



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 9, 2013

NY Times Calls Gun Owners of America an “Upstart”

With the background checks bill stalled in the Senate, [the New York Times was surprised to learn](#) that it may largely be due to the determined and noisy efforts of a pro-gun advocacy group less than one-tenth the size of the National Rifle Association (NRA) — Gun Owners of America (GOA). Calling it an “upstart,” *Times* writer Jennifer Steinhauer wrote that the GOA “is emerging as an influential force.”



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) intended to bring the expanded background checks bill to the floor as his first priority but had to back away after learning that Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) had broken off private meetings with Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) to discuss a compromise on the controversial measure. Larry Pratt (shown), GOA’s executive director, said his group’s efforts to express its dismay over Coburn with e-mails, letters, and phone calls to his office began to annoy the pro-gun senator. Said Pratt: “His staff admitted that it kind of irritated the senator. We were told ‘He’s getting tired of this.’ But when we hear complaints like that, we know we are close to success. We are happy this changed his mind.”

[Reid had to agree:](#)

The NRA - their lobbying efforts are being pushed even further to the extreme by virtue of the fact that there’s another organization called Gun Owners of America. Whenever the NRA tries to be reasonable, the Gun Owners of America becomes more unreasonable, and it pushes the NRA [to the right.]

[In an update to his members](#), Pratt was pleased to see that the *Times* was finally giving the group its due, quoting from the article:

Gun Owners of America, with its war chest, membership and lobbying strength dwarfed by the National Rifle Association, is emerging as an influential force as a series of gun control measures heads to the Senate floor....

The group has already been successful in both freezing senators, particularly Republicans [like Coburn], who have appeared to be on the fence about supporting bills to expand background checks and [has been] empowering those who have a strong gun rights background...

Concluded Pratt:

To date, no compromise has been reached. And that means Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid just doesn’t have the votes yet.

The differences between the GOA and the NRA are striking. With just 300,000 members compared to the 4- to 5-million member NRA, and a budget of just \$2 million compared to the NRA’s \$220 million, the GOA is nevertheless well-known to its supporters and to its enemies. Moderate Republican Representative Peter King from New York has an F- rating from the GOA and admits that the group has clout:



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Larry Pratt with the Gun Owners of America is effective. I don't deal with them myself, but the fact is, they are effective.

The GOA's ratings of politicians are far stricter than are those of the NRA. For example, Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) [has an A+ rating](#) from the NRA while he has a D- rating from the GOA. During the 2008 presidential campaign the GOA gave presidential candidate John McCain (R-Ariz.) an F- rating while the NRA favored McCain with a C+ rating. In fact, the only presidential candidate to receive an A+ rating from the GOA was Texas congressman Ron Paul. The GOA also rates Sen. Reid an F- while the NRA gives Reid a pass with a B.

The GOA has a narrow focus for its mission: preserving, defending, and expanding the Second Amendment rights for gun owners. [On its website](#), the group explains:

GOA has never wavered from its mission to defend the Second Amendment — liberty's teeth as George Washington called it.

Over the last 30 years, GOA has built a nationwide network of attorneys to help fight court battles in almost every state in the nation to protect gun owner rights. GOA staff and attorneys have also worked with members of Congress, state legislators and local citizens to protect gun ranges and local gun clubs from closure by overzealous government anti-gun bureaucrats.

In addition to stalling, at least for the moment, the bill to expand background checks in the Senate, what likely put Pratt into the limelight of the national media was his response to the Newtown shooting. While most were calling for more gun controls, Pratt said the politicians who created the gun-free zone were to blame instead:

Gun control supporters have the blood of little children on their hands. Federal and state laws combined to ensure that no teacher, no administrator, no adult had a gun at the Newtown school where the children were murdered.

This tragedy underscores the urgency of getting rid of gun bans in school zones. The only thing accomplished by gun-free zones is to ensure that mass murderers can slay more before they are finally confronted by someone with a gun.

The GOA was founded by a member of the NRA's board of directors, California state senator H. L. Richardson, back in 1975, [following the successful defeat](#) of a handgun ban bill by his group Gun Owners of California. Richardson became increasingly disenchanted with the NRA's lack of effectiveness in the fight to preserve and strengthen the Second Amendment, noting that the NRA's position had waffled severely over the years. After the NRA supported some parts of the Gun Control Act of 1968, Richardson and other members began their migration to another group with more backbone. The GOA grew out of that discontent and today is the country's second most influential gun lobbying organization. Former Texas congressman Ron Paul called the GOA the "only non-compromise gun lobby in Washington," an appellation that appears on the group's masthead.

As the NRA tries to increase its membership base, it attempts to appeal to a broader spectrum of gun owners, and consequently has left a long and unhappy trail of compromises behind. Two heavily detailed reports of that long sad trail include Felix Bronstein's article, ["Whose Side Is the NRA Really On?"](#) and Nicki Fellenzer's ["Betrayal of Trust."](#)

In simple terms, the GOA has never lost focus on its prime purpose: to protect and defend Americans' Second Amendment. It is successfully giving those disappointed with the NRA another choice in the gun



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wars. Part of the group's mission, according to Pratt, is to stay on top of the NRA "when we don't think they've gone far enough." After 38 years of working behind the scenes, it must be gratifying to Pratt and GOA's 300,000 members to finally get some appreciation for the work they have been doing in their mission.

Photo of Larry Pratt, executive director of Gun Owners of America

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