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## ***Who and What Are You Protecting?***

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When the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791, the Founding Fathers felt that there was a need for an amendment that would confer a collective right of the people of the states to maintain armed militias for the common defense. Accordingly, they included the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states:

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

So, how does an amendment, which calls for the right of the people to maintain a "well-regulated militia," transform into one of the most fraudulent - and effective - pieces of propaganda used on the American public in history?

The National Rifle Association (NRA) is the most powerful and feared special interest group on Capitol Hill due to its extensive lobbying efforts, sustaining a chokehold on the legislature with their spending on election campaigns. The NRA spent 7.5 million dollars on federal elections on 66 candidates in 2012 alone, the same year that Sandy Hook took place. By spending a fraction of their annual 282 million dollar revenue to directly fund certain campaigns, the NRA ensures that their chosen officials will protect their interests by supporting pro-gun legislation. The Constitution, being a living, breathing document, is meant to be interpreted by members of Congress, presidents, federal judges, and Supreme Court justices, in a manner that protects the interests of the American people. But how can the Second Amendment be interpreted in a manner that protects the American people when numerous members of Congress - and two recent presidents who nominated scores of federal judges and five Supreme Court justices - have been indebted to

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the NRA, an organization that manipulates the words of the Second Amendment to fit its own interests by quoting only the second half of the Amendment as if the full Amendment read, "...the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed?"

The NRA also spends extensive amounts of money on advertisements to the American public. By preying upon the fear or alleged "patriotism" of citizens in its advertisements, the NRA manipulates Americans into believing that the NRA is protecting their "individual rights." After the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, 2018, the NRA drastically increased its spending on advertisements, especially on social media. Their media presence increased so rapidly and indiscriminately that their ads were showing up on YouTube videos meant for young kids. Before the Parkland shooting, the NRA was spending \$11,300 a day on digital ads; this total skyrocketed to \$47,300 just three weeks after. The NRA needed to re-convince the American public that guns were necessary to their safety and freedom after the tragedy of Parkland, and they succeeded. After Parkland, the NRA jumped from 3 million members to almost 5 million members. The NRA has convinced its members through calculated propaganda that any form of gun control is an attack on the "individual rights" of citizens.

The NRA is protecting its own income and the profits of the related gun industry. But who is protecting the lives of our country's children who are being killed by guns at a rate that is 12 times higher than the rate in other high income democratic countries? And who is protecting the lives of our country's high school age youth who are being murdered with guns at a rate that is 82 times higher? What elected officials spoke out against the fraudulent misrepresentation of the Second Amendment by the gun lobby and advocated the adoption of stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws in other high income democratic countries after the Sandy Hook massacre? After the Parkland massacre? Or after the CDC reported that since 2019, gunshot wounds have become the leading cause of death in US children and youth from the ages of 1-19?

The Second Amendment has been hijacked and manipulated by special interest groups to the extent that it is almost unrecognizable from the original amendment. The American people, including American children and youth, are the victims of this fraud, which places the economic interests of the U.S. gun lobby and the associated gun industry as a higher priority than even the lives of first grade children.

Who and what should we be protecting?

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