

Guns - Colorado

High school shooting puts about-face on guns in Colo.

By Valerie Richardson
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

DENVER — A year ago, it would have been tough to find a state with more momentum behind the gun-rights issue than Colorado.

Republican Gov. Bill Owens was poised to sign a bill allowing residents to carry concealed weapons. Meanwhile, the National Rifle Association was gearing up to trumpet the victory at its annual convention here, the group's swagger evident by its huge billboard downtown of the NRA's president, Charlton Heston.

The situation today couldn't be much different. The Republican-controlled state legislature has made gun control its first priority, scheduling hearings on a slew of related bills — including a package of firearms restrictions proposed by none other than Mr. Owens.

What changed the political dynamic was, of course, the tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton. The April 20 shooting rampage that left 15 dead, including the two teen-age gunmen, is clearly weighing on the minds of state legislators across the nation as they get back to business this month.

In California, for example, the state legislature has put gun control at the top of its agenda, despite the pleas of Democratic Gov. Gray Davis to wait until last year's laws take full effect. Democratic legis-

lators are jockeying for the privilege of carrying bills that would require licensing, registration and proficiency testing for handgun purchases.

Still, the political shift is most obvious in Colorado, where Republicans dominate the political scene; where the state's favorite elected official, Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, appears in NRA ads; and where hunting is almost as popular as skiing and snowboarding.

In his State of the State speech earlier this month, Mr. Owens surprised gun-control advocates — and enraged opponents — by laying out a five-point plan to promote gun safety. His proposals, devised with Democratic Attorney General Ken Salazar, call for banning "straw purchases," meaning those made for someone who cannot legally buy a gun; requiring safe storage of firearms; raising the legal age to buy a gun from 18 to 21; including juvenile records in background checks; and requiring background checks at gun shows.

"Let me be clear: The Second Amendment guarantees that law-abiding citizens have a right to own firearms," said Mr. Owens in his speech. "But we must take common-sense steps to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals."

State Sen. MaryAnne Tebedo of Colorado Springs plans to reintroduce the concealed-carry bill,

but Dick Wadhams, the governor's spokesman, says Mr. Owens won't support it this time.

"It's too soon after Columbine to entertain that," said Mr. Wadhams.

A suburban Republican known for his leadership on education and tax reform, Mr. Owens has never led the charge on Second Amendment issues, although he has consistently sided with his rural GOP counterparts on gun rights in the past.

John Head, co-founder of SAFE (Sane Alternatives to the Firearms Epidemic) Colorado, a gun-control group, says he believes the governor has undergone a genuine transformation in the wake of the Columbine tragedy.

"I think [Mr. Owens] has had a change of heart," said Mr. Head, who supports the governor's proposals. "I think he's learned some things since he witnessed the carnage at Columbine. He walked through the library and saw the computers still on and the knapsacks on the floor with blood everywhere, and that had to be incredibly moving."

But some analysts say the governor's move to the left is also grounded in political reality. By getting in front of the issue with a modest gun-safety package, he can steal the spotlight from his party's right wing and thus avoid a political drubbing by the Democrats in November.

Edwards trial to open in Louisiana

Ex-governor accused of corruption in deals for casinos

By Hugh Aynesworth
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

BATON ROUGE, La. — The prosecution opens its case against former Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards this week, trying to prove that he lied, cheated and stole millions in a scheme to sell lucrative riverboat-gambling franchises.

The raconteur, gambler and silver-tongued orator is one of seven defendants charged with myriad offenses. They range from extortion and mail fraud to money laundering, lying under oath, racketeering, even illegal wiretapping. His lawyer son, Stephen, 44, also is a defendant.

Conviction on several of the charges could mean five years in prison each. On the extortion and racketeering counts, a guilty verdict could amount to a 20-year sentence.

Thus, considering his age, 72, conviction could mean the slick Cajun politician's final years might be spent in federal prison.

"This is crunch time for Eddie," said Robert Wilson, a Baton Rouge civil service employee who said he met Mr. Edwards at Las Vegas gambling casinos in the 1980s and later played poker with him here. "This is when he shines, when the pressure is on."

And shine Mr. Edwards has, particularly when faced with criminal prosecution. Twice previously, in 1985 and 1986, the government took the wheeler-dealer governor to trial — and twice they

came away with only huge expenditures and no convictions.

The first time, he fought federal charges that he financially benefited from the state's awarding of nursing-home franchises; a jury deadlocked, causing a mistrial. The second time, Mr. Edwards was found not guilty.

John Volz, now a Covington, La., lawyer, was the chief prosecutor in those trials. He could not get a jury to understand the complex licensing scheme and had little more than paperwork, some of it open to contradiction, to prove his case.

This time, the government has a powerful array of witnesses, hundreds of hours of recorded telephone conversations and photographic surveillance — so much, some lawyers contend, that it might actually work in favor of the still-popular ex-governor.

"But the tapes give the government a 30 to 40 percent advantage right off the bat," said Mr. Volz.

"I think there is so much evidence here that some jurors might begin to feel it's just too much," said one Baton Rouge lawyer familiar with much of the government's case. "You've heard so much about how the feds overload in a situation like this, fostering all sorts of conspiracy allegations. I think they'd better make it as simple as possible," he said.

U.S. District Judge Frank Polozola today will finalize a jury that has been winnowed down to 50. The prosecution will get nine peremptory challenges, where they

can ask that potential jurors be removed from the venire list for no stated cause. The defense has been given 15.

The judge has said he would seat 12 jurors and six alternates — an unusually high number of alternates, though the trial is expected to last more than three months.

Depending on how long final jury selection takes today, opening arguments could begin late in the afternoon. Most participants think the judge will set arguments for early tomorrow morning.

The makeup of the final 50 includes 21 white men, 18 white women, seven black men and four black women.

Several well-known Louisiana politicians and businessmen are expected to testify, as well as former San Francisco 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo Jr., who paid Mr. Edwards \$400,000 — he claims — to win the state's final riverboat casino-gambling license.

Another possible witness might be a former Louisiana congressman, Cleo Fields, who reportedly was caught on a surveillance camera accepting cash from Mr. Edwards.

One source close to the investigation told The Washington Times that Mr. Fields was recorded in March 1997 accepting a bundle of cash and being warned, "make sure that everybody involved is careful about how that's passed out."

Once upon a time

Overwhelmed briefly by politics, we ducked into the children's section of Borders bookstore on 18th Street NW to reread "Green Eggs and Ham."

What is America coming to? In the way of Dr. Seuss was the life story of Bill Bradley, former New Jersey senator and 2000 presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. The small book's print was so large it resembled the type of story parents read to their children at bedtime.

Except in this sleepy-time tale, there's no green ham, Cat in the Hat, Yertle the Turtle, or our Seuss favorite, "You're Only Old Once."

Official position

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin, asked to remark last week about the deadline for the latest round of Israeli and Palestinian peace talks, replied: "It's certainly our view that mid-February is fast approaching!"

Greyber's government

Maryland has a rather unusual candidate for the Republican nomination for the Senate.

Howard David Greyber, a U.S. Navy officer in wartime, is a Ph.D. physicist who helped design our thermonuclear weapons at Livermore National Laboratory in the 1950s.

Later, the Potomac resident was involved in space research, and during the 1980s, with the Defense Intelligence Agency spe-

cializing on foreign nuclear-weapons research, prepared intelligence briefings for Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger.

Mr. Greyber graduated from a unique science high school, Stuyvesant in New York City, which requires passing an exam to enter. That challenged him, he tells this column, and forever changed his life.

"There are very few such public high schools in this nation of 275 million people," says the physicist, who also worked on the Viking Mars project. "Stuyvesant produced three Nobel Prize winners, and its sister school, Bronx High School of Science, produced five."

Which leads us to Mr. Greyber's political platform, if one can call it that. He proposes the federal government, over the next seven years, fund and build 435 public high schools of science, like Stuyvesant. There would be one in each congressional district — "locally controlled," he stresses.

"At a time of budget surpluses, the cost is reasonable," he says. "Building 63 such schools per year, at a cost of \$3.8 billion per year, would cost less than \$27 billion over seven years, about half

INSIDER VIEW BELTWAY

By John McCaslin



Ex-President Dwight Eisenhower is a source of inspiration for a would-be senator from Maryland.

the cost of the Apollo Space Project when corrected for inflation."

Mr. Greyber says Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Mississippi Republican, liked his idea, although the latter expressed concern about possible meddling by

federal bureaucrats.

He feels the science schools would "exert a strong positive influence on all public education" as parents in feeder elementary and middle schools demand courses be improved so their children have a reasonable chance to pass the entrance exam.

"Thus, revolutionizing American public school education," the physicist explains. Mr. Greyber's own three children hold M.D., M.B.A. and M.A. academic degrees.

"President John Adams wrote, 'The preservation of the means of knowledge among the lowest ranks is of more importance to the public than all the property of the rich men in the country.'"

"For our own national security in the 21st century, the minds of our poor children, of all skin colors, are far too valuable to waste," he says.

He credits President Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration, more than any other in recent years, for boldly passing the far-reaching National Defense Education Act, creating NASA, and establishing the post of presidential science adviser.

All sorts of fellows

The "Judicial Fellows" held their first annual meeting in the Powerscourt of the Phoenix Park Hotel last Friday.

Founded by then-Chief Justice Warren E. Burger in 1973, the program provides fellows an opportunity to study firsthand both the administrative machinery of the federal judiciary and the dynamics of inter-branch relations.

The Judicial Fellows program draws outstanding individuals from diverse professions and academic backgrounds, including law, the social and behavioral sciences, public and business administration, systems research and analysis, communications and the humanities.

C. Boyden Gray, former White House counsel to President Bush, is a Judicial Fellows alumnus.

Beltway, anybody?

Thanks to our readers for the several hundred additional definitions we never requested for "GOP" (explained historically in Friday's column).

"GOP stands for 'Gutless Old Prostitutes,' at least for this current crop in Congress," gripes Gene Burch of Temecula, Calif.

"I thought GOP stood for 'God's Only Party!'" says a far kinder Kerry Burrough.

While Pat Pyfrom of PLP Associates in Santa Monica, Calif., requests: "Now that you have explained 'GOP,' can you explain 'Beltway?'"

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