

## Where's Wayne?

*by Paul Helmke - October 28, 2008*

Tonight in New York City, I'll be participating in a gun control debate hosted by Intelligence Squared, in partnership with National Public Radio.

I'll be joining Prof. John Donohue of Yale University and Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske to argue one side of the issue, while Prof. Gary Kleck of Florida State University, attorney Stephen Halbrook, and John Lott of the University of Maryland will argue the other side.

Notable by his absence, however, will be National Rifle Association Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre. Mr. LaPierre was expected to join us in this debate, but he backed out unexpectedly.

This is unfortunate. One week before the most significant election of our lifetime -- an election in which the NRA promises to spend \$40 million across the country to defeat Sen. Barack Obama and other candidates who favor common sense gun laws -- we will be discussing the need for effective ways to prevent gun violence in America.

Mr. LaPierre could have used tonight's forum to explain why NRA opposes laws that help keep dangerous weapons from dangerous people, and why his organization tries to undermine candidates who support those common sense policies. Sadly, this is not to be.

For the record, however, it is worth noting that Mr. LaPierre's absence from tonight's debate fits into a pattern of NRA behavior.

Rather than confront their opponents face-to-face, we learned from reports this summer that the NRA hired a spy to infiltrate the gun control movement and collect information on gun violence victims and their families for over 10 years. When Mr. LaPierre was asked to explain these dishonorable tactics for the first time on national television last week, he ducked the question completely.

And now, rather than engage the voters in honest terms, NRA leaders are spending millions of dollars in false attacks against Sen. Obama on television ads and direct mail that CNN, Congressional Quarterly, The Washington Post, and FactCheck.org have called "misleading," "a huge stretch," "intentionally dishonest," "pants on fire wrong" and which "distort Obama's position on gun control beyond recognition."

The American people are seeing through the NRA's false attacks. Since the Supreme Court declared an individual right to own a gun for self defense in the home, NRA's campaign of division has fallen flat. Sen. Obama has said consistently that he believes in an individual Second Amendment right to own a gun with reasonable restrictions to protect public safety, and his message of finding a middle ground to solve America's problems has resonated across the country.

I'm looking forward to a vigorous discussion at tonight's debate about the need for common sense gun laws to protect our families and communities. The debate should be available online at a later time, and will likely be broadcast on NPR in the near future.

We will post it to [www.bradycampaign.org/blog](http://www.bradycampaign.org/blog) as soon as it becomes available.