



NRA phones (my) home

Is Washington a battleground state in the nation's gun rights and responsibilities debate?

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My home phone rang Tuesday night around 7 p.m., just as I was about to sit down for dinner. Like most of you, I've come to ignore my land line. Important calls only come to my cell.

But I've started answering these calls lately in order to demand that I be put on the "do not call list." I don't know if that works but I do it anyway. It makes me feel more in control.

My stomach was rumbling, but I decided to take the call anyway. It was the National Rifle Association.

I grew up hunting, and I don't have the same knee-jerk response of many liberals when I hear the NRA's name. Gun ownership doesn't bother me as much as the ham-handedness and incompetence of many advocacy groups. I decided to play along.

The very nice NRA lady told me she was calling with an audio recording from Wayne LaPierre. I listened as the NRA CEO told me that I was one of those Americans who was concerned with the direction of the country. That I saw its freedoms under attack. That I am being lied to by the media (uh-oh). Our borders are not being secured and gun owners are being attacked. That some people in Washington, DC, are trying to rip the heart out of the Second Amendment and that it's "time to take the country back."

According to Wayne, I need to send a message loud and clear to D.C. that I am not going to stand for gun control.

After Wayne finishes a different woman comes on the line — equally nice with a southern accent and more interactive (she was the closer). She asks me what I think of the recording.

Without hesitation I tell her it's a rousing speech. She laughs and asks me what I think is the greatest threat to the Second Amendment. She offers me three options: the Obama Administration, the United Nations (hmm) or all of the above.

I ask her to repeat the question because I am sure I must have missed an option. Surely failing to enact policies to reduce violent crimes was an option. The conservative Cato Institute, for

example, has testified about the need to increase efforts to identify and treat mental illness. She re-reads the choices, and I say, sorry, but none of the above. My response puzzles her and she asks what I have in mind.

Wanting to keep the conversation going, I blurt out, "the price of guns." I simply can't afford one. She laughs and quickly agrees. She tells me that she wanted to buy one herself and had gone to a pawn shop where they are more affordable.

She moves on to the job she is paid for. Would I be interested in a five year NRA membership? They are very nicely discounting NRA memberships from \$175 to \$125. For that, Wayne will send me a "freedom knife." And his magazine.

I tell her thanks, but no. She then offers me a one-year membership for \$35. When I decline again she just asks for my email, which I don't even give to my favorite restaurant.

A few months ago, on a bus ride from the Eastside to Seattle, I sat next to a guy proudly sporting an NRA jacket. I consciously sat next to him in order to ask a few questions. This was just after Sandy Hook, and I was curious what kind of reaction his jacket had elicited from Seattleites. He said people treated him fine, and went on to make some very good points about the many causes of gun violence, including the influence of violent films, mental illness, etc.

Former Seattle City Councilmember Tina Podlodowski co-chairs the Washington Alliance for Gun Responsibility, which is pushing I-594, a statewide initiative to expand background checks for gun purchasers. The campaign has gathered 250,000 signatures on the way to the necessary 325,000 signatures. She points out that the NRA has less money than people think, and that they are concerned about anti-gun organizing in the West, thus their current recruitment push. She said Washington has emerged as a state on "the leading edge" of gun control policies that concern NRA members.

On the other side, the Washington Arms Collectors and other gun rights organizations (as well as several local Tea Party groups) are gathering signatures for I-591, a gun rights initiative.

Both the Times and the PI have weighed in recently with articles about the NRA in Washington State. Andrew Garber of the Times reported last month that in the 2012 election cycle Washington state candidates led the country in National Rifle Association contributions. The PI's Joel Connelly wrote that the NRA is recruiting zoo and wildlife groups for membership.

My guess is that I am on the NRA's list because of my lifetime membership in Trout Unlimited. I like to fish, and the logic must be that I also like to hunt.

Hunters and gun owners are smart, and the ones I know are also open-minded. The NRA should focus more on serious solutions to violence and less on insulting our intellect with hobgoblin arguments about the U.N. Wayne might want to spend less time direct marketing and more time listening to guys like the one I encountered crossing a floating bridge.