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Gun rights hero today, gun goat tomorrow

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Marty Trillhaase |

Right, center-right, or centrist (and even left of center) Idaho politicians dare not get on the wrong side of the gun issue. But where's the line - and who draws it?

GunPAC? On its website, the political action committee described itself as "... a group of individuals, citizens, businesses, and organizations gathered with the intent to protect and enhance our Second Amendment rights in our national, state and local elections. To this end, we seek to identify, support, and advocate for the conservative political candidates who share our common ideals."



So how do the people behind GunPAC - political activist Lou Esposito and House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star - explain GunPAC weighing in on the 5th Legislative District Senate race between Republicans Gresham Bouma and Barrett Schroeder?

Bouma got GunPAC's nod, yet both candidates rate an "AQ" from the National Rifle Association. That means both scored an A on the NRA questionnaire. But because neither has held office and has no voting record, the NRA withheld making an endorsement.

If the NRA seal of approval isn't the gold standard, what is? How about this? Schroeder's father, former state Sen. Gary Schroeder, R-Moscow, owns Moscow Hide and Fur. Barrett Schroeder manages the business. Their clients are hunters. You can't get much more pro-gun rights than that.

Except, perhaps, for someone who actually sells guns.

That would be state Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa.

Perry has an NRA A-plus rating. She has the NRA endorsement. And she owns a gun shop in Boise.

Yet the Esposito-led group has endorsed Matt Dorsey of Nampa.

"We take the NRA ratings and (incumbent) voters very seriously looking at that, but then we have our other considerations that we look at and evaluate," Esposito told the Moscow-Pullman Daily News' Brandon Macz last week. "If they don't have those issues right, then it even defeats the purpose of the Second Amendment. If they are eroding our personal liberties in other areas, that's the evaluation."

"Other considerations," it turns out, includes political vendettas. Bouma is a Tea Party favorite. Perry had the temerity to knock off a Moyle ally, former state Rep. Steve Kren, R-Nampa, two years ago. And GunPAC, of course, is the financial jackhammer Esposito and Moyle are using against House Caucus Chairman Ken Roberts, R-Donnelly. John Blattler of Boise is GunPAC's choice in the race, even though Roberts has an A-minus from the NRA - and the NRA endorsement.

So you'll just have to trust the NRA.

But can you?

Long before the gun lobby was out promoting concealed weapons in every possible venue, guns on college campuses and stand-your-ground laws, it was, well, a tad reasonable when it came to gun control.

Dig through the NRA's history, as Jill Lepore did for the New Yorker last month, and you'll find these tidbits:

- In the 1920s and 1930s, it supported waiting periods for handgun purchases and requiring people who wanted to carry concealed weapons to get a permit.
- The NRA supported the first major federal gun control law - the 1934 National Firearms Act - as well as the 1938 Federal Firearms Act, which put automatic weapons beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.
- After Lee Harvey Oswald used a rifle he purchased through the mail to murder President John F. Kennedy, the federal government imposed new restrictions. And the NRA's executive vice president, Franklin L. Orth, had this to say: "We do not think that any sane American, who calls himself an American, can object to placing into this bill the instrument which killed the president of the United States."
- A wave of gun violence and political assassination triggered more restrictions in 1968, and while Orth said some provisions "appear unduly restrictive and unjustified in their application to law-abiding citizens, the measure as a whole appears to be one that the sportsmen of America can live with."

So who was the true champion of gun owners? Your father's NRA? Or the current version?

All of which tells you one thing: If you rely on any organization's assurances of who is pro- or anti-gun rights, you could be fooled. - M.T.

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