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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-1308

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Mr. Dennis Henigan
Acting President
The Brady Campaign
1225 Eye Street NW, #1100
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Acting President Henigan:

In your response to my recent letter, you have once again drawn false and illogical conclusions from my statements. I therefore wish to again clarify my beliefs and those of many law-abiding gun owners.

I stand by my original statement, that the Second Amendment – now, and as originally intended – is the last line of defense between us and a tyrannical government. As James Madison wrote, it is this “advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation.” Your sensationalist characterization of my statements as an encouragement of “resistance by force” or to “engage in violent acts against government officials” is not only a gross exaggeration, but also reveals your misunderstanding of American history and rhetoric.

The beginning of my letter included a short review of the circumstances leading up to the creation of the Bill of Rights and the inclusion of a right to keep and bear arms. This recitation was not meant as an “exercise in misdirection and obfuscation” or a “repetition of gun lobby talking points” as you claim – but instead an attempt to provide some background for my beliefs and those of many Americans regarding the origin of our Second Amendment rights.

Surely you agree our Founding Fathers, who fought for freedom and the right to self-government, included a right to keep and bear arms as not just a mere reference to a “way-of-life” or as a frontiersman’s necessity, but also for protection against the threat of a tyrannical government (like the one they just fought for independence). This idea of protection against tyranny emerges directly from this most formative period in our nation’s history. The idea that our citizens should never be deprived of the ability to defend themselves from a government that would take away our right for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was the primary purpose of the American Revolution. In fact, James Madison wrote in *The Federalist* of the idea that a federal army with intent to oppress the people “would be opposed by a militia amounting to near half a million of citizens with arms in their hands.”

I am not now claiming, nor have I ever claimed, that using “lethal weaponry is a legitimate political remedy for those who are dissatisfied with (our laws).” I believe in our democratic process and proudly serve as a Representative because of it. I believe in the rule of law, and the ability of our citizenry to effectively address our grievances within that rule of law. However, should this democratic process fail – should the government abuse its power and the Constitution, should the ruling government be deemed illegitimate by the people – it was the Founding Fathers’ desire, and our

right as Americans, that we not be helpless but be able to fight back when the very existence of fundamental rights are at issue.

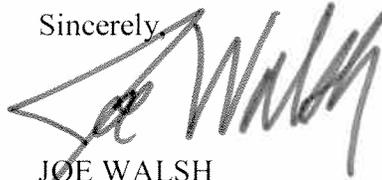
These references to tyranny and illegitimate, abusive government may seem far-fetched or impossible to us, but as we have seen in the last century and this one, governments are more than capable of unspeakable acts against their citizens. To protect against those acts, our nation's founders included the specific freedom and right to protect oneself and one's liberty – and listed it as the Second Amendment, only after the freedom of speech, because of its importance.

But securing the rights of the people against a tyrannical government is not the only reason that the Second Amendment remains what I believe is the most important amendment. In fact, securing the freedom of the people to bear arms was understood from the beginning of our nation to include not just protecting liberty and the people collectively, but to also include an individual's right to self-defense.

Both William Blackstone (whose Commentaries on the Laws of England are considered authoritative in America even today) and John Locke wrote of the fundamental right of self-preservation and defense. Locke specifically noted its importance “when the sanctions of society and laws are found insufficient to restrain the violence of oppression.” Allowing our law-abiding citizens to carry firearms is to allow them to exercise their right as Americans to protect themselves – be it from violent crime or to secure their freedom from a despotic government.

I hope that in the future, when you evaluate my remarks, you will consider the obvious: that we both have significantly different views of gun ownership and the rights guaranteed in that regard – but we need not exaggerate or contort those views in order to engage one other in political discourse.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Walsh". The signature is stylized and written over a faint, large, light-colored watermark or background graphic that resembles a triangle or a stylized letter 'W'.

JOE WALSH
Member of Congress