and communications. The most recent Tea Party chaired by Liz was held November 2nd and exceeded a crowd of over 10,000 attendees.” Foley is also an NRA benefactor member and serves on its Second Amendment Task Force and President’s Council.⁶⁶

Eric Clendenin of Dallas, Texas, is listed on the NRA’s website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for the 30th Congressional District in Texas.⁶⁷ Eric Clendenin maintains a page on ResistNet.com, “Home of the Patriotic Resistance.” Issues that concern him most are: “Illegal Alien Amnesty & Open Borders, Socialism, Tax Increases, Universal Healthcare, Gun Control, Constitutional Infringements.” His “biggest concern about the current administration, congress, and or the leftist agenda is...Infringement on the 2nd Amendment, spending, and Socialism.”⁶⁸ Eric Clendenin is also listed as a coordinator on the website of the Dallas Tea Party.⁶⁹

⁶³ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=TX>.

⁶⁴ “Tea Party Planned in Sherman,” March 16, 2010, KTEN.com, <http://www.kten.com/Global/story.asp?S=12152451>.

⁶⁵ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=TX>.

⁶⁶ See <http://www.secondamendmentmarch.com/about>.

⁶⁷ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=TX>.

⁶⁸ See <http://www.resistnet.com/profile/EricClendenin>.

⁶⁹ See <http://dallasteaparty.org/places/United%20States/TEXAS/75227/>.

Wyoming

Richard Bohling of Laramie, Wyoming, is listed on the NRA's website as the Election Volunteer Coordinator for Wyoming.⁷⁰ Richard Bohling is also listed as the legislative director of the Wyoming State Shooting Association, an NRA state affiliate.⁷¹ A copy of a 2009 newsletter posted on the group's website states:

Freedom (as well as Second Amendment) minded organizations such as the Tea Party movement, the September Twelvers, and Oath Keepers have sprung up, are growing and are increasingly making their presence known.

During my travels around the country I have been encountering more and more anger and defiance and less and less whining and defeatism. As the crooks in the capitol become increasingly rapacious in their efforts to seize our money and our liberty, they are meeting increased hatred and are being rejected to a greater and greater degree by more and more of our population.

The beltway regime's most powerful tools used to maintain control over the states have traditionally been the promises to provide and the threats to withhold funds. As national bankruptcy looms, these tools are becoming increasingly blunted.⁷²

⁷⁰ See <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GetInvolvedLocally/EVCbyState.aspx?st=WY>.

⁷¹ See <http://www.wyossa.com>.

⁷² See <http://www.wyossa.com/newsletter%2010-09.pdf>.

Conclusion

According to Aitan Goelma, a former federal prosecutor who was a member of the Department of Justice team that helped win convictions against Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in the Oklahoma City bombing case:

Anytime you have group-think and this churning of ridiculous ideas back and forth, eventually you'll get someone like McVeigh who's going to say 'I'm going to take the mantle of leadership and fire the shot heard around the world and start the second American revolution...'

Some of this is fantasy. I think the idea that it is kind of fun to talk about a UN tank on your front lawn and the New World Order...but when someone blows up a building and kills 19 kids in a day-care center, it's not so glamorous anymore.⁷³

And now, once again, the tone and volume of the NRA's rhetoric is changing as it helps to breathe new life into anti-government arguments that have remained mostly dormant since the end of the Clinton administration. And with the growth of the Internet, and the NRA's sophisticated dedication in using it to create a single-source NRA "news" information portal that allows its supporters to bypass the 'mainstream' news media, the reach and influence of the NRA's message is at its highest level ever. It is also important to recognize that the power and influence of the NRA in the pro-gun community goes far beyond that of a professional association or interest group. As former NRA Executive Vice President J. Warren Cassidy explained in 1990, "You would get a far better understanding if you approached us as if you were approaching one of the great religions the world." And while Cassidy's comparison is self-serving, it is not inaccurate.⁷⁴

As was the case 15 years ago, America is once again at a place where the language and rhetoric of the gun lobby, most notably the NRA, has the potential to validate violent acts. And while no act equaling the horror and devastation of Oklahoma City has occurred, there is general acknowledgment of a steady thrum of anti-government sentiment and attendant violence occurring in our nation.

As the Southern Poverty Law Center warns:

Already there are signs of similar violence emanating from the radical right. Since the installation of Barack Obama, right-wing extremists have murdered six law enforcement officers. Racist skinheads and others have been arrested in alleged plots to assassinate the nation's first black president. One man from Brockton, Mass.—who told police he had learned on white supremacist websites that a genocide was under way against whites—is charged with murdering two black people and planning to kill as many Jews as possible on the day after Obama's inauguration. Most recently,

⁷³ "Could the Hutaree militia have spawned a Timothy McVeigh?," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/291795>.

⁷⁴ Josh Sugarmann, *NRA: Money, Firepower & Fear*, (National Press Books, Bethesda, MD, 1992), p. 14.

a rash of individuals with antigovernment, survivalist or racist views have been arrested in a series of bomb cases.⁷⁵

These concerns are bolstered by the April 2010 ADL report *Violent Voices: Anti-Government Extremism Takes on New Intensity*, which offers a sample of violent, on-line Internet chatter and concludes that “not only has there has been significant growth in militia activity across the U.S., but also evidence that a broad range of anti-government extremist groups and individuals are ramping themselves up for possible violent confrontation with the authorities.”⁷⁶ One striking aspect of the report are the number of quotes calling for violent acts that are taken from gun-related sites.

As Bart McEntire, a supervisory special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has stated, “You’re seeing the bubbling [of antigovernment sentiment] right now. You see people buying into what they’re saying. It’s primed to grow. The only thing you don’t have to set it on fire is a Waco or Ruby Ridge.”⁷⁷

One of the National Rifle Association’s greatest successes has been its ability to create a disconnect between the potential for violence fostered by its words—the “group think” and “churning of ridiculous ideas” noted earlier—and the actual acts of violence committed by “lone wolves” and others facilitated by the organization’s validating rhetoric.

Consistently exploiting this inexplicable rhetorical exemption, the NRA incites its members and others, offering words that outside of the purported protective bubble of direct-mail and official publications would be chilling, as illustrated by this postscript from an August 2008 direct-mail letter from the NRA’s Institute for Legislative Action (ILA) warning of the threat posed by a possible Obama administration:

Our Constitution and our system of government guarantee that every American has the opportunity to write his or her name in the history books of tomorrow—to leave his or her imprint on the fabric of our nation. But in the end, history is always written only by a select few—the few who sacrifice of themselves to fight for the causes in which they believe.

Such language offers benediction to the most violent of acts. The NRA predictably dismisses criticism of its rhetoric as an overheated reaction to direct mail license. Based on past history, the overriding concern should be that the NRA’s words may, in fact, once again be revealed as violent prophecy.

⁷⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right>.

⁷⁶ *Violent Voices: Anti-Government Extremism Takes on New Intensity*, ADL, April 2010, <http://www.adl.org/extremism/Anti-Government-Extremism-Report.pdf>.

⁷⁷ *The Second Wave: Return of the Militias*, Southern Poverty Law Center, August 2009, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/splc-report-return-of-the-militias>.