

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Robberson: Still awaiting for the NRA to denounce white supremacists

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While conservatives across the country scrambled to distance themselves from President Donald Trump's disastrous response to events in Charlottesville this week, one organization stood squarely by his side. The National Rifle Association apparently has no problem with the president equating leftist radicals with white supremacists.

Broadcasting from Farmville, Va., NRA-TV's Cam Edwards assumed the mantle of Trump's staunch defender as the sane world was telling the president in no uncertain terms that he's off his rocker. Virginia-based NRA is the nation's pre-eminent and immensely powerful gun-lobbying group. NRA-TV is its official website television station.

Whenever there's a massacre involving assault rifles and little schoolchildren, look to the NRA to explain why guns are good and protecting little children is bad if it means restricting the NRA's inflated reading of the Second Amendment. Neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klan supporters who marched in Charlottesville on Saturday came armed to the teeth.

On his show Tuesday, Edwards took an unusually long time to address the weekend's explosive events, which seemed odd because Farmville is only 48 miles south of Charlottesville. Edwards talked at great length about upcoming races at Virginia's Bristol Motor Speedway. Bristol, by the way, is just a few miles down Interstate 81 from a hillside where farmer David Roberts has erected a massive, 100-foot flagpole that flies a 12-foot-by-18-foot Confederate flag to lord over the motoring public below.

That's Cam Edwards Country. Which might explain why the NRA host had so much trouble transitioning into the uncomfortable topic of Charlottesville.

Edwards meandered lightheartedly about the dull summer for Hollywood film releases. He suggested Americans are staying away from theaters because they don't want to "reward" liberal Hollywood. (Or, maybe they remember that 12 people were shot to death in an Aurora, Colo., theater in 2012 by a crazed gunman armed with NRA-sanctioned weapons?)

It took 22 minutes before Edwards finally addressed the elephant in the room. He opened the floor to obscure conservative blogger John Hinderaker. Their conversation sounded almost as if it had been scripted by Trump himself. Not the Trump we heard on Monday condemning neo-Nazis and KKK members but the Trump we heard on Saturday and Tuesday, equating the cheerleaders for Adolf Hitler and black enslavement with the people who protest against those extremists.

Hinderaker criticized “Monday Trump” on his blog, saying the president had wimped out. “I supported President Trump’s initial statements about the Charlottesville violence, and was disappointed when he yielded to liberal pressure and denounced only the white supremacists who planned the original Charlottesville demonstration. They deserve condemnation, to be sure, but they are just one source among several of political violence, and nowhere near the most important one,” Hinderaker wrote.

Nowhere near the most important one? Wow.

“Unlike the narrative that the liberals are trying to jam down our throats after Charlottesville, the vast majority of political violence in the United States doesn’t come from the right. It comes from the left. ... They’re exactly like the Nazi brownshirts. They’re violent fascists,” he told his NRA host.

The gun-friendly, libertarian Cato Institute reports that right-wing extremist groups have been responsible for 10 times more fatal attacks and 22 times more injuries in the past 25 years than left-wing extremists.

Edwards interrupted Hinderaker, just to make sure the blogger wasn’t diminishing white nationalist violence. Not at all, Hinderaker said.

“But the fact is, Cam, they had a permit. And as reprehensible as their views may be ..., like everybody else, they’ve got a legal right to get a permit and hold a demonstration,” Hinderaker said.

He dug in: “The reason that the liberals love this Charlottesville story is because they want to imply that these neo-Nazis or white supremacists” — he giggled here — “this little ragtag group of maybe a few hundred people who managed to assemble in Charlottesville, are somehow typical of, or symbolic of, the entire conservative movement, and that somehow President Trump is mixed up in that. They’re trying to use this to smear President Trump, and it’s insanity.”

Trump mixed himself up in this without any help from “liberals.”

Hinderaker then did exactly what he accused the left of doing: Making gross generalizations and false associations.

“But the difference is, on the left, we see mainstream politicians actually endorsing and backing the Black Lives Matter movement, which has produced more political violence in recent months than any other political movement in the United States,” Hinderaker said. He identified James Hodgkinson, the gunman who opened fire on Republicans practicing baseball in Alexandria, Va., and who seriously wounded Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., as “a mainstream member of the Democratic Party.”

Edwards agreed: “There is a clear double standard in this country.”

What a silly attempt at defending the indefensible. NRA chief Wayne LaPierre needs to call Cam Edwards and tell him it’s OK to wholeheartedly and unabashedly denounce neo-Nazis and the

KKK. Even the NRA should be able to find a full-throated way to condemn Hitler's modern footsoldiers.