

National Rifle Association

By Bill Hobby

What is the National Rifle Association's position on pistols? Do they want people to have to wait a few days to buy a pistol? What about criminal background checks on gun buyers? What is the right answer? That depends on who you ask and when you ask them.

The NRA has waffled a lot on these issues for the last several decades, particularly on waiting periods and background checks. In the mid-seventies, the NRA published a firearms control pamphlet in which they said "a waiting-period could help in reducing crimes of passion and preventing people with criminal records or dangerous mental histories from acquiring guns."

The NRA is hardly alone in waffling on gun control. When Lloyd Bentsen beat George Bush for the United States Senate in 1970, Bentsen made a campaign issue of a pro-gun-control vote by then-congressman Bush. In 1988, presidential candidate George Bush made an issue of Massachusetts Governor Dukakis' support of gun control. Bentsen, of course, was Dukakis' running mate.

What goes around comes around.

By the early 1980s, the NRA took a strong stand against criminal background checks, charging that they were an invasion of privacy and diverted police from real crime to paperwork.

Congress is now considering the Brady Bill. The Brady Bill is named for James Brady, once press secretary to president Ronald Reagan. Brady was crippled for life by a pistol-wielding would-be assassin of Reagan.

The Brady Bill requires a seven-day waiting period to buy a pistol. When the U.S. House of Representatives was considering the bill in 1988, the NRA opposed a waiting period. In an effort to kill the bill, the NRA abandoned its earlier opposition to "gun control" laws and supported instant background checks at the point of sale--requiring an expensive and non-existent federal computerized system of criminal records to be created and be accessible by gun dealers.

Talk about invasion of privacy!

Of course, the NRA's real objective was to pass a measure that would be impossible to implement. It would take at least ten years and hundreds of millions of dollars to develop and install such a system. More recently, the NRA supported legislation extending Oregon's 5-day waiting-period to fifteen days. And here in Texas, NRA supporters advocated Senator Gene Green's concealed weapon bill, which would allow citizens to carry guns around with them after undergoing a background check. Is the NRA schizophrenic? Why is it ok to conduct background checks for up to 30 days under the green bill--for concealed permits--but not for handgun sales?

This year the NRA is against the Brady Bill because it only requires a waiting-period but not a background check. In an effort to compromise, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell attached an amendment to the bill requiring a background check and providing federal money for states to update their criminal records databases. Yet the NRA remains opposed to the revised gun control bill. The NRA's flip-flopping has been going on for decades.

The NRA used to be a fairly benign group interested in teaching people about gun safety, target shooting, and hunting techniques. But somewhere along the line the association leaders went crazy. In the early 1980s they opposed the nation's law enforcement officers who were working to outlaw the armor-piercing ammunition that police affectionately call "cop-killer" bullets. By 1986, they opposed a ban on plastic

pistols, weapons that don't set off metal detectors in airports and government buildings. And even after several mass murders with assault rifles triggered the introduction of bills in congress to ban their sale, the NRA remains opposed to this legislation. What do legitimate gun owners need with weapons that kill cops and aid terrorists?

The NRA has dug itself into a hole. Several times this year the NRA has supported both waiting-periods and background checks. To be sure, its support has been designed to delay and weaken bills when their passage seemed inevitable.

After decades of battling gun control advocates, the NRA has become one. At least the NRA no longer takes an automatic position. In fact, the association's positions revolve faster than the chamber on a saturday night special.

The Brady Bill won't make the streets safe overnight, but it's a step in the right direction.

Wouldn't it be nice if the NRA was for the cops and not for the robbers?

Written in 1991.