

Guns -  
Gun lobby

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## THE NRA's "PINOCCHIO" AWARDS: LYING LONGER AND LOUDER

(Washington, D.C.) In two consecutive weeks' worth of appearances on network television public affairs programs, NRA spokespeople have quite possibly set a new standard in the millennium for on-the-record lies, dissemblances, fabrications and distortions.

For the weeks of March 12 and March 19, 2000, National Rifle Association President Charlton Heston and Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre made statements that flat-out contradict public record, deliberately misrepresent the past actions of their organization and, in a breathtaking display of hubris, take credit for the most significant gun safety bill to have passed into law in the past 30 years.

In the spirit of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences "Oscar" awards given out this week in Los Angeles for excellence in filmmaking, we would like to present the NRA officers with the "Pinocchio" awards for their skill in hiding the truth:

- In the category of most blatant statements contradictory to the public record, the winner is NRA President Charlton Heston, for his appearance on ABC's "This Week," March 19, 2000:

CHARLTON HESTON: We're in favor of the Brady Bill as it stands now. To a large extent, we drew it up in its current form.

SAM DONALDSON: Mr. Heston, the NRA opposed the Brady Bill.

STEVE ROBERTS: At the time.

HESTON: No, we supported the Brady...

DONALDSON: Once it was passed...

HESTON: We opposed it at the beginning and we were a large factor in the language of the bill.

*The truth:* When it appeared the Brady bill would become the Brady Law, the NRA dropped the appearances of opposition, and watered it down with amendments such as a "sunset" clause for the waiting period included in the bill, and a provision for an "instant check" which at that time was not feasible and promoted the convenience of the gun buyer over the safety of the citizen. As James Brady himself said in a statement to Washington's WTOP Radio, "It's called the Brady Law, not the Heston Law."

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- For Best Performance by a Lobbyist in contradiction of his own organization's stated policies: NRA VP Wayne La Pierre, on mandatory trigger lock sales, on NBC's "Meet The Press," March 19, 2000:

TIM RUSSERT: Do you support -- on your Internet it says trigger lock legislation is an invasion of privacy. It says you're against it.

LAPIERRE: No, we have always supported safety locks. We're supporting the bill on Capitol Hill right now that provides mandatory ...

RUSSERT: In states throughout the country?

LAPIERRE: Mandatory safety locks with the sale of every gun, instant checks on gun shows done with a 24-hour delay, and violent juveniles prohibited from owning guns.

*The truth:* In a letter to Sarah Brady, dated June 15, 1998 (available to be faxed to reporters), Charlton Heston wrote:

Dear Mrs. Brady,

I appreciate your warm letter, but I fear I've not yet earned your applause. When I expressed approval of trigger locks for gun safety, I by no means included support for a federal mandate requiring their use...

Cordially, (signed) Charlton Heston

- In the category of Best Impersonation of an Administration Official touting an Administration program, Wayne LaPierre, once again on "Meet The Press," 3/19/00, claiming credit for the Project Exile program, initiated by U.S. Attorney for the state of Virginia and Clinton Administration appointee Helen Fahey and other U.S. Attorneys across the country:

LAPIERRE: "I know they brag about [prosecutions] being up 16 percent. That entire increase is in the NRA Exile cities of Richmond, Virginia, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Birmingham and Rochester, New York. I'm the guy that's trying to make people safe."

- In the category of Best Performance in A Fable or Fairy Tale, once again, the NRA's Wayne LaPierre, on NBC's "Meet The Press," 3/19/00, contradicting reality in his claim that President Clinton shares blame for the shooting death of Northwestern basketball coach Ricky Byrdsong:

LAPIERRE: Tim, but here's the fact. The man, Ben Smith (ph), walked into a gun store, committed a brand-new federal crime right under the federal governments nose. It's up to 10 years in prison, it's a felony.

They were notified right away. Even though Illinois has co-responsibility, the Feds were notified right away. They did nothing to the felon except let him walk out the door. Three days later he bought a gun on the illegal market and then he did the killing. If they had prosecuted under the existing federal law, that killing wouldn't have happened. Those 179,000 people that the president says he's stopped, what he doesn't tell people is they're all walking the street tonight.

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TIM RUSSERT: Who prosecutes Brady violations in the state of Illinois?  
The Feds or the state?

LAPIERRE: They both have co-authority, and the Feds ought to prosecute.

*The truth:* Illinois does not use the federal NICS system to process a background check – all gun checks are done at the state level. Federal firearms officials were notified *six days later* of Benjamin Nathaniel Smith's attempt to purchase a firearm.

As Mr. LaPierre's statement about letting Smith "walk out the door," for the federal authorities to even make an arrest at the point of sale would require close to *103,000* more ATF agents, just to be stationed on the premises of each federally licensed firearms dealer – something the NRA would *never* support, proving LaPierre's argument to be sheer demagoguery.

In addition, the week before, LaPierre said on ABC's "World News Tonight,":

"The key question here for the president, has he looked into the eyes of Ricky Byrdsong's family. Ricky Byrdsong, a former basketball coach for Northwestern who was killed, because blood is on his hands. That death is on the president's hands. If he prosecuted, he would have prevented the death."

The widow of Ricky Byrdsong released a statement to the media, saying in part:

"I am shocked and appalled by the statement and consider the accusation against our president to be unjust."

When confronted by Mrs. Byrdsong's statement, LaPierre's comment was: "... and that doesn't surprise me."

Coming from Wayne LaPierre, scurrilous statements with no basis in fact are no surprise to anyone else, either.

And finally, for the sheer number of whoppers told in one broadcast, National Rifle Association Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre completes a near-sweep of long-nosed trophies for his appearance on ABC's "This Week," March 12, 2000:

- *"The NRA created the Instant-Check system."* As President Clinton pointed out, the NRA fought the Brady Bill – the proposal that eliminated prohibited purchases by background check and waiting period – for seven long years. Only after President Clinton's election, and with the support of his Administration, did passage of the Brady Law become a political possibility. And only then did the NRA offer an "instant-check" system as a substitute for the locally-administered background check and waiting period proposed by Brady. With the usual political haggling and threats from the gun lobby, the compounding of ingredients by a Congress longing for a compromise gave us the original Brady proposal for five years, which was replaced by the Instant-Check system on November 30, 1998. Thirty-four states now have no waiting period for new handgun purchases, putting public safety at risk from impulse homicides and suicides.

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- *The NRA: the brave protector of innocent children.* Wayne LaPierre claims that his organization supports holding gun-owners responsible for leaving guns accessible to children. There's a name for that: it's called a Child Access Protection law, which in 17 states has lowered the number of accidental deaths of children from firearms by an average of 23%. This is the law currently being proposed in Ohio, where the NRA just this week labeled it "the [Governor] Taft Burglar Protection Bill" and urged its members to "oppose any bill which attempts to dictate how law-abiding citizens should store their firearms." Last week, in its member blast-fax, the NRA congratulated pro-gun legislators in Georgia for opposing a CAP bill which "would have made you a criminal if a child were to gain unauthorized access to your firearms." As the NRA webpage noted on Friday, in Georgia, Michigan and South Carolina they opposed bills which would make it easier to prosecute and convict irresponsible gunowners whose guns are used by children to kill or injure others.

And oh, by the way, you'll have to look long and hard for the NRA's supposed "support" for the mandatory sale of trigger locks. They have consistently opposed this admittedly modest measure at both the Federal and state level since it was first proposed, more than five years ago.

- *Let's just lock up those gun-toting criminals and throw away the key,* or words to that effect. Like in Illinois, where the NRA is again fighting a state law which would make illegal firearms possession a felony instead of a misdemeanor. Or Utah, where the gun lobby fights a legislative attempt to 'deprive' violent misdemeanants of their ability to purchase a firearm. Or Florida, where the NRA filed an amicus brief supporting the right of a gang member standing on a corner NOT to be searched for the illegal weapon he was carrying. Or in the United States Congress, where every year the NRA searches for funding for the ATF to research and restore the 'gun rights' of convicted felons who want their weapons back.

The Charlton Heston who now challenges President Clinton to a debate about "enforcement" is the same Charlton Heston who last week found himself too busy to share a platform with Jim Brady supporting Project Exile in Colorado. Why? Because the entire enforcement issue is a false choice: we can prosecute and convict gun-toting criminals *and* do everything possible to prevent them from getting guns in the first place. The NRA's enforcement red herring certainly smells fishy these days.

- *The NRA really wanted to pass that gun-control package bottled up in Congress.* News to us. Handgun Control lobbyists saw more of NRA chief lobbyist James Jay Baker on the Hill last spring than they did their own mothers, and it never occurred to us that we were all after the same thing. Let's not rewrite history: Senator (and NRA Board Member) Larry Craig first got an amendment passed that actually broadened the gun-show loophole, and the NRA pulled in every chit to defeat the subsequently successful Lautenberg amendment, which closed it. The issue of taking 24 hours vs. 72 to check out gun-show purchasers whose records show a problem is not a meaningless debate.
- The way the NRA wants it, after 24 hours (on a weekend, most likely), if the instant-check cannot PROVE that the purchaser is prohibited, he happily gets his gun and goes on his way. This is not about waiting periods; this is about the five percent of purchasers whose records show

problems and for whom research is needed. The NRA sure loves that five percent, enough to ensure that, as the NRA put it in its year-end report, "NRA's grassroots army prevailed upon the House of Representatives. While the Senate passed a version of Juvenile Justice Reform legislation (S. 254) containing the Lautenberg amendment, the House of Representatives stood fast and blocked similar legislation."

- *Suburban women are safe from guns...despite what Clinton/Gore say.* The NRA's newfound interest in suburban women stems from its understanding that suburban women are the swing voting bloc for the 2000 elections. In Missouri last year, it was suburban voters who defeated the NRA's proposal to let virtually anyone carry a hidden handgun in the state. Just last week, suburban voters in California defeated a pro-gun Democrat, replacing him with Hilda Solis, who has led the gun-control charge in the California legislature.

Suburban women haven't forgotten that every school shooting, except in Michigan, occurred in suburban schools, at the hands of suburban kids with guns. But according to Wayne LaPierre, because one school shooting was committed by a child who lived in a crackhouse, now ALL the problems of youth violence are "inner city" and "drug-related." It's just those inner-city drug-dealers who are putting suburban women at risk....classic NRA rhetoric to try to divide and conquer, and to persuade average Americans that gun violence couldn't possibly touch their lives. But after watching kids shoot and kill other kids, all Americans have been touched by gun violence. The NRA's greatest fear is that the American people, especially the swing voters, will make support for stricter gun laws a voting issue. This November, the NRA's greatest fear will be realized.

The NRA obviously believes that most Americans, including the national press, can be easily duped. But all the message-training that money can buy will not make people forget that the NRA is, in the words of that leftist liberal publication Fortune Magazine, "a pariah even among some of its friends." Shame on the NRA for its latest attack ads, shame on them for their hypocrisy, and shame on them for believing Americans to be stupid enough to believe the big lies.

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*Handgun Control, chaired by Sarah Brady, is the nation's largest citizens' gun control lobbying organization. Based in Washington, DC, HCI works to enact stronger federal, state and local gun control laws, but does not seek to ban handguns. Founded in 1974, HCI has more than 400,000 members nationwide and works with local groups around the country to enact and protect reasonable gun control laws. More information about HCI and its affiliated organization, the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, can be found on our website at [www.handguncontrol.org](http://www.handguncontrol.org).*

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To: Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP@EOP, Eric P. Liu/OPD/EOP@EOP, Leanne A. Shimabukuro/OPD/EOP@EOP  
cc: Anna Richter/OPD/EOP@EOP  
Subject: Handgun Control's Response to NRA this weekend: THE BIG LIE(S)\*.FROM THE NRA

TO: State Gun Control Activists  
FROM: HCI State Legislation  
DATE: March 13, 2000

The following press release went out yesterday.

THE BIG LIE(S)\*.FROM THE NRA

(Washington, D.C.) In his appearance this morning on ABC's "This Week," National Rifle Association Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre told some whoppers that, even by the standards of his organization, strain the credulity of any American who has ever followed the gun control debate.

§ "The NRA created the Instant-Check system." As President Clinton pointed out, the NRA fought the Brady Bill - the proposal that eliminated prohibited purchases by background check and waiting period - for seven long years. Only after President Clinton's election, and with the support of his Administration, did passage of the Brady Law become a political possibility. And only then did the NRA offer an "instant-check" system as a substitute for the locally-administered background check and waiting period proposed by Brady. With the usual political haggling and threats from the gun lobby, the compounding of ingredients by a Congress longing for a compromise gave us the original Brady proposal for five years, which was replaced by the Instant-Check system on November 30, 1998. Thirty-four states now have no waiting period for new handgun purchases, putting public safety at risk from impulse homicides and suicides.

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