

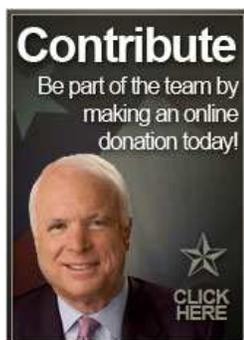


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John McCain Addresses The National Rifle Association

September 21, 2007

John McCain delivered remarks to the National Rifle Association Friday, September 21st at 9:30 a.m. EDT. Below are McCain's remarks as prepared for delivery:

It is a pleasure to appear before you this morning. I see a lot of old friends here, friends like Jim Baker whom I worked with as long ago as the 1980s in the struggle to preserve firearms freedom. His hair was not so gray back then -- and I had a lot more of it.

This is a sophisticated crowd. You know politics, and you know politicians. You are pretty used to hearing aspirants for public office come before you and pledge fealty to the cause of the Second Amendment. You know you need to dig into a politician's record to find out where they really stand. You know some will change their position or have little record for you to judge. That is not the case with me.

When I first ran for Congress in 1982, I was proud to have the support of gun owners and the National Rifle Association. For more than two decades, I've opposed the efforts of the anti-gun crowd to ban guns, ban ammunition, ban magazines, and paint gun owners as some kind of fringe group, dangerous in "modern" America. Some even call you "extremists." My friends, gun owners are not extremists, you are the core of modern America. The Second Amendment is unique in the world and at the core of our constitutional freedoms. It guarantees an INDIVIDUAL right to keep and bear arms. To argue anything else is to reject the clear meaning of our founding fathers.

But the clear meaning of the Second Amendment has not stopped those who want to punish firearms owners -- and those who make and sell firearms -- for the actions of criminals. It seems like every time there is a particularly violent crime, the anti-gun crowd comes up with a plan to capitalize on tragedy and limit Second Amendment rights for all Americans. I opposed the ban on so-called "assault weapons" which was first proposed after a California schoolyard shooting. I thought it made no sense to ban a class of firearms based on cosmetic features. I opposed waiting periods for gun purchases. We lost on both of those in the short run, but it has worked out better in the long-run. Fortunately, that gun ban sunsetted after 10 long years. And, I was proud to vote against those who tried to extend it in 2004.

I also opposed efforts to cripple our firearms manufacturers by making them liable for the acts of violent criminals. This was a particularly devious effort to use lawsuits to bankrupt our great gun manufacturers. A number of big-city mayors decided it was more important to blame the manufacturers of a legal product than it was to control crime in their own cities. Fortunately, we are able to protect manufacturers from these frivolous lawsuits.

In my years in Washington, I have seen what I will call three myths used by politicians to excuse their support for gun control. First, is the big city myth: that it is acceptable -- even necessary -- to fight crime in big cities. If you have a crime problem, they say it's really a gun problem. So instead of increasing police patrols, instituting tough sentences for lawbreakers and other measures that would actually address crime, we restrict ownership of guns and limit the rights of law abiding citizens.

We are meeting today in a city that represents the worst of this myth. The citizens of the nation's capital do not enjoy the right to keep and bear arms. That is why I have co-sponsored legislation repealing the ban on firearms possession for law abiding citizens in the District of Columbia. The Second Amendment is not just for rural Arizona, it is for all of America.

The second myth is that of the "bad gun." This was at the core of the debate over so-called "assault weapons." Proponents of this myth argue that some kinds of guns are acceptable -- for now -- but others are not if they have certain features -- like a pistol grip or an extended magazine. I will continue to oppose those who want to ration the Second Amendment based on their views of what guns it applies to.

Finally, there is the hunting myth -- if you show your bona fides by hunting ducks or varmints or quail, it makes up for support for gun control. This myth overlooks a fundamental truth: the Second Amendment is not about hunting, it is about freedom.

Over the years, we have not agreed on every issue. We had differences over my efforts to standardize the sales procedures at gun shows and to clean up our campaign finance system. I understand and respect your position. But while we may disagree on the means we do agree on the need to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and, in light of the number of my colleagues who have been disgraced, are under investigation and

are worried about indictment, agree that Washington needs cleaning up. Americans have lost trust in their government and that trust must be restored.

But these minor differences pale in comparison to our shared vision of a Second Amendment protected from political vagaries. And we have real differences with many of those running for President. Democratic presidential candidates have learned something since 2000. They don't talk about their plans for gun control. They pose for the cameras in camouflage. But that is all they are doing -- posing. Just because they don't talk about gun control doesn't mean they don't want gun control. Let's be clear. If Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama or John Edwards are elected President, they will go after the rights of law abiding gun owners -- just as Bill Clinton did when he was president. Moveon.org, which seems to be calling the shots in the Democratic Party these days, will have more influence on gun control in the Oval Office, not John Dingell. These Democratic candidates voted to ban guns or ban ammunition or to allow gun makers to be sued out of existence as Senators. Think how much worse it would be if they had the power to appoint Supreme Court Justices, name Attorneys General and use the full power of the federal government.

And just as the Democratic candidates are fundamentally wrong about the Second Amendment, they are fundamentally wrong about the key threats facing America in the 21st century.

As we meet, in Iraq and Afghanistan, American soldiers, Marines, sailors and airmen are fighting bravely and tenaciously in battles that are as dangerous, difficult and consequential as the great battles of our armed forces' storied past. As we all know, the war in Iraq has not gone well, and the American people have grown sick and tired of it. I understand that, of course. I, too, have been made sick at heart by the many mistakes made by civilian and military commanders and the terrible price we have paid for them. But we cannot react to these mistakes by embracing a course of action that will be an even greater mistake, a mistake of colossal historical proportions, which will -- and I am as sure of this as I am of anything -- seriously endanger the country I have served all my adult life.

In the coming month we will face a fork in the road. We can pursue our opportunity for victory in Iraq, strengthen our hand in the larger war against Islamic extremists, and make our nation more secure. Or we can fold our tents, embolden our enemies, throw a region into instability, and increase the risks faced on our home soil. Which way requires greater leadership? I am leading the fight on the floor of the United States Senate to support our troops and in support of victory and against a plan for surrender.

We have new commanders in Iraq, and they are following a counterinsurgency strategy that I have advocated from the beginning of this war, which makes the most effective use of our strength and doesn't strengthen the tactics of our enemy. This new battle plan is succeeding where our previous tactics failed. Although the outcome remains uncertain, we must give General Petraeus and the Americans he has the honor to command adequate time to salvage from the wreckage of our past mistakes a measure of stability for Iraq and the Middle East, and a more secure future for the American people. To concede defeat now would strengthen al Qaeda, empower Iran and other hostile powers in the Middle East, unleash a full scale civil war in Iraq that could quite possibly provoke genocide there, and destabilize the entire region as neighboring powers come to the aid of their favored factions. The consequences would threaten us for years, and I am certain would eventually draw us into a wider and more difficult war that would impose even greater sacrifices on us.

Our defeat in Iraq would be catastrophic, not just for Iraq, but for us, and I cannot be complicit in it. I will do whatever I can to help avert it. That is all I can offer my country. It is not much compared to the sacrifices made by Americans who have volunteered to shoulder a rifle and fight this war for us. I know that and am humbled by it. But though my duty is neither dangerous nor onerous, it compels me nonetheless to say to my fellow Americans, as long as we have a chance to succeed we must try to succeed.

I have many responsibilities to the American people, and I try to take them all seriously. But I have one responsibility that outweighs all the others -- and that is to use whatever meager talents I possess, and every resource God has granted me to protect the security of this great and good nation from all enemies foreign and domestic. And that I intend to do, even if I must stand athwart popular opinion. I will attempt to convince as many of my countrymen as I can that we must show even greater patience, though our patience is nearly exhausted so we can defeat our enemies. That is how I construe my responsibility to my country. That is how I construed it yesterday. It is how I construe it today. It is how I will construe it tomorrow. I do not know how I could choose any other course.

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