

Closing The Gun Show Loophole Is Only One Way Citizens Want To Tighten The Noose On Illegal Gun Buyers

By Buford Scott

Keeping the gun show loophole open and turning a deaf ear to other security-minded crime Bills will not only cost the Commonwealth a few more precious lives, it will continue to erode our quality of life and the faith we have placed in our elected officials.

On January 31, 2005, the Richmond Times-Dispatch eloquently defended the Virginia Senate's recent vote down the proposed Bill to close the gun show loophole. This Bill would require unlicensed, private gun sellers at Virginia's gun shows to conduct background checks on gun purchasers – the exact same requirement that all federally-licensed dealers currently follow. The editorial staff's perspective suggests that this Bill's marginal impact on crime reduction – an estimated 2% of crime guns come from gun shows – is simply not worth effort and cost of giving up any personal liberties guaranteed by the 2nd Amendment.

As a life long hunter and citizen of this Commonwealth, I respectfully submit that the Richmond Times-Dispatch, as well as a few uninformed Senators, are out of step with the people that keep they serve. The vast majority of the citizens of Virginia, including gun owners, are more than willing to put up with a few inconveniences for *any gain* in public safety. If it means only eliminating 2% of the problem so be it. Both sides agree there is no one silver bullet that will solve the crime gun problem. So, the answer must come from small, sensible steps. Two percent (2%) here and 2% there will eventually add up to a safer society. And, this is what the public wants.

Crime & Availability Of Guns Impacts Everyone's Quality Of Life

According to the Fall 2004 Crime & Safety Study conducted by the Southeastern Institute of Research, 76% of the registered voters rated the Richmond Metropolitan area's current quality of life as "excellent" or "good." However, people believe our quality of life is under attack. Crime is perceived to be on the rise and is perceived as the single biggest threat to our region's quality of life (60% name it so and nothing else comes close). Simply put, crime is having a profound impact on life as we know it.

People say they are doing many things less because of crime — including visiting certain neighborhoods; going downtown to shop; dining or attending cultural events; recommending friends visit Richmond; and going out after dark. This slow but sure erosion of our quality of life will eventually impact everyone, whether it is directly through some tragic crime-related event or higher taxes to support enhanced public safety services.

Citizens see guns as part of the problem. Three-quarters of Metro Richmond area registered voters believe the availability of guns is directly related to the level of crime. Not surprisingly, more than half (57%) feel that greater control of gun sales would reduce the level of crime.

Virginians Support Sensible Crime Gun Controls

Citizens of Virginia and Metro Richmond have had enough. There is now an undeniable level of wide-spread support, including support from gun owners, for enacting new sensible gun control laws, no matter how small a contribution to crime reduction any one law will have. This includes a statewide mandate to close the gun show loophole.

A total of 84% of registered voters across Virginia (compared to 89% in Metro Richmond) support new legislation to close the gun show loophole. Support for closing the gun show loophole is strong throughout all regions of the Commonwealth (ranging from 80%-90% support) and across all segments of society.

Even gun owners and those experienced with guns supported this Bill. In Metro Richmond, 83% of registered voters who have a gun in their household support closing the gun show loophole as do 82% who have used a gun in self-defense. And what "personal rights" are at stake in terms of giving up our individual rights? A private gun seller would have to pay \$5 to the gun show promoter to have a background check run on the potential buyer, the exact same procedure required of all of the federally licensed dealers at the same show.

And, who knows what a background check may uncover. Timothy McVeigh and David Koresh may be two of the best known gun show customers that slipped through the loophole. There may be lesser known, but equally discomfoting transactions happening in Virginia's gun shows. What will it take to find out?

Eighteen (18) other states decided not to wait. They have recently closed the gun show loophole. Virginia continues to isolate itself. We are now the only state from North Carolina to Maine that refuses to close the loophole. That makes Virginia, in general, and Richmond, specifically, a major destination on the firearms freeway to New York and Philadelphia.

President Bush is in favor of closing the gun show loophole and Congress is taking steps to enact legislation to require that everyone who buys a firearm at a gun show to undergo a thorough background check. But, from a State that invented states rights, why should we have to turn to the federal government for any crime gun legislation. We should take care of the problem ourselves.

It's Time To Act

The work starts with educating our elected officials who are seemingly out of step with their constituents. Their impassioned fight for our personal liberties is simply lost on most of the citizens they represent. Why should we continue to let the well-oiled gun lobby hijack our elected officials? Now is the time to put this issue back in hands of the people who created the 2nd Amendment – the democratic process where majority rules. The numbers are unassailable. The vast majority of registered voters want more control over guns.

Call your representative and tell them you are part of the 79% of the voting public who feel controlling gun sales will be an important issue in deciding which candidate to support in the

next election for your state representative. Remind them that the 2% reduction in crime guns is 100% when it involves someone in your immediate family.