

Heritage Foundation plots attack on NRA

by Leo F. Scanlon

An article in the summer edition of *Policy Review*, the Heritage Foundation quarterly, threatens the National Rifle Association with political ostracism unless it abandons its commitment to the defense of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. Patrick McGuigan of the Free Congress Foundation, a Heritage front group, charges that “the NRA has refused to play coalition politics with . . . the conservative movement” (McGuigan, Paul Weyrich, and their clique at Heritage) and adds that “a go-it-alone approach and a refusal to compromise on less than critical issues is jeopardizing the NRA’s effectiveness in winning political support.”

McGuigan devotes the first portion of his polemic to arguing that the spate of anti-gun legislation erupting in local legislatures and the Congress is the result of the NRA’s policy of intransigent opposition to legislative and judicial action which undermine basic constitutional rights. In this, he is deliberately trying to obscure the fact that this legislation is being supported by the Bush administration, specifically the White House staff and the Office of Drug Abuse Policy.

In the weeks before the appearance of the Heritage piece, the Bush administration dropped its “conservative” mask and banned a broad array of foreign-made semi-automatic weapons. While the news media, the administration, and highly visible police bureaucrats hyped the idea that this ban was imposed on “assault weapons,” it is actually aimed at semi-automatic weapons, a class which includes most hunting rifles and many pistols.

The scheme was hatched among gun control advocates infesting the staff of William Bennett (such as his long time crony Chuck Wexler, former top aide to police bureaucrat Robert DeGrazia—the “Robert McNamara of police reform”) who proposed the ban and secured White House support for it as soon as they took office. The NRA’s response, McGuigan complains, was swift and sure; it sat out the election for Dan Quayle’s vacated Senate seat, contributing to an embarrassing defeat for the Republican Party.

Burning the Constitution

The electoral capabilities of the NRA are feared by the Bush administration martinets, who see constituency-based movements as threats which must be dismantled. While many friends of the NRA might criticize one or another tactical blunder made by the massive organization, NRA’s strength proceeds from a principled interpretation of the Constitution,

and a refusal to alter its strategy to appease its opponents. This quality guarantees its continued independent electoral influence which frightens the White House and the Republican National Committee.

This is seen in McGuigan’s attack on the NRA’s role in the fight over the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. McGuigan asserts that the NRA saw that Bork’s positivist approach to law would make him amenable to support of unconstitutional law enforcement actions which are increasingly typical of federal agencies. In spite of the fact that Bork had ruled in favor of the NRA in several specific instances, his defective legal reasoning gave the NRA pause, and they stayed out of the empty ideological brawl which ensued.

McGuigan supports his criticism of the NRA with a revealing argument: “Most conservatives who are fighting ACLU absolutism on issues like pornography, school discipline, and school prayer are troubled by assertions from the NRA that *any* new regulation of citizen access to firearms would violate a fundamental constitutional right.” The problem is not pornography, or encroachments on religious freedom, but the “absolutist” approach of the American Civil Liberties Union—whatever that means. Just so with the constitution and the NRA; McGuigan and his pragmatic cohort—including the National Right To Life office—demand that the NRA join political coalitions in support of candidates to whom they are principally opposed, to thus gain admission to Paul Weyrich’s political brothel.

McGuigan’s warning to the NRA is simple: the NRA has “weakened the party [Republican] that has been most sympathetic to the NRA overall, and showed a spitefulness toward the Bush administration, with which it probably should be cooperating not fighting.” Behind this warning is McGuigan’s boss, Paul Weyrich, head of the Free Congress Foundation and related “Coalitions for America”—sponsored and housed by the Heritage Foundation. White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray told the media that Weyrich is his plenipotentiary to the conservative populists, and demonstrated the power of the position, by designating Weyrich to torpedo John Tower’s nomination.

Weyrich’s gossipy testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee launched a smear campaign characterized by KGB-style circulation of rumors and lies by the FBI. But the ability to turn a blind eye to tyranny is a cultivated quality in Weyrich and his ilk. When tens of thousands of anti-abortion protestors were beaten and jailed for exercising First Amendment rights, Weyrich and his captive National Right To Life Committee took every opportunity to publicly attack the activists. When the Justice Department tore up the Constitution in its vendetta against Lyndon LaRouche, Weyrich repeatedly joined the *Washington Post* and the Democratic National Committee in support of this judicial tyranny.

Weyrich’s, and Bush’s, plan for the NRA is written in this record of treachery and deceit.