

NRA Supports Bullet Ban

Editor's Note

Whatever thoughts Neal Knox had entertained about returning to Arizona disappeared when he saw a *Washington Times* story about his successor at ILA appearing with Ted Kennedy and other leaders of the gun prohibition movement to endorse a bullet ban. A version of this piece appeared in a prototype *Hard Corps Report* which went out to a borrowed mailing list under a cover date of July 4, 1984. The recipients of that mailing formed the basis of his launch of The Firearms Coalition.

June 25, 1984

For once, Sen. Edward Kennedy had it right: “The fact that we are here together today with the NRA and the leaders of the effort for handgun control is as significant as the actual legislation that we are introducing.” The occasion was a June 15 press conference in the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing room, called by Chairman Strom Thurmond to announce the armor piercing bullet compromise bill that the Reagan Administration, NRA, Handgun Control Inc. and a host of law enforcement organizations had endorsed, and which 76 Senators had co-sponsored.

NRA-ILA Executive Director J. Warren Cassidy told the *Washington Times*: “We support the proposal ... because it does not impact on gun owners or a single round of conventional ammunition.”

To the best of my knowledge, it's the first time in history that NRA has *ever* supported an outright ban on manufacture of any form of firearm or ammunition. Even in 1934—when the NRA supported the National Firearms Act, which put the Federal government in the firearms law business—the bill levied a heavy tax upon machine guns rather than any form of prohibition.

If, indeed, there were no impact upon gun owners, what business does the NRA have in endorsing it, much less actively seeking co-sponsors on the Hill—as the ILA staff has been ordered to do. But in fact, the bill does impact upon gun owners, for many experimentally minded handloaders have over the years turned out solid bullets on lathes, either to attain high velocities or in an effort to achieve improved accuracy. And many have made non-deforming hard core bullets for special hunting needs. If this bill passes—and there seems little doubt that it will—any handloader who makes such a bullet is subject to \$10,000 fine and 10 years imprisonment.

However, that's not the point. The greatest impact of this legislation is that it destroys a fundamental principle: *criminal behavior cannot be controlled by controlling inanimate objects.*

Because of that principle, and because there is no advantage to gun owners, I know of no other firearms organizations supporting the bill.

The bill, S.2766/H.R.5845, contains two major elements. First, a prohibition on the importation and manufacture, except for military, police or export, of solid bullets or bullets (for any firearm) with cores made of tungsten alloys, steel, iron, brass, bronze, beryllium copper, or depleted uranium. The exceptions are steel shot, frangible (sintered metal) target bullets, or “any projectile which the Secretary (of Treasury) finds is primarily intended to be used for sporting purposes.”

Secondly, the bill provides for a mandatory 5-year sentence for using or carrying a firearm “during and in relation to the commission of a violent felony” (defined to include feloniously shooting a hole in a water tank) while “in possession of armor piercing ammunition capable of being fired in that firearm.”

Since it's true that the bill has only a marginal direct effect on gun owners, it would be preferable to a loosely worded bill like Moynihan/Biaggi's prohibition against any “handgun” bullet that would penetrate a Kevlar vest—if such a bill were about to pass. But that wasn't the case; Cassidy sent a letter to the NRA Board announcing NRA support and stating that the Moynihan/Biaggi bill had been defeated. Sen. Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) thought so, too, for in response to a question as to whether he was satisfied with the bill, he said: “We were about to get nothing two months ago. This isn't the time to get picky.”

In a press release, Cassidy said “the legislation would serve as a viable legislative vehicle to protect our nation's police. That is of paramount importance to the NRA, because tens of thousands of our members are law enforcement officers.”

Sen. Thurmond said: “I don't know of any more important piece of

legislation that could be advocated that would do more to protect our law enforcement officers than this particular piece of legislation.”

What nonsense! What about putting an end to light sentences for repeat offenders—and executing a few vicious murderers? The Justice Department just released a study showing that the average murderer or rapist served an average of two to four years; so Congress proposes a five year mandatory minimum for committing virtually non-existent crimes with AP bullets.

During the press conference Sen. Al D’Amato (R-NY) thanked Rep. Mario Biaggi “who called our attention to the fact that, yes indeed, two police officers had lost their lives. They had the Kevlar vests on. [Another] one was injured very seriously.”

Sen. D’Amato’s office admitted that the Senator was incorrect; Rep. Biaggi’s office acknowledged that there’s never been a known case of a police officer killed by a so-called “Cop Killer Bullet” having penetrated a vest.

As Rep. Biaggi’s office confirmed, there is only one known case of police officers being killed with AP ammunition. In 1976, two officers in Florida were killed, reportedly with KTW armor piercing 9mm ammunition—by shots to the head. Not that it would have made any difference, neither was wearing Kevlar light armor. In 1974, a Federal building guard in Baltimore who was wearing a vest, was shot with his own gun; the bullet failed to penetrate. However, shortly afterwards, the guard was shot by another bullet which penetrated the vest, pierced his body, and pierced the other panel of the vest as it exited. He didn’t see who fired the shot, or with what, and the bullet was never recovered, but the examiners believe it may have been a 9mm. I suspect he was shot with a center-fire rifle.

This bill is a phony solution to a phony problem. It is solely a response to a media campaign orchestrated by Handgun Control Inc.—the same type of campaign that they have run in the past against all handguns, small handguns, and soft-nosed expanding bullets (the exact opposite of their present effort), all aimed at nibbling away firearms ownership. The Treasury Department letter transmitting the bill to the Judiciary Committee states that its purpose is to limit hard core bullets to those “who may have legitimate needs for this ammunition.” How many times have we been told in recent years that we have no “legitimate need” for various handguns, or scoped rifles, or autoloading rifles and shotguns, or any firearm?

The greatest danger, and the greatest impact of this legislation upon gun owners, is the message that the NRA is sending to the Congress.

As Sen. Kennedy interpreted that message: “Some things really do change—I believe the NRA no longer feels it must resist any and all efforts in Congress to strengthen the existing law in ways that will help

keep handguns out of the hands of criminals to protect our citizens from handgun crime.”

What might prove him wrong is for NRA to get behind a budding effort to amend the bill by attaching the *original* McClure-Volkmer bill. Since Sen. Thurmond’s Judiciary Committee is sitting on a version of the McClure bill, six weeks after voting to pass it, and since the AP bullet bill is on a high-speed track in both Houses, that looks like the only way to pass McClure-Volkmer this year.

If we’re going to accept something that—at best—offers nothing good for gun owners, we might as well get something good out of it. I thought that’s what “compromise” meant.

Welcome to the New NRA

Editor’s Note

This piece is a summary of a report on the 1984 NRA convention in Phoenix that appeared in *Rolling Stone*. Written under the sardonic pen name “Wright Bledsoe,” it appeared in *Gun Week*. The demographics of *Rolling Stone* virtually guaranteed that it would be seen by few NRA members, but Knox felt that the members needed to see it.

The pseudonym fooled no one who followed the issue, but provided enough cover that reporters from the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* might miss that Neal had written the article. The intent of using the pen name was to keep the family fight within the family.

October 25, 1984

Rolling Stone, whose editor and publisher is chairman of a new anti-gun foundation, has given unexpected and unusual praise to the National Rifle Association for having “shed its guns ‘n’ bluster image. It’s trying to make shooting respectable again.”

While *Rolling Stone* is a rock music publication, it started as an underground newspaper and remains a mouthpiece for “trendy left”