

FIREARMS IN AMERICA

Hooray for the Second Amendment

Celebrating Gun Appreciation Day

By Alan Gottlieb

Countering the political exploitation of the Sandy Hook tragedy, firearms rights activists and conservative groups have joined in an effort to demonstrate the continued public support for firearms ownership and Second Amendment sovereignty.

We have designated Saturday, Jan. 19, as Gun Appreciation Day across the United States, and we are encouraging American gun owners to participate. Visit our website at GunAppreciationDay.com, learn more about this event and sign our petition supporting the Second Amendment.

In the wake of the heartbreaking Connecticut tragedy, all manner of extremist gun prohibition measures have been revived and re-packaged as part of a long-standing agenda to adopt the most restrictive firearms laws and regulations possible. Despite these efforts, a recent Gallup poll taken after Sandy Hook shows a majority of Americans still do not support a ban on so-called "assault weapons" or legislation that would be detrimental to handgun ownership.

Gun Appreciation Day will provide an opportunity for millions of law-abiding citizens and their families to exercise their Second Amendment rights by either visiting a gun shop or shooting range, going hunting during a late season, or even attending one of the many gun shows or sportsmen's shows that are scheduled on the weekend of Jan. 19-20 at various locations around the country. We encourage people to bring American flags or signs promoting firearms ownership and gun rights.

This will be an opportunity for new people to be introduced to shooting and responsible firearms ownership, and for firearms owners to enjoy activities that are protected by the Bill of Rights.

Tens of millions of gun owners have harmed nobody, and they should not be penalized for the acts of a madman. It has never been the American way to punish the innocent, yet when it comes to firearms ownership, we have recently seen a newspaper expose thousands of citizens to public scorn and ridicule by invading their privacy as licensed gun owners in New York State and



publishing their names and home addresses. We have seen gun owners demonized and even threatened with violence.

Gun prohibitionists have been calling for a "national dialogue" about guns and violent crime. Gun Appreciation Day is part of that dialogue, because millions of citizens will essentially go about their typical weekend routines that just happen to include firearms-related activities. Their actions will speak louder than words.

Actually, every day in America might be a Gun Appreciation Day. Every day, somewhere, people visit gun shops and sporting goods stores, they spend time in a basement or workshop at the reloading bench or working on a gun-related project, and in thousands of cases, they use a firearm to defend themselves or their families from harm.

Firearms ownership is part of the American fabric. We are unique among nations in protecting our civil liberties and constitutional rights. Gun Appreciation Day will underscore public support for that tradition.

Alan Gottlieb is founder and executive vice president of the Second Amendment Foundation, and chairman of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms.

Obama 'determined to act' on gun restrictions

By Oliver North

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

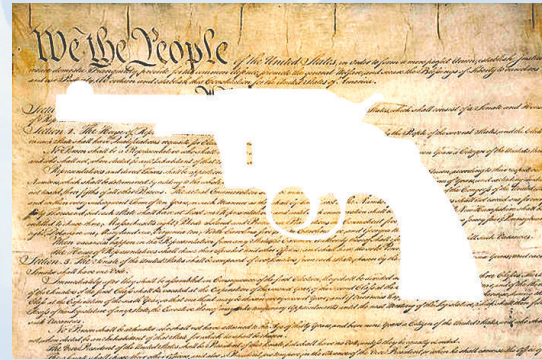
Full disclosure right up front: I'm a proud life member of the National Rifle Association. I am on the NRA's board of directors and serve as chairman of the organization's Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee. I have owned and used firearms most of my life, and I can read. Unlike some in Washington, I don't believe that the 27 words above — the Second Amendment of our Constitution — have anything to do with "gun rights." Guns don't have rights. I do. So do you.

Fifty-two years ago, like tens of millions of people before and since, I raised my right hand and took an oath of enlistment in our armed forces, pledging to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." I promised I would "bear true faith and allegiance to the same." Notably, the words

promise loyalty not to a political party or a particular individual but to the Constitution, which enshrines our liberties and the limits and responsibilities of those who govern us like no other foundational document on earth.

Unfortunately, in the aftermath of recent carnage in a Colorado movie theater and a rampage at an elementary school in Connecticut, some now insist that "We the People" must accept some alterations in how we interpret the "archaic" language contained in our Constitution. On Jan. 9, after a meeting with "gun safety advocates" and "victims groups," Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., head of the "White House task force on gun violence," said the Obama administration is "determined to take action" and then added: "The president is going to act. There are executive orders, executive action that can be taken. We haven't decided what that is yet."

Those words, "executive orders, executive action," used in conjunction with constitutionally protected rights and liberties, ought to alarm us all. They used to frighten Barack Obama. On Oct. 2, 2007, then-Sen. Obama railed against what he called the abuse of executive powers purportedly perpetrated by President George W. Bush in his administration's efforts to protect the American people from acts of terror by radical Islamists. Apparently, the current occupant of the Oval Office has overcome his early concerns about chief executives exceeding their authority.



When the Biden task force was announced three weeks ago, the president claimed that no policy proposals would be "prejudged." Yet after the Jan. 10 White House meeting with firearms manufacturers, firearms retailers, sportsmen and a

representative of the NRA, neither Mr. Biden nor Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. even mentioned the NRA's call for increased prosecution of violent criminals and those who break existing federal firearms laws.

While the meeting was under way in the Cabinet Room, a teenager carrying a 12-gauge shotgun walked into a high-school classroom in Taft, Calif., and opened fire,

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DIPLOMATIC MISSTEP

By Jose R. Cardenas

More than a decade's worth of Hugo Chavez gutting his country's democratic institutions and centralizing power in his person has led to the present turmoil in Venezuela, where it is no longer clear just who is the country's constitutional leader. According to the Venezuelan constitution, Jan. 10 was the day Mr. Chavez was to be sworn in for his fourth presidential following his reelection last October. However, he remains sequestered somewhere in a Cuban hospital recovering from reportedly his fourth cancer surgery and hasn't been seen or heard from since Dec. 8.

If the president-elect was unable to take the oath of office by Jan. 10, according to the Venezuelan constitution, then power was to be transferred to a successor, the president of the National Assembly, currently former military man Diosdado Cabello. Yet, the Chavez-packed Venezuelan supreme court decided that his swearing-in could be postponed "indefinitely." This means with Mr. Chavez nowhere in sight and his medical condition unknown, Venezuela's nominal leader is Vice President Nicolas Maduro,

whom Mr. Chavez anointed as his successor last month before disappearing. The Venezuelan opposition, however, is demanding that the government follow the constitution.

As if that is not complicated enough, it turns out that both Mr. Maduro and Mr. Cabello lead disparate factions within chavismo that could come to loggerheads when it is finally announced that Mr. Chavez has succumbed to cancer. Mr. Maduro is also favored by the Cubans and chavismo's most ardent ideological adherents. Mr. Cabello, a wily survivor, represents the military and, more importantly, is seen as the protector of high-ranking Venezuelan military officials who have been designated as drug traffickers by the United States or are under current investigation.

It is into this morass that the U.S. State Department has currently waded with a full-blown attempt to "reset" U.S.-Venezuelan relations, which are in tatters due to Mr. Chavez's relentless hostility. Last month, former Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega disclosed the news in Washington that high-ranking department

A bad time to cozy up to Venezuela

Factions on the rise as ailing Chavez misses swearing-in



ILLUSTRATION BY GREG GROESCH

officials had begun discreet talks in November with Mr. Maduro and Venezuela's ambassador to the Organization of American States, Roy Chaderton, with the simplistic purpose of restoring ambassadors in both capitals

following the re-elections of both President Obama and Mr. Chavez.

The idea of restoring diplomatic ties with the Chavez government without getting anything in return is troubling,

It is difficult to imagine why we would seek "normal" relations with a government that openly supports rogue nations like Iran and Syria, has turned Venezuela into a prime crossroads of drug trafficking in the Americas, protects Colombian terrorists, and runs roughshod over democracy at home.

There is an institutional crisis running amok in Venezuela, and State Department officials continue to tout their desire to rebuild ties.

Who stands to benefit from such a move? To say the situation remains fluid is a titanic understatement. We don't know Mr. Chavez's condition or whether he is ever coming back. The democratic opposition is questioning the constitutionality of the process. We have no assurance about what will happen upon Mr. Chavez's death. Moreover, the United States would be inserting itself

in a power struggle between Mr. Maduro and Mr. Cabello.

Does this really sound like a propitious moment to pursue normalizing relations?

Someone in the administration may have thought it was

a good idea last November to reach out to Mr. Chavez — that's disturbing enough. Given the drastic turn of events, pressing forward on this initiative borders on reckless. Are we going to recognize a new chavista government in Venezuela before securing any concessions? Or are we planning to exchange ambassadors and then hope for the best? Does it matter to us whether the next elections are no fairer or more transparent than the last?

The administration would do better to immediately pull back this initiative, allow the uncertain transition process to play out, and support the opposition's calls for an open, transparent and constitutional resolution to the crisis. Moreover, this would allow the next secretary of state, presumably John Kerry, and his team to have a better understanding of who is in charge and, if the new team so chooses, leverage U.S. policy to get counternarcotics and pro-democracy commitments from Mr. Chavez's successors.

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