

National Rifle Association Rebuttal

By Bill Hobby

Two weeks ago in this space I pointed out that, on some gun control issues, the National Rifle Association cannot make up its mind. Sometimes the NRA is for criminal record checks and waiting periods to screen out felonious prospective pistol packers and sometimes it is against them.

But sometimes the NRA is consistent. Whenever there is an issue between armed robbers and policemen, the NRA favors the criminals. Moreover, the NRA, generally thought of as a right-wing group, likes to rewrite history just as much as the left-wing "politically correct" forces on some university campuses.

The NRA said I was wrong in saying that the NRA opposed the bill banning armor-piercing ammunition (known as coiller bullets to police). The NRA, through its spokesman Weldon Smith, says it not only supported the ban, but drafted the legislation and helped pass it.

Not quite.

Cop-killer bullets were originally designed for the police. But police stopped using the bullets because they ricochet, endangering police and bystanders. By 1982, when legislation was first introduced to ban the bullets, the only people using them were criminals who wanted to kill policemen wearing bullet-proof vests.

Nevertheless, the NRA opposed the ban on coiller bullets, charging that the issue was a "media-made hoax." For some strange reason, policemen whose lives were threatened by the bullets, did not agree.

Many police chiefs testified for the bill. In 1984, the Reagan administration proposed a compromise bill that would outlaw the manufacture and importation of cop-killer bullets. Finding themselves backed into a hole, the NRA gave in and said they wouldn't oppose the administration's bill, but they would continue to oppose any bill that banned the sale of cop-killer bullets.

But the bill Congress passed did ban the sale of armor-piercing, or cop-killer, bullets. The NRA now says it supported the bill. The NRA is wrong, again.

The NRA now denies, in letters to the editor and to me, that it opposed legislation banning plastic pistols--guns made from polymer or ceramic that have a few small metallic parts. So small, in fact, that they don't set off the metal detectors in airports and government buildings. They are potentially dangerous weapons in the hands of terrorists.

In 1987, the U.S. Senate considered a bill to ban plastic guns. When asked to take a stand on the issue, the NRA said they could not support a ban on plastic guns because there were no such guns so they weren't a realistic threat. They also said the bill was a back door effort to ban thousands of guns that already existed, even though the bill specifically exempted all legally owned guns.

More than half a dozen people testified before the Senate that prototypes of this gun existed and that the technology was available to produce them in vast numbers. Senators also heard from police officers, the U.S. secret service, and airline representatives who testified that the proliferation of these guns would create dangerous security problems.

Faced with this expert testimony, the NRA decided that plastic guns did exist, but that they had legitimate hunting purposes and shouldn't be banned.

Unlike some issues before congress, this time Senators on both sides of the aisle were bound and determined to prevent a problem before it became one. The only way to insure that these weapons would never get into the hands of terrorists and assassins was to ban them before they hit the market. And that's what Congress did.

So the NRA is right. Thanks to the wisdom of the U.S. Congress--and no thanks to the NRA-- plastic guns cannot legally be made or sold in the United States.

Written in 1991.