

OPINION: THE NRA – VULNERABLE AFTER PARKLAND KILLINGS?

CARL GOLDEN | FEBRUARY 27, 2018

Several large corporations have severed business ties with the National Rifle Association, while Gov. Murphy and counterparts in other states have created a coalition to share gun-crime data



Carl Golden

For all of those who thought they'd never witness it, it appears that, at long last, the National Rifle Association is on the run.

A growing number of its long-time, reliable allies who stuck with the NRA's "never give an inch" positions are distancing themselves from the organization – albeit it cautiously – in light of the national outrage over the murders of 17 students and faculty at a high school in Parkland, FL.

Equally significant, several large corporations have severed their business ties with the NRA, withdrawing from underwriting insurance coverage or offering discounts to the association members. Affiliation with the NRA has suddenly become economically toxic.

Accustomed to using its deep pockets and organizational resources to support or oppose candidates and incumbents, the group ran up a string of successes in fending off firearms control legislation, even in the wake of mass killings of first graders, nightclub partygoers, worshippers, and audiences at a movie theater and outdoor concert.

Over the edge?

It appears now, though, that the killings at the Florida high school pushed the nation over the edge. The NRA now confronts an outraged populace, increasingly fed up with the association's excuses and rationalizations.

Its campaign of fear that gun control is merely the first step in a government plot to disarm the American people, trample on their constitutional rights, and install a despotic junta is no longer credible to the American people.

It has damaged itself further by the hysterical responses of its leaders who cast blame for the mass killings on everyone else.

And in times such as these, it turns to its favorite whipping boy – "the liberal media."

That tactic hit a new low when NRA spokesperson Dana Loesch, in an appearance at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC), said "many in legacy media love mass shootings. Crying white mothers are ratings gold."

Callous or stupid?

The depth of such lunacy leaves one speechless. Was it incredibly callous or incredibly stupid? Both.

It's tantamount to saying to one of those "crying white mothers" – "So your daughter got shot up at school. Big deal. Suck it up. Get over it and move on. You're bad for business."

Wayne LaPierre, chief executive officer of the NRA, weighed in with a dark warning that gun control was the beginning of the imposition of a socialist state.

It is beyond dispute that failure after failure of government agencies at all levels contributed greatly to the tragedy at Parkland.

A clearly disturbed young man openly advertised his intention to "shoot up a school," and all warning signs were dismissed by local authorities and the FBI.

All those involved in a clear dereliction of duty will spend the remainder of their lives with the knowledge that, but for their laxity, 17 people would be alive today.

The slow erosion of heretofore slavish support for the NRA is surely worrisome to the organization. It faces defections in Congress and in State Houses with the prospect of further fissures in its solid wall of opposition.

Enhanced background checks for prospective gun buyers – an idea roundly ridiculed by the NRA as meaningless and ineffective – have become a very real possibility, for example, as has extending the checks to private sales of weapons.

Gun-control coalition

Gov. Phil Murphy has joined his counterparts in New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island pledging a coalition to share information across state lines concerning individuals who may pose a risk if allowed a gun purchase. Puerto Rico has signed on as well. Additionally, five Republican members of Congress from New Jersey have announced support for expanded background.

President Donald Trump has indicated his support for increasing to 21 the legal age for gun purchases, a move the NRA opposes. He has also recommended a ban on so-called bump stocks, a device which, when attached to a semi-automatic weapon, mimics the rapid-fire action of a fully automatic one.

He's spoken in favor of arming teachers or other school personnel to confront potential threats and wants substantially enhanced mental health programs to identify individuals suffering psychological issues and deny them the ability to purchase a weapon.

Despite rising demands, a ban on the sale of AR-15 semi-automatic rifles like the one used in the Florida high school shootings will not be enacted.

Talk, talk, talk ...

The argument over a prohibition will rage on, but there is little appetite in Congress to impose one. The NRA – as it has in the past – will prevail in that argument. Its clout hasn't diminished to that extent.

With a Republican in the White House and the party in control of the Congress, it's virtually assured that some action will be taken although it's unclear at this stage what it will entail.

The test for the NRA will be whether to make a stand. It has historically opposed any changes it can argue infringe on gun ownership. Maybe it will recognize the public outrage unleashed by the high school massacre and accept modest changes in gun regulations.

The NRA can look reasonable and portray itself as a part of the solution to gun violence or it can fall victim to the worst stereotype of a band of wild-eyed gun nuts.

It's on the run for the first time and one immediate step it can take is to lash a muzzle on Dana Loesch and apologize to every crying mother she insulted with her loony assertions.

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