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GUNS AND GUN LAWS

Pistols and paranoia

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There is one thing that makes me even more uncomfortable than the thought of being surrounded by lots of strangers with concealed weapons beneath their coats. It is the thought of being surrounded by any strangers with concealed weapons beneath their coats and paranoid ideas floating around their brains. Pistols and paranoia are a scary mix indeed.

According to the non-psychiatric vernacular, paranoia is a tendency on the part of an individual or group toward excessive or irrational suspiciousness and distrustfulness of others. □ As such, there is now and has been in previous years the rather unrealistic fear on the part of many gun advocates that some autocrat holding the keys to the White House will decide to round up all of their guns.

There were those who suspected that President Bill Clinton had some devious scheme up his sleeve given his aggressive response to the cluster of school shootings that occurred during the second term of his administration. One week after the April 1999 Columbine massacre, Clinton pushed for a series of gun control initiatives designed to avert such tragedies. At the political fringe, the Cutting Edge Ministries, a far-right Christian-based extremist organization, condemned the Clinton administration for its anti-gun posture.

Cutting Edge released a map, reproduced below, displaying all the major school shootings that had occurred during the 1997/98 and 1998/99 school years. Curiously, the locations virtually formed two straight lines, the intersection of which pinpointed Hope, Arkansas -- Clinton's birthplace.



Based on this evidence, Cutting Edge suggested that the President was involved in an unholy conspiracy to disarm America. As further proof, Cutting Edge inferred from the timing of the shootings that there had been a deliberate attempt to obfuscate the plot: The plan was drawn up before the first school shooting occurred. If Edinboro had been followed by Paducah, then by Jonesboro, for example, in a straight timeline, someone would probably have spotted the connection. But, if each successive school shooting were random as to time, then the chance of discovery would be far less. □

It wasn't long after the spate of school shootings subsided that one of the more gun-friendly presidents claimed occupancy of the Oval Office, calming the fears and concerns of the "I'll give you my gun when you pry it from my cold, dead hands" crowd. During the eight years of President George W. Bush, the stranglehold that the NRA and other pro-gun groups had over the political agenda grew stronger. Moreover, facilitated by the shift in balance produced by Bush's two appointees, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the validity of the Second Amendment in gun control challenges from Washington, D.C. and Chicago.

Ironically, these are the same two cities that represent the former and current residences of President Barack Obama, the man who is described by some as the greatest threat today to the sanctity of the Second Amendment. The pro-gun rhetoric seems to be way out of touch with political reality.

Last year, I tuned into the live streaming broadcast of the NRA annual convention in Pittsburgh, PA. Speaker after speaker commented on the importance of the 2012 election, not just the need to elect pro-gun members of Congress, but the urgency of preventing a second term for Obama. According to the NRA's CEO Wayne LaPierre, and many others at the conference, a re-election of Barack Obama would pose a major threat to the Second Amendment.

There surely has been no evidence of this threat during Obama's few years in the White House. If anything, he has been disappointingly friendly to the gun lobby, so much so that the Brady Center awarded him a big fat F. But in true paranoid style, critics from the NRA interpreted Obama's failure to advance a liberal agenda on guns as just a clever ploy.

At his recent speech to the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC), LaPierre outlined Obama's scheme to ambush the Second Amendment. All that first term lip service to gun owners, argued LaPierre before a decidedly receptive audience, is just part of a massive Obama conspiracy to deceive voters and hide his true intentions to destroy the Second Amendment during his second term.

The NRA spokesperson was explicit in his grim view of a second Obama term: We see the president's strategy crystal clear: Get re-elected and, with no more elections to worry about, get busy dismantling and destroying our firearms' freedom, erase the Second Amendment from the Bill of Rights and excise it from the U.S. Constitution.

Listening to LaPierre and the recorded statements of angry gun owners included in his presentation convinced me that paranoia is running deep among the pro-gun advocates.

LaPierre concluded his remarks with a note of urgency: This is the most dangerous election in our lifetime. If Obama wins, we'll go to our grave mourning the freedom that will be lost. □

Dire warnings that an outright gun ban is looming just around the corner should Obama remain in office seems to be gaining traction, at least in some circles. Recent reports show a surge in gun sales and applications for concealed carry permits.

I would like to believe that LaPierre's stridency is mainly a bunch of rhetoric designed to provoke and motivate pro-gun voters come November. And I trust that most gun owners understand the political purpose for his strong words.

At the risk of myself seeming a bit paranoid, I worry that some will misconstrue the message and the associated call to action. According to LaPierre, liberty lives in the Second Amendment; it is the one freedom that distinguishes America from all other nations. I surely hope that such hyperbole never becomes a battle cry for those few paranoid strangers with concealed weapons beneath their coats.