

From the Editor

Several years ago I tried to institute a “theme” concept for issues of W&G, advising writers and advertisers that a particular issue would be focused on, say, concealed carry products. This lasted about as long as it took me to stop coloring my hair and leave it au natural—about six or eight months. Any number of events would conspire against my concept issues and I would end up pulling out some of that expensively-colored hair.

This issue naturally evolved into one with two themes: growing the ranks of gunowners through new shooters, particularly young people, and the general concept of outreach.

Unless Carolee, Oleg, Diane, Genie and Cherie are all holding rump editorial meetings in cyberspace, it was just serendipity that led to so many features and columns that take differently angled looks at the same subjects.

Since attending a public forum here in Buffalo a month ago, I had intended to write about outreach myself, and say a few words about looking inward as well.

I got a call from old friend Arqiel Qadir asking if he could give my name to Karla Thomas, who was building a “community discussion” about New York’s SAFE Act, on behalf of Erie County Legislator Betty Jean Grant.

Sure I said, and duly got calls from both Karla and Ms. Grant.

I agreed to take part in the forum which, as I understood it, would feature speakers who favored the repeal of the SAFE Act, those seeking adjustments to it and those who were in favor of it. It was scheduled to take place at a public library branch about six blocks from the office, so making the 5:30 start time was no problem (gratifyingly, parking was!).

As detailed in a Page 5 story in this issue, a number of NY county legislatures have issued non-binding resolutions calling for either the repeal of the SAFE Act or serious amendments to it—far beyond the offhand “technical” amendments Gov. Andrew Cuomo blithely told reporters might be needed. The number of local legislatures doing so must have surprised Cuomo and his henchmen in the state Assembly and Senate who rammed the bill through in a late night January session under cloak of “emergency measure” (otherwise, there would have been time for lawmakers not in the Cuomo circle to look it over and the public to weigh in). That associations of county clerks, sheriffs, and other government officials who will be charged with implementing the laws have also publicly weighed in against it, has also come as a rude shock to Cuomo et al.

That a public forum on a gun law was being held by a black county legislator in a mostly black district in Buffalo, one of

the poorest cities in the nation and one of its most crime-ridden, might have surprised more than just Cuomo. Local media was represented at the event as well.

Just as we are told constantly by media and politicians that all women are anti-gun, so too, are we told that all “urban populations” are anti-gun. While “urban population” covers a lot of actual ground, it’s generally understood to be media mealy-mouth for black people.

I had planned to offer as part of my criticism of Cuomo’s bill the fact that like all gun control, it was more about controlling people and not guns, and that historically the first group that “gun” control sought to control was newly freed blacks after the Civil War; the first gun control laws were Jim Crow laws. The second group targeted for “control” were immigrants at the turn of the 20th century—a group I also mention included several of my grandparents. And the third group to fall under the controllers’ eyes were early unionists.

In discussing gun control this way, it’s easy to reach out to almost everyone in any room in the country, because people of different backgrounds still have a lot in common, and unless you are in front of the Royal Order of Descendants of Europeans with Very Good Record Keeping, you are going to be talking to people whose backgrounds include one

or more of these groups.

I also said that I was a “city girl” and worked a short distance away and lived in the city as well—once again, there is often more in common with people than a first look would suggest and almost everyone appreciates being made to feel part of whatever group they are in.

Although the event at the Merriweather Library (which was designed by the father of someone I went to public grammar school with) was billed as a “forum,” in truth only one speaker was in favor of the SAFE Act and, during a lively Q&A session that followed the panelists, I noted that no one spoke in favor of it.

One audience member who said she was a parole officer (and a licensed civilian gunowner) said she felt the law should be changed so that law enforcement would be entitled to carry magazines of more than the 7-rounds the law proscribed for everyone (one of those “technicalities” Cuomo mentioned).

Her fellow audience members were not having it. Why should law enforcement (a group it was clear this well mannered, middle- and lower-middle-class audience distrusted) be entitled to something they were not?

In speaking against the SAFE Act, one audience member said, “You don’t build a house by putting the third floor on first,” demonstrating once again that

citizens understand things in a way which politicians do not.

One of the panelists, also a county legislator, who spoke of correcting the law, rather than repealing it, talked about other factors contributing to violence and lawlessness. He said he could tell when his young sons had been playing video games because they were more aggressive and more prone to “acting out.”

While the general media pilloried NRA’s Wayne LaPierre for saying some of these same things, the general public recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all magic wand solution to the real problems and that external factors including the pervasive culture of violence in the media, do have an affect on the entire population, but particularly boys and young men.

I don’t doubt that pollsters and pulse-takers are correct in assuming that this was a slice of a community which overwhelmingly voted for Andrew Cuomo.

One audience member was wearing an Obama button, but clearly was not a fan of the idea of disarming the civilian population and/or making them jump through regulatory hoops that echo the Jim Crow laws that kept guns out of their ancestors’ hands.

I got a nice laugh when I mentioned that unlike Vice President Joe Biden, I didn’t live at Downton Abbey, so that using his

recommended solution to a home invasion of letting off a couple of shotgun blasts from the “balcony” (which presumably summons the police and a gaggle of cap-pulling family retainers) would be enough to keep his wife safe.

But Cuomo, and the Democratic politicians who attended are getting a civics lesson from folks who see through them and are not afraid to speak truth to power.

While I attended ostensibly to reach out to a community that is thought to be anti-gun, it was I who got the bulk of the outreach.

Just as other writers in this issue have detailed how different groups are reaching out to new shooters, and others have discussed how the urgent gun politics of today have forged new recruits in a long battle, I came away from the Merriweather Library that March evening thinking that we still have a lot of work to do.

But it is gratifying that the work, despite its current urgency, continues to prove that all Americans have a stake in gun rights and that they all need to be welcomed to the fold.

There are lots of different communities out there who would welcome a visit from gun rights activists—and those are invitations you should accept at once.

*Peggy Tartaro,
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