

Not Your Grandfather's NRA:
How the Firearms Industry Gives Millions to the NRA



By the Office of Senator Chris Murphy
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Introduction

The terrible tragedy that unfolded on December 14th at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut has sparked a national conversation on gun violence prevention. President Obama has proposed a package of policy recommendations and Members of Congress have introduced a number of different measures to reduce gun violence. Standing in the way of these potential solutions to reduce gun violence is the National Rifle Association (NRA). A previous report by the Office of Senator Chris Murphy, entitled *Washington's Paper Tiger: A Look at the NRA's Ineffective Political Spending*, examined the level of spending by the NRA in previous federal elections and its effectiveness in electing policymakers. The report concluded that, despite the NRA's reputation as an omnipotent political force, recently it has not been effective at electing candidates it supports or defeating those it opposes. Furthermore, it completely failed in its single-minded goal of defeating President Barack Obama in 2012.

This second report continues to build the case against the NRA by examining one of the drivers of the NRA's extremism – their relationship with the firearms industry. It is a compilation of earlier findings from the Violence Policy Center and new research that exposes how the firearms industry has played an increasingly more prominent role in the association.

At its core, this relationship is both symbiotic and cyclical. The NRA receives millions of dollars from all aspects of the firearms industry and in turn stokes fear about the government confiscating guns from law-abiding citizens. By heightening the misplaced fears of gun owners, the NRA is able to drive higher sales of guns and accessories despite declining ownership of guns in the U.S. The additional revenue to the firearms industry then feeds larger corporate contributions to the NRA.

Key Findings

- The NRA leadership has worked to develop close ties with firearms industry. In its 2011 report entitled *Blood Money*ⁱ, the Violence Policy Center found that the association has received millions of dollars from the industry in the past few years alone. Further, the report found that the NRA's corporate contributors represent virtually every sector of the firearms industry, including: manufacturers of handguns, rifles, shotguns, assault weapons, and high-capacity ammunition magazines; gun distributors and dealers; and vendors of ammunition and other shooting-related products.
- Specifically, the *Blood Money*ⁱ report found that the vast majority of funds - 74 percent - contributed to the NRA from "corporate partners" since 2005 are from members of the firearms industry and totaled between \$14.7 million and \$38.9 million.
- The NRA Round-Up program, created by MidwayUSA founder Larry Potterfield, allows buyers to "round up" their purchase to the nearest dollar, with the difference going to the NRA. MidwayUSA, a retailer that boasts their sales of "just about everything for shooting, reloading, gunsmithing and hunting," has contributed nearly \$8 million to the NRA Institute for Legislative Action National Endowment for the Protection of the Second Amendment (NRA-ILA) since 1992. Other retailers have followed suit, and the total raised through the NRA Round-Up Program is now almost \$9.3 millionⁱⁱ.

- As the *Blood Money*^j report found, a number of the NRA's "corporate partners" (full list can be found in the appendix) manufacture firearms, including some of the most well-known in the industry: Beretta USA Corporation; Glock, Inc.; Remington Arms Co., Inc.; SIGARMS, Inc.; Smith & Wesson Corporation; and, Sturm, Ruger & Co., Inc. Many of these companies also manufacture assault weapons, including Smith & Wesson, DPMS Panther Arms and SIGARMS, Inc.
- Additionally, the NRA's "corporate partners" includes a variety of high-capacity ammunition magazine manufacturers or vendors, including Beretta USA Corporation and Cabela's.
- Over the last year, the NRA has strengthened ties with the firearms industry.
 - The NRA welcomed Smith & Wesson to the Golden Ring of Freedom program, noting on their website that "Smith & Wesson's support far exceeds one million dollars in cash."ⁱⁱⁱ
 - The NRA awarded Tommy Millner, the president and CEO of Cabela's (one of the nation's largest gun retailers) with a gold jacket to signify his admission into the NRA Golden Ring of Freedom program. The Golden Ring of Freedom is reserved for individuals who have donated at least \$1 million to the NRA.
 - During the 2012 NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits in St. Louis, Sturm, Ruger, & Co. CEO Mike Fifer presented a check for \$1,253,700 on behalf of Ruger to the NRA-ILA. This contribution was the result of a company goal to donate \$1 from each gun sold in between the closing of the 2011 NRA Annual Meeting and the opening of the 2012 NRA Annual Meeting.
- Corporate membership in the NRA has its privileges. The NRA made providing gun manufacturers with immunity to gun manufacturers from civil lawsuits their top legislative priority^{iv}. The organization succeeded in this goal when President George W. Bush signed into law the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act* in 2005^v. This legislation prevents cities from being able to hold gun manufacturers accountable for the costs of gun violence in their cities.
- Despite the already close ties between the NRA and the gun industry, the NRA wants to strengthen these relationships. For example, when questioned by CNN's Candy Crowley in a January 13, 2013 interview, NRA President David Keene admitted that his organization would like to receive even more money from the industry. The transcript of the exchange follows:

CROWLEY: You do take millions of dollars from people who make guns and who make bullets, all perfectly legal. I'm sure they're all fine folks.

KEENE: Actually, Candy, we get less money from the industry than we'd like to get. But we get some. We get more than we used to.

Who Does the NRA Represent – Responsible Gun Owners or Gun Manufacturers?

The NRA claims that it represents nearly 4 million members and that its mission is to protect and defend the Second Amendment. On its website,^{vi} the association provides a brief history of the association and proudly mentions its history in providing gun safety training to youth. It notes that, “By 1906, NRA's youth program was in full swing with more than 200 boys competing in matches at Sea Girt (NJ) that summer. Today, youth programs are still a cornerstone of the NRA, with more than one million youth participating in NRA shooting sports events and affiliated programs with groups such as 4-H, the Boy Scouts of America, the American Legion, U.S. Jaycees and others.” Because of these youth training programs, many people in the United States think of the NRA as a positive influence. However, the truth is much different. In fact, the modern day NRA pushes an agenda in state capitols around the country and in Washington, DC, that is often the agenda of gun manufacturers, not responsible gun owners.

For example, in response to a number of civil lawsuits by cities and gun violence victims against licensed gun manufacturers and dealers, the NRA made the protection of gun manufacturers from civil lawsuits in federal and state courts their top legislative priority^{iv}. The product of its lobbying was the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act* (PLCAA)^v, which was sponsored by NRA Board member Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID) and was signed by President Bush in October 2005. In an NRA press release marking the enactment of the law^{iv}, Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre said, “This is an historic day for freedom. I would like to thank President Bush for signing the most significant piece of pro-gun legislation in twenty years into law. History will show that this law helped save the American firearms industry from collapse under the burden of these ruinous and politically motivated lawsuits.”

The PLCAA shut off the possibility for cities to hold gun manufacturers accountable for the violence happening each day on their streets. For example, New York City began a lawsuit in 2000 against a number of gun manufacturers, including Beretta USA and Smith & Wesson, in an attempt to stop the flow of guns into the city. That lawsuit ended after 9 years when it was dismissed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit because of the PLCAA. The Supreme Court later refused to review the dismissal.

This intense relationship between the NRA and the firearms industry is a stark contrast to the direction of the organization in its earlier times. As the *Blood Money*^f report noted, an official history of the organization from 1967^{vii} stated that the NRA “...is not affiliated with any manufacturer of arms or ammunition or with any jobber or dealer who sells firearms and ammunition.”

Notable NRA Corporate Partners

Smith & Wesson

Earlier this year, the NRA welcomed Smith & Wesson to the Golden Ring of Freedom program. As NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre stated in *Ring of Freedom*,⁶ “Smith & Wesson is a valued corporate partner in NRA's fight to preserve the Second Amendment and we are grateful for their dedication to our shared American values.”

Beretta

In 2008, the Beretta Group of companies, pledged to give the NRA \$1 million over a 5 year period^{viii} to benefit the NRA-ILA and the NRA Civil Rights Defense Fund's litigation activities to further expand the scope of Second Amendment protections in the wake of the recent United States Supreme Court ruling in *District of Columbia v. Heller*. At the time, this gift from Beretta brought the company's commitment to over \$2 million.

Freedom Group

Over the last several years, a number of the most well-known firearms and ammunition companies have been purchased by Freedom Group. As their website notes, "we have some of the most globally recognized brands including Remington, Bushmaster Firearms, DPMS/Panther Arms, Marlin, H&R, The Parker Gun, Mountain Khakis, Advanced Armament Corp., Dakota Arms, Para USA and Barnes Bullets."^{ix} According to reports from the Violence Policy Center, Freedom Group gave between \$25,000 and \$49,999 to the NRA as a corporate partner.^x

As the manufacturer of the Bushmaster .223 caliber assault rifle (the weapon that was used by both Adam Lanza at Sandy Hook Elementary School and William Spengler Jr. when he shot two volunteer firefighters in Webster, New York), Freedom Group readily acknowledges the threat a federal assault weapons ban would pose to their company. The most recent report quarterly report^{xi} states, "In September 2004, the United States Congress declined to renew the Assault Weapons Ban ("AWB"), which generally prohibited the manufacture of certain firearms defined under that statute as —assault weapons and the sale or possession of —assault weapons except for those that were manufactured prior to the law's enactment. Various states and local jurisdictions have adopted their own version of the AWB and some of those apply to Bushmaster, DPMS and certain Remington sporting firearms products. We cannot guarantee that an "assault weapons" ban similar to the AWB, or another version thereof, will not be re-enacted. ***Legislation of this type, if enacted, could have a material adverse effect on our business.***

Cabela's

During the 2012 NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits, the president and CEO of Cabela's, Tommy Millner, was inducted into the NRA's Golden Ring of Freedom. The Golden Ring of Freedom is reserved for individuals who have donated at least \$1 million in cash to the NRA. Cabela's is a gun retailer and also sells high-capacity magazines.

Sturm, Ruger & Co.

At the 2012 NRA Annual Meetings & Exhibits in St. Louis, Missouri, an award was given to Sturm, Ruger, & Co. CEO and NRA Golden Ring of Freedom member Mike Fifer. As the *Ring of Freedom*^{xii} magazine noted:

"It was one year ago at the 140th NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits that Fifer announced Ruger's '1 Million Gun Challenge to Benefit the NRA.'" The goal was to sell 1 million guns between the close of the 2011 NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits and the opening of the 2012 meetings, with \$1 from each gun sold being donated to the NRA Institute for Legislative Action. The million-gun goal was shattered. Another 1.2 million goal was established, and then that goal was surpassed as well. During the 2012 NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits in St. Louis, Fifer presented a check for \$1,253,700 on behalf of Ruger to the NRA-ILA."

Appendix

Listing of NRA Corporate Partners^{xiii}

HARLON CARTER | \$5,000,000-\$9,999,999

- Midway USA

JOE FOSS | \$1,000,000-4,999,999

- Beretta USA Corporation
- Springfield Armory, Inc.
- Clayton Williams Energy, Inc.
- Pierce Bullet Seal Target Systems, LLC

GEORGE WASHINGTON | \$500,000-\$999,999

- Cabela's
- Brownells
- Big Sky Carvers
- Dillon Precision Products Corp., Inc.
- Benelli USA Corporation
- Leupold & Stevens, Inc.
- Xe, Inc.
- Sturm, Ruger & Co., Inc.
- Winchester Division - Olin Corporation
- Universal Coin & Bullion, Ltd.
- The Master's Table

SAMUEL ADAMS | \$250,000-\$499,999

- Davidson's, Inc. Greg Martin Auctions
- Hodgdon Powder Company
- Natchez Shooters Supply
- Lockton Companies
- Doug Turnbull Restoration, Inc.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON | \$100,000-\$249,999

- Independence Tube Corp.
- Action Target
- Crimson Trace Corporation
- Numrich Gun Parts Corporation
- Nosler, Inc.
- LM Collection: American Legacy
- Arsenal, Inc.
- National Firearms Museum Store
- Mzuri Wildlife Foundation
- Collectors Firearms, Inc.
- MetaMedia Training International, Inc.

- DBS International
- James D. Julia Auctioneers, Inc.
- Blue Book Publications, Inc.
- Telecom Brokerage International
- CDNN Investments, Inc.
- The Brunton Company
- The Hampe Family FoundationBlackhawk Products Group
- Kamps Propane
- ParaUSA

GEORGE MASON | \$50,000-\$99,999

- Smith & Wesson Corporation
- Gamo USA Corporation
- Charles Daly
- The Allbaugh Company, LLC
- DPMS Panther Arms
- LPL Financial
- FNH USA
- Auctionarms.com, Inc.
- Glock, Inc.
- AmeriCap Co., Inc.
- Browning
- Widener's Reloading & Shooting Supply, Inc.
- Camp-Younts Foundation
- Dale Gallon Historical Art Inc.
- Graf & Sons, Inc.
- Cisco Ford
- Saulsbury Industries

JAMES MADISON | \$25,000-\$49,999

- AcuSport Corporation
- Marlin Firearms Co.
- Marsh - Des Moines, IA
- Ackerman McQueen
- Cheaper Than Dirt
- RCBS Reloading Equipment
- Reinhart Fajen, Inc.
- John Rigby & Co.
- Krieghoff International, Inc.
- Petersen Publishing Company
- Starline, Inc.
- H & R 1871, LLC
- Sinclair International, Inc.
- Lockton Affinity

- Stanton Barrett Motorsports Management
- Umarex USA
- Remington Arms Co., Inc.
- Hornady Manufacturing Co.
- Pyramyd Air
- Loon Lake Decoy Company, Inc.
- Optima Direct Inc.
- Werner Enterprises
- Ellett Brothers, Inc.
- KS Industries, LP
- Security Equipment Corporation
- St. Louis Antique Arms Association
- BCN Telecom, Inc.
- Frank G. and Gertrude Dunlap Fund
- Component Engineers, Inc.
- SIGARMS, Inc.
- Investment Arms
- Charlotte Motor Speedway
- McMillan Group International

Endnotes

ⁱ 2011 Blood Money Report from the Violence Policy Center - <http://www.vpc.org/studies/bloodmoney.pdf>

ⁱⁱ MidwayUSA website - <http://www.midwayusa.com/General.mvc/Index/NRASupport> - accessed on February 6, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith & Wesson inducted into NRA Golden Ring of Freedom - <http://www.nraila.org/news-issues/news-from-nra-ila/2012/05/smith-wesson-to-be-inducted-into-the-nra-golden-ring-of-freedom.aspx>

^{iv} NRA Press Release on the enactment of the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act - <http://www.nra.org/Article.aspx?id=4228>

^v Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (Public Law 109-92) - <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d109:7:./temp/~bdbZxh:./home/LegislativeData.php?n=BSS;c=109>

^{vi} NRA website - <http://www.nra.org/aboutus.aspx>

^{vii} Trefethen, James, *Americans and Their Guns*, Stackpole Books (Harrisburg, PA), 1967, p. 303.

^{viii} NRA-ILA Press Release on Beretta's commitment - [http://www.nraila.org/news-issues/news-from-nra-ila/2008/beretta-group-pledges-\\$1-million-to-ben.aspx](http://www.nraila.org/news-issues/news-from-nra-ila/2008/beretta-group-pledges-$1-million-to-ben.aspx)

^{ix} Freedom Group website - <http://www.freedom-group.com/>

^x NRA donors listed at its 2012 Annual Meeting in St. Louis -
<https://www.vpc.org/nradonors.htm>

^{xi} Freedom Group September 30, 2012 Quarterly Report (page 41) - http://www.freedom-group.com/Q3_2012.pdf

^{xii} Ring of Freedom Magazine, 2012, Volume 4, Issue 1 -
<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/0d674862#/0d674862/20>

^{xiii} Listing of the NRA's Corporate Partners -
http://nragive.com/#/ringoffreedom/text/generic_page,95 - accessed on January 19, 2013.