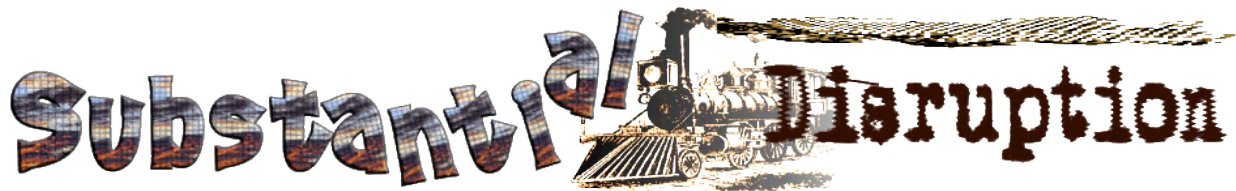


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The 2nd Amendment's Strongest Supporters Are Its Greatest Threat

By Mike Tully

The Second Amendment is in jeopardy, but not for the reason you might suspect. While some gun control advocates have called for its repeal, they do not endanger it. The greatest threat to the Second Amendment comes from its most ardent advocates.

Most Americans support the Second Amendment and agree that it preserves an individual's right to bear arms. They also support limitations on the right, including universal background checks, red flag laws, and keeping military-grade weapons away from teenagers. A majority opposes the sale of such weapons altogether.

Those limitations wouldn't violate the Amendment. Justice Antonin Scalia, who wrote the opinion establishing the individual right to bear arms, made that clear. "Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment right is not unlimited," he wrote. He added that it's "not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose."

But Second Amendment absolutists oppose any restrictions and, by doing so, endanger it. Here's an example: In 2016, then State Representative Randall Friese introduced a bill requiring universal background checks for all gun sales in Arizona. Friese is a trauma surgeon who has treated victims of gun violence, including former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords.

"We need to make it more difficult for someone who is prohibited from having a weapon from getting a weapon," Friese told the *Phoenix New Times*. "You shouldn't be able to go online and say, 'Meet me in the parking lot. I'll sell you a gun.'"

Charles Heller, a Tucsonan who was President of the Arizona Citizen's Defense League at the time, denounced the proposal. He characterized Friese's plea for background checks as a "violation of his oath of office."

Heller is a local iteration of the National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre, who vehemently condemns any limitation on the right to bear arms. LaPierre's most famous quote is, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." Good guys with guns took down a bad guy with a gun in Dayton, Ohio, in thirty seconds. That's how it's supposed to work, right? Unfortunately, thirty seconds was enough time to mow down a city block, killing nine people and injuring dozens of others.

Recently, a bad guy with a gun slaughtered nineteen children and two teachers in a school in Texas. Good guys with guns were present – cowering in the hallway.

Heller and LaPierre take an absolutist view of the Second Amendment. That is how they are killing it.

Every time a state or congressional representative proposes reforms like universal background checks, red flag laws, or limitations on high-capacity magazines, the Hellers and LaPierres denounce the proposals as unconstitutional infringements on the right to bear arms. Sufficient lawmakers in Arizona and Washington agree with them to undermine any attempt to make the use of firearms safer.

Whenever gun safety measures are proposed, they go nowhere. And every time the reason is the same: the Second Amendment forbids it. How many Americans, including American school children, must perish at the altar of the Second Amendment before Americans question whether it's actually necessary?

The absolutist interpretation of the Second Amendment has turned it into a tragically failed social experiment. It doesn't have to be that way, but those like Heller and LaPierre are forcing the issue. Every time they use the Second Amendment as a shibboleth against even the most modest and popular gun reforms, more Americans come to doubt its value. Eventually, there will be a tipping point and the Second Amendment will be repealed.

When that day comes, Heller and LaPierre won't have to point fingers to identify who killed their precious Second Amendment. All they'll need to do is look in the mirror.