

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
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NRA

March 14, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We read your editorial submission to the Arizona Star. However, to focus a national dialogue on guns – and not criminals or mental health issues – misses the point entirely. Americans are not afraid of gun ownership. To the contrary, they overwhelmingly support the fundamental, individual right to keep and bear arms. The primary reason why tens of millions of Americans own firearms is that they fear violent criminals roaming the streets undeterred.

We agree with your assertion that “Americans by and large rightly refrained from finger-pointing” in light of the shooting in Tucson. In truth, the professional corps of gun control lobbyists moved with lightning speed to exploit the tragedy. These included the Violence Policy Center (“In the wake of these kind of incidents, the trick is to move quickly”), the Brady Campaign (“Gabrielle Giffords Shooting ‘Inevitable’”) and Mayors Against Illegal Guns-MAIG (“Bloomberg, Mayors Outline Steps to Help Prevent Another Tucson Shooting”). Your article contains talking points nearly identical to the ones circulated by MAIG for weeks in pursuit of its longstanding gun control agenda. In contrast, it was the National Rifle Association that avoided “playing politics with other people’s pain” with our consistent response that only thoughts and prayers for the victims and their families were appropriate in the immediate aftermath.

We also agree with your statement that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms. Your record as a public official, however, is anything but supportive of the rights of law-abiding gun owners. In fact, when Congress had an opportunity to voice its support for the basic right of lawful Americans to own firearms, you refused to join a bipartisan majority of more than 300 of your colleagues in signing the congressional amicus brief to the Supreme Court in *District of Columbia v. Heller*. In addition, you previously stated (and have never retracted) your support for both Washington, D.C.’s and Chicago’s handgun and self-defense bans that the Court rightfully struck down in *Heller* and *McDonald v. Chicago*. Further, you surrounded yourself with advisors who have advocated against the Second Amendment for years (Eric Holder, Hillary Clinton and Rahm Emanuel, to name just a few) and you nominated Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan to the U.S. Supreme Court, one of whom has already attempted to

eliminate the Second Amendment right entirely. More recently, you selected Andrew Traver to head the BATFE, despite his long-standing association with groups that support onerous new restrictions on our rights.

If you do in fact believe the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right, we suggest you demonstrate that in your policies and those of your Administration, which you have not done to date. Simply saying that you support the right to keep and bear arms is mere lip service if not put into action.

The government owes its citizens its most vigorous efforts to enforce penalties against those who violate our existing laws. The NRA has members proudly serving in law enforcement agencies at every level. Rank and file law enforcement want to arrest bad people – not harass law-abiding gun owners and retailers.

As for enforcing the laws on the books, we strongly suggest you enforce those that actually take violent criminals off the streets. To start, we urge you to contact every U.S. Attorney and ask them to bring at least ten cases per month against drug dealers, gang members and other violent felons caught illegally possessing firearms. By prosecuting these criminals in federal court – rather than state court – strong sentencing guidelines would apply and charges would not be plea-bargained or dismissed, nor would criminals be released after serving only a fraction of their sentences. This simple directive would result in roughly 12,000 violent criminals being taken off the streets every year. Surely you agree that this would be a good first step.

Unfortunately, your Administration is currently under a cloud for allegedly encouraging violations of federal law. We suggest that you bring an immediate stop to BATFE's "Fast and Furious" operation, in which an unknown number of illegal firearm transactions were detected – and then encouraged to fruition by your BATFE, which allegedly decided to let thousands of firearms "walk" across the border and into the hands of murderous drug cartels. One federal officer has recently been killed and no one can predict what mayhem will still ensue. Despite the protests of gun dealers who wished to terminate these transactions, your Administration reportedly encouraged violations of federal firearms laws – and undermined the firearm industry's concerted efforts to deter straw purchases through the "Don't Lie for the Other Guy" program. We hope you agree with our belief that this burgeoning scandal merits a full and independent investigation.

There are additional steps you can take to prevent tragic events such as the Tucson shooting from occurring in the future. One of these is to call on the national news media to refrain from giving deranged criminals minute-by-minute coverage of their heinous acts, which only serves to encourage copycat behavior. If media outlets won't show a fan running onto the field during a baseball game because they don't want to encourage that behavior by others – surely they can listen to law enforcement experts and refuse to air the photographs, video messages, or Facebook postings of madmen and murderers.

Another step is to encourage people to report red flags when they see them. In the case of Tucson, a man clearly bent on violence was not reported to the proper authorities by those

who had good reason to believe he had serious mental problems. That's not a deficiency in our gun laws, it's a deficiency in our mental health system – and should be treated as such.

In closing, we agree that gun owners in America are highly responsible. This is in large part due to the NRA's 140 years of dedication to promoting safe and responsible gun ownership, an effort on which we take a back seat to no one. We welcome any serious discussion on policies that focus on prosecuting criminals and fixing deficiencies in the mental health system. Any proposals to the contrary are not a legitimate approach to the issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne La Pierre". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wayne" and last name "La Pierre" clearly legible.

Wayne La Pierre
Executive Vice President
National Rifle Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris W. Cox". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Cox" being the most prominent parts.

Chris W. Cox
Executive Director
NRA-ILA