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An American Amendment “i love u guys”

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In the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, as with almost every incident of mass gun-related violence, the issue of gun control has arisen for heated discussion. Pundits, politicians, and social media users all demand action, be it a ban of bump stocks or the strengthening of background checks before the sale of a gun. Inevitably, gun owners or members of interest groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) respond in kind. Their defense: some form of Second Amendment argument.

As many bumper stickers, lawn signs, flags, and t-shirts will attest, to many citizens the Second Amendment is as American as apple pie. The right of the people to “a well-regulated militia,” as well as that “to keep and bear arms,” provokes passionate rhetoric in a way that, for example, the Third Amendment never has. My Facebook news feed has never witnessed ferocious arguments between former classmates about the unlawful quartering of soldiers in peacetime.

Proponents of gun control measures, it seems, not only have gun owners to reckon with, but also must face what many people consider one of the shining stars of the Bill of Rights, a feature of the modern American identity.

In the wake of the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012, Jeffrey Toobin reported in *The New Yorker* on the NRA’s relatively recent adoption of the Second Amendment as a weapon in the American gun debate. Not until 1977, he wrote, did the NRA leadership begin an uphill battle to establish that the Second Amendment protects the rights of the individual, not just the militia, to bear arms. “The re-interpretation of the Second Amendment,” according to Toobin, “was an elaborate and brilliantly executed political operation.”

Many conservatives embrace constitutional originalism, yet the use of the Second Amendment to oppose gun control actually represents an evolution of constitutional interpretation. The Supreme Court supported this reinterpretation in 2008 when it ruled that the Second

Amendment protected the individual’s right to bear arms in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, striking down the city’s ban on handguns. Reva Siegel, the Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Professor of Law at Yale Law School, has written extensively on how this case, in particular, is in a tradition of “social movement conflict” following *Brown v. Board of Education*. Although it claims to proceed from originalism, the Heller decision actually participates in the “culture war” which Justice Scalia spoke of in his *Lawrence v. Texas* dissenting opinion.

In fact, the Second Amendment was the least-debated provision of the Bill of Rights in Congress. According to Michael Waldman in his book *The Second Amendment*, no congressman actually mentioned the private ownership of guns for any purpose other than joining a militia when it considered the Bill of Rights amendments.

Gun law reform will always encounter fierce resistance, so long as the NRA successfully maintains this popular conception of the Second Amendment as protecting an individual rather than a collective (and limited) right. In the minds of many gun supporters, how can angry liberals even conceive of destroying such an eternal and fundamental pillar of American democracy and culture?

It may take advocates of gun control laws as many years to change this view of the Second Amendment as it took the NRA to establish the amendment in popular American imagination as the ultimate defense of the right to own guns. No matter how many children die in school, this debate will still rage on, because an attack on guns appears to gun control opponents to be an attack on the American way of life.

The Second Amendment and the right of an individual to own guns are two distinct ideas. Importantly, though, they both belong to the pantheon of values that for many people constitute “What it means to be an American.” Further, they are seen as one and the same. If the sale of guns in America is to be reduced, owning a gun must be made less American.

I applaud the brave students from Florida, who in the aftermath of the tragic Parkland shooting are demanding gun reform in efforts to prevent more lives from being senselessly taken in another act of violence. I cannot imagine how much courage it takes for them to speak out about the atrocities they endured while lobbying politicians for change. Seeing the passion of these students gives me hope for the future, because these are the young people shaping their communities.

The unity and support for the survivors of the horrific events in Florida is reminiscent of my own community’s response to the Platte Canyon shooting in Colorado in 2006. I was ten years old that day. We had just arrived back from a field trip, and the principal immediately began lockdown procedures. The school day was about to end, but we were not allowed to leave until our parents could come to pick us up. Students also had to wait hours for the highway to reopen after the sheriff dissolved the lockdown perimeter around Platte Canyon High School. I watched the news with my family that night and learned more about the jarring events, which would forever affect my community. A peculiar and disturbing hostage situation at the high

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school had ended in the shooting death of 16-year-old Emily Keyes. Her last text, “i love u guys,” is now immortalized in my community — our battle cry for healing and progress in the aftermath of loss.

The first Emily’s Ride, an annual motorcycle parade from Columbine High School to Platte Canyon High School, occurred ten days after the tragedy. It was a huge success, with 5,000 motorcycles participating. Along the Highway 285 corridor those who were not riding lined the roadside, sitting in lawn chairs, typically holding signs, and sometimes releasing balloons into the air.

The astonishing show of support

continued on back

“I LOVE U GUYS” cont.

and simultaneous fundraising efforts inspired the launch of the “I Love U Guys” Foundation. After several years of research, the foundation developed the Standard Response Protocol, a procedure for dealing with threats at schools. Many school districts (including my own) across the United States and Canada have already implemented this program. Members of the foundation are currently working to spread knowledge about best practices in dealing with threats at school in their initiative to increase student safety internationally.

However, I cannot ignore one stark contrast between the reaction of many in Parkland and that of my own community. Both of our communities prayed together, mourned together, and worked to provide counseling to those most affected by the tragedy. We discussed policy changes. However, I do not remember a single discussion about gun

control in my community, and for good reason. Platte Canyon is a “remote rural” Title I school in an area where hunting provides sustenance for many community members and helps combat childhood hunger. The overwhelming majority of residents are gun owners, and the Platte Canyon shooting has been the only major incident of gun violence in the community.

The one-size-fits-all divisive rhetoric surrounding school shootings is not only offensive, but unfair. Particularly upsetting is the notion that those who do not immediately demand gun control following a school shooting are the problem, even the reason, that innocent students were subjected to abhorrent levels of violence and trauma. No matter how much some people may hate “Republicans,” the truth is that no one, except a very small number of extremely disturbed individuals, would ever want an innocent student to die in a school shooting. Indeed, it was a Republican,

Park County Sheriff Fred Wegener, who made the brave decision for police to storm the high school and confront the suspect when negotiations fell through. His son was inside the school that day.

Although my community did not discuss gun control, we did not do nothing. We discussed ways to make schools safer and recognized the complex array of issues that contribute to the upsetting number of school shootings in this country. My community was able to improve school safety after the shooting. We adopted new procedures, such as locking all the doors to the school except for the main entrance. The school district stationed a deputy sheriff there to check visitors in. Like the people of Parkland, Florida, we came together to do what was best for our community. I hope the brave students lobbying politicians are able to improve the safety of the other students around them, just as my community did in the aftermath of our own tragedy.

Everything’s Free — Ticket to Nowhere

By MONTANA SPRAGUE

STAFF WRITER

Recently a story went viral about a couple who decided to leave the world behind and sail around the globe but sank while trying to leave the marina. The twentysomethings decided they’d had enough of the rat race, quit their jobs as timeshare salesmen and Uber drivers, sold their possessions, and bought an old sailboat to pursue their dreams, telling reporters: “Money isn’t everything.” Haven’t we all had that fantasy?

I started following this story itself. What I found compelling was the national response, whose strong division along ideological lines presents a clear comparison to the unfortunate political divide in America today.

The people who followed this story fell into one of two camps.

Some, who were sympathetic to two young people whose dreams were crushed by tragedy, generously opened their wallets and donated to the couple’s GoFundMe.

On the other side, people thought: “So you had dreams, but instead of realizing them by getting an education and working hard, you preferred to skip the middle part and go straight from adolescence to retirement. You didn’t buy insurance, but are asking everyone to pony up \$16,000

to cover the predictable consequences of your irresponsible choices. You opted out of the free training offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary (who would have advised against trying to navigate a channel for the first time at night, in the fog, with outdated charts and your girlfriend hanging over the bow with a flashlight) and thought you’d

*“Money isn’t everything.”
Haven’t we all had that fantasy?”*

circle the planet with less than \$100 in your pocket. You say money isn’t everything, but you want mine. In fact, your whole philosophy seems to be: “We don’t like work because sailing is more fun, but we want you to work to make the money we need.”

My dad had a similar dream when he was 21. Just back from Vietnam, he bought a van for \$500 to travel around the country. He was broke, with no parental assistance, and rolled out of Boston headed for California in January 1974. The van was a wreck — no heater, bald tires, rusted out, and not even an inspection sticker. He spent his first night by the side of the Jersey Turnpike and was woken up by a state policeman because the van was buried in snow, with about four inches inside the van.

He made it to Florida and California, doing every kind of miserable job imaginable (picking apples, cleaning toilets,

breaking rocks for a stone mason, digging ditches, driving a taxi), and in the first twelve months was robbed at gunpoint and knifepoint and had a drunk driver hit him head-on, breaking his back and putting him in the VA Hospital in Miami where he spent three days, never seeing a doctor.

One thing he figured out quickly was that until he got an education, his life was going nowhere. It took eight years, but with the G.I. Bill, plus working and taking on a pile of student loans, he finally got his degree and kept going. There was no such thing as GoFundMe, and he wouldn’t have taken it anyway. This past year, he retired as a 747 airline captain.

So why is this a political metaphor? Over the last half-century, we as a people have gone from “Ask not what your country can do for you ...” to “Vote for me and everything’s free!” We have 4.1 million federal employees, 21 percent of our population is on some form of government assistance, and the number of people on food stamps has skyrocketed from 2.8 million under President Nixon to a high of almost 48 million under President Obama. Although that number has decreased in recent years, the cost of food stamps (now known as the SNAP program) is extremely high: currently \$68 billion. The recipients of such largesse will often be tempted to vote for those who would make that gravy train larger, and these politicians are more than happy to try to buy their votes with taxpayers’ money, not unlike the big sign in front of a bar in Alaska named Chilkoot Charlie’s: “We Cheat the Other Guy and Pass the Savings On To You!”

ENQUIRY

vol. V

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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#iloveguys

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