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The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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"A free people . . . ought to be armed"

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Thomas Jefferson said, "No free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms." But, could he have foreseen people using guns in mass shootings, like Virginia Tech?

In the United States handguns are used in two-thirds of the robberies and in half the 15,000 murders each year. Why aren't we passing gun control laws to prevent these tragedies? The stumbling block is the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution which 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."

And, in 2008 the United States Supreme Court affirmed this Second Amendment right to own guns, ruling unconstitutional the 31 year old handgun ban in Washington, D.C. Further, they dissected the wording of the Second Amendment, showing that the "people" themselves have the constitutional right to gun ownership.

People favoring gun control still believe the Second Amendment guarantees gun ownership only to members of militias, which they liken to our National Guard. But, when the Founding Fathers referred to militias they could not have meant a government army like the National Guard. They had just gone through the American Revolution and government armies were the enemy. Isn't it clear they were referring to private citizens owning guns so, if needed, they could band together into a militia to forcefully oppose the government army?

What were the intentions of the authors of the Bill of Rights concerning private citizens owning guns? Further, why might they have

actually wanted private citizens to own guns?

To a great degree, their beliefs were molded by their lives in the countries from which they emigrated. American scholar and political writer, Noah Webster, summarized the fears of our Founding Fathers saying, "Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom of Europe."

The Founding Fathers saw firsthand the results of governments removing guns from the people. And they brought this fear with them, wanting citizens to own guns to prevent what happened in Europe from happening here.

Further, while creating our new government, they feared the very government they were creating. Wouldn't it be reasonable to expect them to incorporate these fears into the text of the Bill of Rights? Wouldn't it also be reasonable to assume these fears of government and its power obviate any possibility that the Founding Fathers considered gun ownership a privilege rather than a right? Further proof of their intent can be gleaned from statements they made outside the Bill of Rights.

Richard Henry Lee, initiator of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the first Senate that passed the Bill of Rights said, "To preserve liberty, it is essential that the whole body of people always possess arms. . ."

Samuel Adams added, "The Constitution shall never be construed to authorize Congress. . .to prevent the people of The United States who are peaceable citizens from keeping their own arms. . ."

James Madison wrote in the Federalist Paper 46, ". . .of being

armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation. . ."

George Washington summarized, "Firearms are second only to the Constitution in importance; they are the people's liberty's teeth;" adding, "A free people ought. . .to be armed."

Beyond their statements, we should also look at how far the Founding Fathers were willing to go if the British government tried to confiscate their guns. How strongly did they really feel about the need for private citizens to own guns? A quote from the Lexicon Universal Encyclopedia: "When a column (of British army regulars) under Lt. Col. Francis Smith moved into the countryside to collect arms and munitions gathered by the patriot militia, hostilities erupted at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775."

Our Founding Fathers were willing to fight and die rather than give up their guns, as they had in Europe. Equally important, it is evident they did not view the militia as a government army, a National Guard. Instead, they viewed a militia as private citizens banding together to fight the government's army.

Maybe those who say, "I'll give up my gun - when they pry it from my cold, dead hands," understood exactly what the Founding Fathers meant.

Yes, "A free people ought. . .to be armed."