

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 12, 2000

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MSNBC'S TOWN MEETING ON GUNS

DATE: Wednesday, April 12, 2000
LOCATION: University of Denver, Denver, Colorado
TIME: Briefing: Aboard AF1 en route Denver, Colorado
Briefing: 12:35 pm – 12:50 pm MDT
Town Meeting: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm MDT
FROM: Joe Lockhart

I. PURPOSE

For you to participate in an MSNBC-televised town meeting on the gun control debate.

II. BACKGROUND

You will participate in the first hour of MSNBC's two-hour town meeting on the issues of gun ownership, regulation and control, "Up in Arms: What Should America Do?" moderated by NBC News' Tom Brokaw from the University of Denver. During the first hour, Brokaw will interview you and take questions from audience members, followed by a second hour that, begins at 11:00 pm EDT, in which Brokaw will moderate a live debate with advocates representing opposing points of view on the gun.

The Town Meeting will air live on MSNBC. Additionally, NBC Nightly News will air live from Denver with reports on the town meeting as well as news of the day. MSNBC will re-air the Town Meeting at 10:00 pm EDT, followed by a LIVE panel discussion on guns that will include members of Congress, administration officials, gun manufacturers, and citizens, moderated by Tom Brokaw, beginning at 11:00 pm EDT.

Expect the following questions from Brokaw:

- Is the ready availability of guns responsible for the recent shootings in schools, office buildings, and places of worship?
- Can gun violence be curbed with more laws, or is this a larger societal problems? How can parents protect their children from the dangers of gun?
- Does there need to be more federal gun control laws or should gun control laws be done by the states?

Expect further discussion on gun safety, the Smith & Wesson Deal, smart-gun technology, the NRA, and licensing and registration of handguns.

One of the questions will come from Newsweek correspondent Matt Bai, who has recently written on the Smith & Wesson deal and the gun manufacturer Colt (see attached articles.) Brokaw will also air 2 NRA ads. The scripts are attached.

III. PARTICIPANTS

YOU

Tom Brokaw

Audience members who will ask questions and/or make comments. (see attached list)
Approximately 350 University of Denver students, some of whom have submitted pre-screened questions to NBC and who may be called upon.

IV. PRESS PLAN

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The Town Meeting will also be transcribed for immediate release.

V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- Upon arrival YOU will proceed to hold for a logistical briefing and makeup.
- YOU will proceed immediately to the backstage area where you will put on a wireless lavalier microphone. YOU must be in place by 12:55 pm.
- At exactly 1:00 pm, the following occurs:

FIRST SEGMENT (Total Running Time: approx. 14 minutes)

- Town Meeting begins.
- Tom Brokaw is announced onto stage and welcomes everyone.
- Brokaw introduces a set-up piece on the gun control debate in America and YOUR day in Colorado. **At this time YOU proceed on stage unannounced.**
- Brokaw introduces YOU (YOU are already seated)
- Possible Questions By Brokaw To YOU:
 - What would you like to say to the people of Colorado as we approach the one-year anniversary of Columbine? How important is the gun show loophole?
 - Does there need to be more gun control laws or is more enforcement the answer?
 - Why shouldn't the states – like Maryland and Colorado – and not the federal government pass gun laws?
- Questions And/Or comments from "VIP" Audience follow (approx. 6 questions if time allows)
- Commercial Break (approx. 3 minutes, 15 seconds)

SECOND SEGMENT (Total Running Time: Approx. 10 Minutes, 5 Seconds)

TOPIC: Smith & Wesson (Footage Of Rose Garden Announcement To Be Shown)

- Possible Questions by Brokaw to YOU:
 - How did the agreement come to be with Smith & Wesson?
 - Are you working with gunmakers to develop smart gun technologies and do you think they'll work?
 - Are more safety devices on guns the answer?

- Question From Student In Audience (Question Is Pre-Screened By NBC Producers)
- Question From Matt Bai, *Newsweek*, On The Smith & Wesson Agreement
- Questions And/Or Comments From “VIP” Audience Follow (Approx. 4 Questions)
- Commercial Break (Approx. 2 Minutes, 40 Seconds)

THIRD SEGMENT (Total Running Time: Approx. 10 Minutes, 35 Seconds)

TOPIC: NRA ATTACKS (NOTE: Crack House And Criminal Lottery Attack Ads Will Be Shown)

- Possible Questions By Brokaw To YOU
- Crack House Attack Ad Is Shown – YOU Respond
- Criminal Lottery Attack Ad Is Shown – YOU Respond (Note: Brokaw Will Follow-Up With You After Response Is Given)
- Questions And/Or Comments From “VIP” Audience Follow (approx. 5 questions)
- Questions From Students (Approx. 2—Questions Are Pre-Screened By NBC)
- Commercial Break (Approx. 3 Minutes, 20 Seconds)

FOURTH SEGMENT (Total Running Time: approx. 6 minutes, 35 seconds)

TOPIC: LICENSE AND REGISTRATION OF HANDGUNS

- Possible Questions By Brokaw To YOU:
 - Why just license new handguns and not all guns? Follow-Up By Brokaw
- Question From Student In Audience (Question Is Pre-Screened By NBC)
- Questions And/Or Comments From “VIP” Audience Follow (Approx. 5 Questions)
- Commercial Break (Approx. 2 Minutes, 20 Seconds)

FIFTH SEGMENT (Total Running Time: approx. 3 minutes, 20 seconds)

- WRAP-UP
- Possible Question By Brokaw To YOU:
 - “What can be done about the millions of guns that are on the streets of America?”
- Brokaw Closes

VI. ATTACHMENTS

Gun Q&A

Participants/Article on Women Against Gun Control (who will attend the event)

Newsweek article on Smith & Wesson, Matt Bai, April 17

Newsweek article on Colt, Matt Bai, March 27

NRA Ads, “Crackhouse” and “Criminal Lottery”

MSNBC TOWN HALL ON GUNS

Is the ready availability of guns responsible for the recent shootings in schools, office buildings and places of worship?

These recent shootings have all been tragedies, and they all had different factors at play. But they did share one key element: guns in the wrong hands. We need to make sure we do everything we can to make sure that those who shouldn't have guns cannot get access to them. This includes tougher enforcement of our gun laws as well as strengthening existing laws to keep guns from falling into the hands of criminals, the mentally unstable, domestic abusers and perhaps most of all, our children. I have asked Congress to help us to do both, by passing my gun enforcement initiative to fund over 1,000 more gun prosecutors and 500 new ATF agents and inspectors, and to pass commonsense gun legislation that, among other things, closes the gun show loophole and requires child safety locks for new handguns.

Can gun violence be curbed with more laws, or is this a result of a larger societal problem?

While no single law can prevent all instances of gun violence from occurring, we know that stronger gun laws can make a difference in preventing gun crime and accidents. When I took office, violent crime – especially gun violence – was on the rise for years. So, we put into place a strategy of more police on our streets and put strong new laws on the books, including the Brady Law and the assault weapons ban. The Brady Law alone has stopped over half a million gun sales to felons, fugitives, stalkers, and others who are prohibited by law from owning guns. As a result of our efforts, stronger State gun laws and local efforts to curb gun violence, gun crime is down 35 percent since 1993 and the homicide rate is at its lowest point in 31 years.

But no one thinks gun violence is at an acceptable level. We could build our success immediately if the Congress would pass the common sense gun legislation that has been languishing for over nine months. These are simple safety measures we can take – closing the gun show loophole that allows criminals to buy guns no questions asked at gun shows, requiring child safety locks for handguns to prevent young people from using guns to hurt themselves or others. We know these measures will save lives and there is simply no excuse for sitting on our hands.

But of course, we can do more to address violence beyond passage of laws. Responsible members of the gun industry can do their part by working with us to make meaningful changes in the way they do business. The media and entertainment industries can help change a culture that too often glorifies violence. Schools and community groups can reach troubled youth before their troubles simmer over. And most fundamentally, parents can talk to their children, teach them to resolve their conflicts peacefully, and raise them with the right values. I believe that if we set our minds to it, and work together, we can make this the safest big country in the world.

How can parents protect their children from the dangers of guns?

First of all, I think it is important for parents to remember that violent crime and gun crime have dropped significantly all across the country. Having said that, I believe we can all do more to help make our children safer from gun violence. I would say to parents that it is important to talk to your children, if they're old enough, about these recent shootings. And reassure them that these are rare occurrences. Parents should remind children that schools are still about the safest places in any community.

Just as importantly, for parents that have guns at home, I would urge them to keep their guns safely stored and locked away so that their children cannot get access to them. The accidental firearms death rate for children under age 15 in the United States is nine times higher than in 25 other industrialized nations. This is unacceptable. UCLA and RAND recently released a study that showed that over a third of all homes with children had at least one firearm. Among those homes, 43 percent had at least one unlocked firearm. This shows that parents need to take greater care to ensure that their children – or other children – cannot use their guns.

Does there need to be more federal gun control laws or should gun control laws be done by the states?

Recently, we have seen more states making progress to enact stronger gun laws. Yesterday, I joined the Governor of Maryland as he signed into law a number of common sense measures that would, for instance, mandate internal child safety locks on handguns and require all gun purchasers to get training on safe storage and handling of guns. Last week, I was in California, where the Governor has signed into law measures to limit handgun sales to one per month and to ban all "junk guns." These are all important steps that will help reduce gun violence, and I plan to do all I can to help bolster these efforts.

However, I still believe that that a national framework for our gun laws is needed. A patchwork of inconsistent state gun laws allows criminals to obtain guns by exploiting loopholes in states with weaker laws to commit crimes in states with stronger laws. And Congress can pass lifesaving new gun laws far more quickly than all 50 states. Take the Brady law. Before we passed this historic law, some states required background checks, but most of them did not. Back then, criminals who couldn't pass a background check in their home state could simply buy guns in neighboring states that didn't require them. Today, background checks are required in every state and the Brady law has helped block over 500,000 felons, fugitives and stalkers from purchasing firearms.

Congress could act immediately to build on the success of the Brady law and pass common sense gun measures that passed in the Senate last spring that included measures requiring background checks at gun shows and mandating the sale of child safety locks. Instead, the Congress has allowed this lifesaving legislation to languish for over nine months. Despite their inaction, states like Colorado and Oregon are considering ballot initiatives to require background checks at gun shows. They recognize the public safety benefits of getting this done in their own communities. But every child in America deserves that same level of protection. And only Congress can pass legislation that protects every child in every corner of our country.

What can be done to make guns safer?

There is a lot we can do to make guns safer and prevent gun accidents and other unintended uses of firearms. First, we should require child safety locks for handguns. This is a common sense proposal I have been pushing for years. I issued a directive to require child safety locks to be distributed to all federal law enforcement. I proposed legislation to require such locks, and the Senate passed this measure last year. The Congress can and should enact this provision right away, along with other common sense gun provisions to close the gun show loophole and ban the importation of large capacity ammunition clips. I was just in Maryland yesterday, where the Governor signed a new law to require built-in locks in handguns to make them even harder for unauthorized people to use them.

In addition to safety locks, we should help support "smart gun" technology that can limit a gun's use to its proper adult owner. I think there is incredible potential in smart guns, which is why I have proposed \$10 million in my budget to expand and develop research into such technology. The agreement we reached with Smith and Wesson last month will advance gun safety significantly, by requiring external locks, internal locks, and smart guns within a few years. The agreement also requires guns to be subject to performance tests, and other safety standards to ensure safer, higher quality guns.

What are the main components of the Smith and Wesson agreement? Does it do anything to make guns safer?

The landmark agreement that we reached with Smith and Wesson, represents an unprecedented partnership between the government and the gun industry to bring about meaningful reforms in the way the industry does business. Under the agreement, they will make major changes to the way they design, distribute and market their firearms. This means that Smith and Wesson will not only make guns that are safer, but they will also take actions to help ensure that their guns don't fall into the hands of criminals.

Smith and Wesson agreed to a number of changes in the way they design their guns that will help to make their guns safer. Handguns will have external safety locks, internal safety locks and eventually smart gun technology. Handguns will also have child safety features to help ensure that young children can't fire them.

Just as importantly, Smith and Wesson will require dealers and distributors who sell their products to abide by a code of conduct and help ensure that guns don't slip into the illegal market and get into the hands of criminals. Under the agreement, guns cannot be sold at gun shows without background checks, new limits will be placed on multiple handgun sales, and safety training will be required before individuals can purchase their gun. These breakthrough measures show what is possible when we work together in good faith – and they disprove the gun lobby's long standing claim that such reforms were impossible. We applaud Smith and Wesson's leadership, and hope other responsible members of the gun industry will step forward too.

What is your position on smart gun technology? Will it really work? When will it be available?

I support smart guns, which is why my budget provides \$10 million to fund the expansion, testing, and replication of such technologies. Smart gun technologies limit a gun's use to the proper owner – preventing accidental gun death, theft, and other unintended gun use. Several handgun manufacturers have already started to experiment with smart gun technologies. Through a partnership the Justice Department formed with one gun manufacturer, a prototype of one type of smart gun technology has been developed. My budget will build additional partnerships with gun manufacturers to help speed the availability of smart gun technology to the average consumer. While it is hard to say when this will be widely available, Smith and Wesson has already agreed to make smart guns available in the next 36 months.

What do you think of the NRA's personal attacks on you?

I don't care if the NRA wants to attack me, but this debate shouldn't be about personal attacks. It's not about politics. It's about saving lives. The gun lobby wants to change the subject away from the reasonable gun safety reforms that are supported by the majority of Americans. The truth is, the NRA doesn't have the arguments on their side, so they're choosing to make it personal instead.

What is your response to the NRA's claims that your Administration has been abysmal at enforcing laws already on the books?

Well, what they don't say is that federal firearms prosecutions are actually up 16 percent since 1992. Federal gun offenders are serving sentences that are about two years longer since I took office. And because of our unprecedented partnership with states and localities, overall prosecutions – federal, state, and local combined – are up 22 percent since 1992. More importantly, gun crime is down 35 percent since I took office in 1993. So, to say we haven't been enforcing the law, and that the results have been disastrous, is just plain wrong.

I do believe that we should do all we can to enforce the law, which is why I proposed the largest increase for gun enforcement – to fund 500 more ATF agents and inspectors, over 1,000 federal, State and local gun prosecutors, more resources to trace more guns, and to expand ballistics testing so we can catch even more gun criminals. For all their talk about enforcement, the gun lobby and their allies have been uncommonly silent when it comes to supporting real resources to crack down on gun criminals. We've been doing the job on enforcement, and we're putting our money where our mouth is. I hope the NRA will come around and support my enforcement proposals.

Many supporters of gun control believe the next step is the licensing and registration of handguns. If you support registration in principle, why did you only offer a proposal to license handgun buyers in this year's State of the Union?

As I have said before, I believe gun registration is a good idea. But I also believe that the best next step to strengthen our gun laws is a state-based licensing system to help ensure that handgun

purchasers may legally possess firearms and can safely handle and store them. This will help law enforcement efforts to keep guns out of the wrong hands, and it can help prevent many accidental shootings. So, I want to focus now on making the case for licensing, and pressing the Congress to pass common sense gun provisions such as closing the gun show loophole, requiring child safety locks for handguns, and banning the importation of large capacity ammunition clips.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO ASK QUESTIONS

Matt Bai, *Newsweek*

Currently covering Campaign 2000 for the magazine. He specializes in law enforcement and urban affairs. He was among the first to report on litigation against the gun industry, and broke an exclusive story on cutbacks at Colt that is in this week's edition.

David Olinger, *Denver Post*

Member of the recent Pulitzer Prize winning staff of the paper for their collective coverage on guns in Colorado and Columbine. He has done investigative pieces on the gun culture and gun dealers in Colorado.

The Honorable Wellington Webb

Mayor of Denver

Tom Mauser

Father of Columbine Victim, SAFE Colorado Political Director

Brian Rohrbaugh

Father of Columbine Victim Danny Rohrbaugh

Amy Sodnikar

Million Mom March, Denver area coordinator for DC national march

Carmelita Conrad

Million Mom March, Denver coordinator for local Denver march

Arnie Grossman

Co-President of SAFE Colorado

John Head

Co-President of SAFE Colorado

Rep. Ken Gordon (D)

Minority Leader, Colorado State Legislature

Paul Paradis

President of Pike Peak Firearms Coalition; Gun Shop Owner; discontinuing the sale of Smith & Wessons because of their agreement with the federal government.

Dave Anver

Owner, Dave's Guns

Anver, according to story in the *Denver Post*, is a well-liked gun store owner who has a good reputation with law-enforcement agencies. The police have sold him hundreds of repossessed guns including "Saturday Night Specials," which Anvers returned, pledging not to support anybody's right to own such guns in recent years. However, according to another *Denver Post*

report, Anver has been investigated by the ATF in 1993 for allegedly violating federal gun-show regulations. The case was dropped.

Bob Ford

President Rocky Mountain Arms

Ford is a former California State trooper who is now the President of Rocky Mountain Arms. In 1992, Ford was one of ABC News' sources alleging drug use at the home of former Governor, Jerry Brown.

Rep. Doug Dean (R)

Colorado State Legislature

Deborah Wasilewski

Women against Gun Control Colorado Chapter

Women Against Gun Control is fighting vigorously against a bill in Utah that will ban carrying concealed weapons in churches and schools, saying "schools would be sitting ducks if criminals knew no guns were inside."

Brenda Flowers

Daughter committed suicide with a handgun. She became a Second Amendment advocate after her daughter's death.

The Honorable Ken Salazar

Attorney General of Colorado

Lance Kirklin

Columbine student who was shot in the face last year. He supports the right to bear arms and still hunts with his father.

Diana Holland

Co-chair of the Littleton Community Task Force, which was formed post-Columbine to provide a dialogue between the civic, business, and school communities in the Littleton, CO.

The Honorable Tom Strickland

US attorney in Colorado, sponsored Project Exile in Colorado

Gerry Whitman

Denver Police Chief

Dave Thomas

Jefferson County District Attorney

OTHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS

All of the above plus approximately 350 students from the University of Denver. Tom Brokaw will try and have at least 2 students ask a question of the President. These students will have had their questions screened by NBC and will not be randomly chosen.

Women Against Gun Control

"The 2nd Amendment is the Equal Rights Amendment," says Janalee Tobias, president of Utah-based Women Against Gun Control (WAGC). As President Bill Clinton and the media exploit the particularly nasty school shooting of one Michigan 6-year-old by another to advance their "for our children" gun control agenda, Tobias is not impressed.

"President Clinton is the one who's anti-family," she said in a recent

interview with HUMAN EVENTS, "because he doesn't want to allow children to be protected. He has no idea of how to protect children. Women have the primary responsibility for protecting our children. And it's just a physiological fact that women are not as strong as men."

Ignored by Clinton and his allies, Tobias said, is the disproportionate impact on law-abiding women that gun control has. "The criminals will always have guns," she said flatly.

"The rapist and the murderer does not obey the law anyway. The housewife, the church-going woman won't have one. The fact is, a woman's husband may be away, she may have a violent ex-boyfriend or ex-husband. A woman needs to know how to responsibly and safely handle a firearm so she can deter crime."

She noted that gun control advocates seem to think that inanimate objects are responsible for causing crime. "Guns are not the root of the crime problem," she said.

For example, Harris and Klebold (the Littleton murderers) were on some kind of mind-altering drug. All the kids in these shootings may have been on some mind-altering drug."

Tobias was particularly disgusted with the speed with which Clinton seized upon the Michigan killing for political advantage, pushing trigger locks and other measures that would supposedly make America safer. Referring to that case of the 6-year-old killer, Tobias said, "You really think a stolen gun would have a trigger lock on it? No. How many violent acts has this kid seen, at least on TV or in movies?"

An article on WAGC's website by Jo Ann Nolan says, "Have you ever been awakened by a noise at night and you were afraid? Have you ever thought that someone could be following you and you were afraid? You have the power to change these feelings. All it takes is a little education



WAGC President
Janalee Tobias

and some practice and you can feel secure and confident." She tells how she learned to handle a gun and, now, she no longer feels afraid.

"I had a self-defense class at Brigham Young University. We had a man come in and we practiced all our moves to defend ourselves," Tobias said.

"It was fine when the guys were fooling around, but when the instructor said okay, use all your force, I was helpless against the attacker." That taught her the importance of guns for women, she said.

"Sometimes a woman will call and say she used to be against guns. But then she was victimized in her home, and so she bought a gun and learned how to shoot."

All-volunteer-staffed WAGC has "thousands of members, and members in all 50 states, and a few internationally," she said. "We call ourselves 'ladies of high caliber.' They range from housewives to doctors to attorneys to statisticians."

Tobias devotes herself full-time to unpaid activism, and has come to Washington to speak at a press conference organized by Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-Idaho).

"I'm an activist on a lot of issues," she said, "for gun rights, against frivolous mass transit, against government waste and abuse, for protecting open space. . . I've been harassed and vandalized frequently." Developers have even sued Tobias for trying to block their plans to develop open space.

Tobias's most politically incorrect fight is for guns. She said that she has received calls from major publications seeking to interview her, "but when they find out I'm a normal mom and that I don't shoot dinner from my back porch and I didn't marry my brother, they don't want to publish anything about me." She can still produce a solid packet of local Utah clips, however.

Begin one from the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, "Janalee Tobias hasn't checked her e-mail for a week. She cringes at what waits—an avalanche of messages that will take her hours to read, let alone answer. There will be invitations to speak, pleas to continue her good work, stories that make her cry, and universally one question: 'How do I get involved?'"

WAGC may be reached at P.O. Box 521000, Salt Lake City, Utah 84152-1000 (801-328-9660; e-mail: info@wagc.com; website: www.wagc.com).

It's official: Our America making her move for the ul



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New York Times
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Newswave

BILL BETS THE HOUSE



Behind the
Custody Fight

What His Life
Would Be Like in
Castro's Cuba

Elián's Ordeal



The company of cowboy legend and wartime firepower is broke and nearly out of business. The fall of an American icon. BY MATT BAI

Unmaking a Gunmaker



DONALD ZILKHA NEVER really planned to get into the gun business. In 1993 he turned 42, and had yet to make his own fortune. Success was expected of him: his family built one of the biggest banking empires in the Middle East

before conquering New York. He worried aloud to friends that his father, a philanthropist and banker, disapproved of him. Zilkha was looking for a chance to prove himself, and suddenly there it was. Colt's Manufacturing Co.—known to the world as Colt—had fallen on hard times and could be bought for next to nothing.

His family, Zilkha told others, was appalled. His mother, a board member at the Metropolitan Opera, thought it a dirty business. His billionaire uncle refused to help. But Zilkha defied them. He was a city kid enthralled by cowboy legends. He was also a shrewd businessman, and he thought he'd found a way to make the guns profitable and "respectable." Colt had helped America win two world wars; it wasn't like owning some cheap handgun maker. Zilkha would buy up Colt's competitors for military weapons, Wall Street style. Later there were other ideas: "smart guns" that would make the world safer, Western theme parks for kids. He just might become a modern Samuel Colt.

Long line: Samuel Colt, who made 'the gun that won the West' in the 1830s; inspecting Colt .45s in the 1940s

Now here he was, in the summer of 1999, sitting in his office 46 floors above midtown Manhattan, listening on the speaker phone as Colt executives told him the dream was dying. Colt was deep in debt and paying more than \$300,000 a month in legal fees. The bank wouldn't loan him any more cash. With school shootings dominating the news, Zilkha's private investors wanted nothing more to do with guns. And if he didn't come up with \$4 million in a hurry, the nation's oldest gunmaker would be forced to close its doors. So Zilkha did what he had to do. He and his partner, John Rigas, secretly put up \$1 million of their own money so that Colt could hastily build 1,100 modified assault rifles for the civilian market. They knew those guns were in high demand—even though they're banned





'Coltsville': The legendary gunmaker missed the modern trends

in several states. The rifles gave Colt a cash infusion so it could pay its factory workers. But it wasn't enough; the money ran out, and Colt soon announced it would have to stop making most consumer handguns.

The fall of Colt—"the gun that won the West"—reflects a shift in the way Americans think about guns. Once the symbol of heroic lawmen and soldiers in battle, guns are now the target of growing public anger. Colt's journey from frontier legend to the brink of extinction is part of a larger story of gunmakers that turned away from hunting rifles and military weapons in favor of handguns that, in the public's view, too often fall into criminal hands.

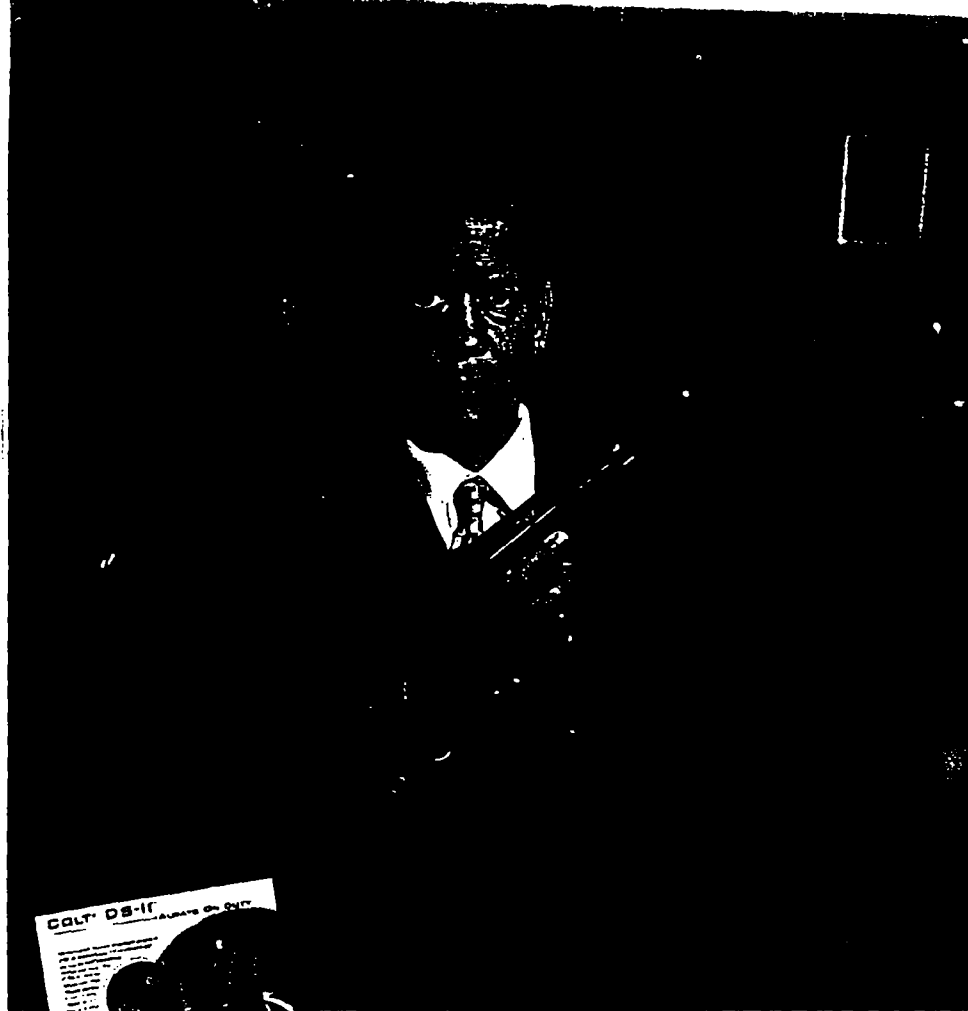
Little is known about the inner world of the gun industry. But exclusive NEWSWEEK interviews with Colt's owner and former and current executives tell the inside story of an industry in trouble—and the desperate measures gunmakers will take to save themselves. Lawsuits from the cities are draining the companies' cash. Politicians are pushing for new laws. Pro-gun crusaders are threatening to punish any company that looks for compromise. Some gunmakers vow to fight on; Smith & Wesson opted for a deal with the Feds to change its ways. Colt tried everything to save itself—and ended up nearly broke.

Zilkha and the outsiders he brought to Colt thought they could teach other gunmakers a thing or two about modern business. But they knew nothing about the people who buy guns, or the people who hate them. They wanted to build safer guns but found themselves buried under lawsuits. They tried negotiating with their enemies, only to infuriate their customers. And while they were able to make the kind of handguns that sell on the street, they feared the image it conveyed. The well-meaning men who ran Colt missed a hard truth of the trade: gunmakers don't push the latest in pocket pistols and assault rifles because they think everyone should have one. They do it to survive.

Only a trickle of guns—military rifles and engraved collectibles—now flows from the troubled Colt plant in West Hartford, Conn. But Colt was once so vibrant that the old plant and its grounds were known as Coltsville, a town unto itself. Sam Colt invented his revolver in the 1830s; by the end of World War II his pistol was in the holster of every American soldier and most cops, too. During the Vietnam War, the company churned out as many as 50,000 M-16s a month.

But then, in the 1970s, revolvers gave way to semiautomatic pistols. As gun sales sagged in an increasingly urban country, gunmakers came to rely on the only market with any

★ SUBMIT QUESTIONS NOW FOR A LIVE TALK WITH MATT BAI ABOUT COLT. THEN LOG ON TO NEWSWEEK.COM, APRIL 13, AT NOON EDT.



COLT DS-11



Rocket scientist:
Sliwa (with a
'smart gun')
could not fund
his dream
weapon; an ad
for a 'ladies' gun'

growth: small and powerful self-defense handguns, many of which ended up on the street. Beginning in 1968, gun-control advocates fought several fierce battles with the gun lobby in an effort to curb handguns. But the gun companies themselves were never targeted; the public seemed not to notice them. Colt, meanwhile, had missed the modern trend entirely. Its outdated handguns weren't cool or affordable, and by 1993—after a prolonged labor strike—the company was bankrupt.

That's when Donald Zilkha stepped into the gun world, wearing pin-striped suits and polished leather shoes. To run the company he hired Ron Stewart, a former Chrysler executive. Stewart knew even less about guns than Zilkha, but he saw why handguns were the lifeblood of the industry. He could make a concealable Mustang

pistol cheap and sell it for 40 percent more, and it would be a sure source of monthly cash. At the plant one day in 1996, Stewart was introduced to Joe Cartabona, an ex-cop who owned a small gun shop. Stewart asked Cartabona if he stocked Colts in his store, and he said no. Why? "Because they suck," Cartabona replied. To test that theory, he and Stewart took down a pile of assembled handguns and test-fired 20 of them. Eleven misfired. Stewart hired Cartabona and charged him with revamping the handgun line.

Cartabona had been buying and shooting handguns his entire life. As a high-school football star, he had been enlisted by school janitors to bring in his .22-caliber pistol and shoot the rats in the boiler room. Cartabona and the Colt engineers produced nine light, inexpensive handguns, including a 9mm pocket pistol made to compete head-on with Smith & Wesson and Glock. He even developed his own testing process: he and his friends would take each new model behind his shop, firing into a sack of calf livers at close range to test the gun's reaction to "blowback" of blood and tissue.

By 1998, as the political furor over guns was getting louder, Cartabona and a Texas-based company were developing a survivalist gun called the Multi-Caliber, which would appeal to Y2K worriers because it could fire any caliber of bullet. "I envisioned marketing that gun with gas masks and beef jerky," Cartabona says.

In his trademark black uniform with the Colt insignia, Cartabona may seem like the perfect villain for a dark industry. But in fact, like most gun executives, he is more complicated than that. He is being earnest when he says that he refused to advertise his guns alongside tobacco ads. "The last thing I want little Johnny to do is pick this up, see a Colt ad, then flip to the back and see this cigarette ad," he says, grasping a magazine. Genial and frank, Cartabona says he would never sell junk guns, and he favors licensing and registration. He has used some gun profits to buy paint for the high school. The guns he was making at Colt, he says, "are designed to get you home at night, which is your God-given right." Does Cartabona feel any responsibility for gun violence? "Not one iota."

The meaner, cheaper Colt handguns hadn't been part of Zilkha's grand plan. He says he approved them because they were designed just for cops. In fact, Colt was aggressively marketing them to the buying public. But Zilkha had little choice; by 1998 he had won back military contracts for Colt, but his bid to buy a major competitor had fallen apart, and in the wake of school shootings, mayors were starting to talk about suing the gun industry—a new tactic that would be devastating to a declining industry. Money was tight, and the new handguns were Colt's only promising new line.

Selling handguns takes a certain mentality. Manufacturers live by a general rule: you don't have to be a "gun nut," but it doesn't hurt to pretend. As outsiders to the industry, Zilkha and Stewart didn't get it. First Stewart, sensing that the gunmakers were headed for the same kind of regulation as car companies, wrote an article saying the industry would be wise to accept some kind of registration. Gun owners revolted, turning up evidence that Zilkha had contributed money to the New York Senate campaign of gun foe Charles Schumer. The resulting grass-roots boycott cost Colt as much as \$10 million.

The bad publicity and the darkening political climate worried Colt's board members, none of whom had any experience in the gun trade. They lived in the real world, not Charlton Heston's, and the public's growing out-

"I don't want to make a gun where some guy shoots some guy, and the ATF comes back here asking questions."

—BILL KEYS, Colt CEO



JEFF RIEDEL

rage over handguns made them uncomfortable. Defending themselves against public lawsuits wasn't what board members had in mind when they agreed to serve. They made their arguments to Zilkha in business terms, saying the modest profits from his sleek new handguns weren't worth the potential liability, but in some cases their feelings were plainly more visceral. "The guy, in my opinion, who was buying that gun was buying it for the wrong reason," says Bill Keys, a retired Marine general who sat on the board and now runs the company. "I don't want to make a gun where some guy shoots some guy, and the ATF comes back here asking questions." As for its intended use for self-defense, Keys says with military disdain, "The pocket gun is a ladies' gun."

Zilkha's partner, Rigas, told other board members that handguns were a dead-end business. With Stewart preparing to leave in 1998, Rigas stepped in and hired a new CEO: Steven Sliwa, a former NASA rocket scientist and college president who barely knew a gun from a grenade. The idea was for Sliwa to hurry along the "smart gun," a high-tech weapon that could be fired only by its owner. The National Rifle Association had at first warned Colt away from the idea, but now it had softened its stance. Sliwa says that as a businessman he was determined not to let his political views on guns affect the bottom line, but employees had little doubt about where he stood. Sliwa's wife cried when he took the job, but he said of the smart gun: "If somebody doesn't get in there and do this, who will?"

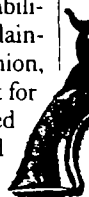
Sliwa's style, a mix of academia and New Age, seemed almost comical in a gun factory. His first move was to send his executives to a New York shrink he called "Uncle Morty," for \$8,000 a pop. The psychiatrist asked them, among other things, what their religious views were and how they got along with their in-laws. Sliwa gave Cartabona a new title: "Colt Fellow." No one knew what that meant. One executive's wife teased him about the new corporate culture, saying he had to go to the gun plant and "feel the love." Some managers thought Sliwa seemed afraid to handle the guns they put in his hand.

Sliwa arrived with a host of ideas for selling Colt's image: videogames, theme restaurants, kids' books. He traveled to Las Vegas to meet with developers about a Colt casino and kiddie ranch. In the gun business, no one introduces a product that may not sell instantly, because the cash flow is too precarious; Sliwa planned to roll out a new innovation every quarter. He was obsessed with the smart gun. In his desperation to find the right parts, he spent weeks in South Africa unsuccessfully negotiating to buy Vector—a gunmaker that was selling guns to outlaw nations like Libya.

'The Gun That Won the West,' Then and Now

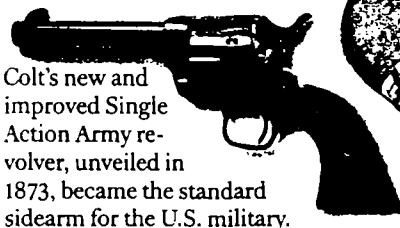
Samuel Colt went bankrupt trying to sell his first revolver in the 1830s. But by the end of World War II, Colt's guns were king, issued to every American soldier and most cops.

1 The Paterson Revolver



Men were born of varying abilities, it was said on the frontier, but Colonel Colt made them all equal. Here's how. The world's first revolver turned Colt into a legend and changed the firearms trade forever.

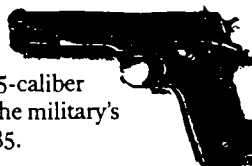
2 The Peacemaker



Colt's new and improved Single Action Army revolver, unveiled in 1873, became the standard sidearm for the U.S. military.

3 The 1911 Pistol

Designed by the legendary John Browning, the .45-caliber pistol remained the military's sidearm until 1985.

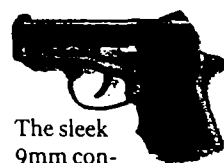


4 The M-16 Assault Rifle

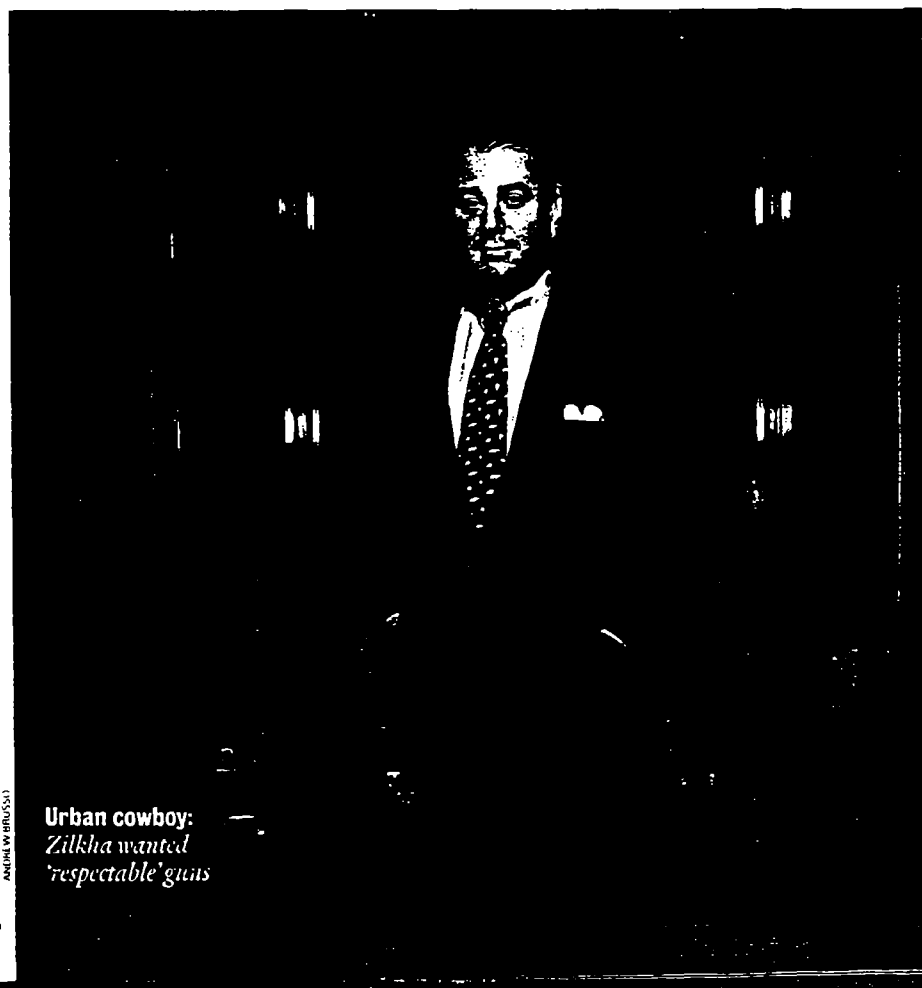


A new gun for a new kind of warfare, the M-16 Assault Rifle made its name in the rice fields of Vietnam. Today's version, the M-4, is still in production.

5 Pocket 9



The sleek 9mm consumer handgun entered the market in 1998, signaling a new kind of Colt pistol for a new kind of buyer. It is no longer made.



Urban cowboy: Zilkha wanted 'respectable' guns

Unknown to the rest of the industry, Stewart and other Colt officials had been meeting secretly with anti-gun activists to develop a strategy for introducing the smart gun. Sliwa continued the process and went a step further, appearing at an anti-gun conference. He was so concerned about Colt's image that on the day of the Columbine High School shootings last April, he wanted to make some gesture to the families. His New York media consultant talked him out of it, saying it would seem empty.

While Sliwa was busy being a "change agent," Colt was sinking. Growing legal bills and a delay on a foreign rifle deal had the company in a bind. Zilkha had managed to buy a smaller competitor, taking on additional debt. But if the pocket guns could help pay the bills, Sliwa wasn't interested. They weren't the future. He would phase them out, along with the profitable assault-style rifles, leaving only the socially acceptable, high-priced collectible guns. Cartabona's new 9mm pistol and his Y2K gun had locked up more than 12,000 orders at the industry's annual Shot Show, but neither would ever come to market. There were no parts.

Sliwa had even more worries. By summer it was obvious that employees had been lying about the inventory of completed rifles in order to mislead the bank and keep the loans flowing in. Sliwa had evidence that employees were stealing guns and products from the plant. On the verge of losing his beloved smart gun to bankruptcy, Sliwa agreed to leave his job and spin off a separate company that would raise money for the project. Nobody wanted to invest.

On an unseasonably warm day in December, just before Christmas, everyone responsible for selling new handguns arrived at the plant to find he had been furloughed without pay. Joe Cartabona left Colt with his Pony Pocket Lite pistol still in his front pocket, among the last the company would ever make. The people who ran Colt had used up their time and money looking for another way to survive—something that wouldn't make them social pariahs. "I just don't think there was an affinity with the final customer," a board member says. "I don't believe we were the kind of ownership or board that was capable of running a gun company."

Donald Zilkha is still trying. He's now negotiating to buy yet another foreign competitor. His family wishes he would

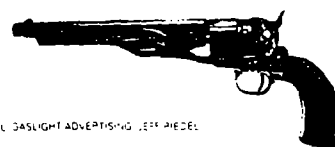
dump Colt once and for all, but with the industry in crisis he doesn't have that option. "I'd love to," Zilkha says. "But the fact is, who wants to buy a piece of cancer?" He is eating french toast at Manhattan's Four Seasons Hotel, reflecting on what went wrong. He blames the lawsuits for Colt's demise. He expects that sooner or later the American gun industry will be reduced to nothing.

The ex-cop: Cartabona's scheme for producing meaner, cheaper handguns had never been part of Colt's plan; a 1982 ad evoking John Wayne



Do he and other gunmakers bear any of the blame for gun violence? "People don't take responsibility for things anymore," Zilkha says in frustration. Then he relates a painful story from when he was 8 years old. He and some friends were at a birthday party, playing like swashbucklers with kitchen knives, when one kid stabbed another in the liver and accidentally killed him. The problem, he explains, was with the kids, not the knife. "It is tragic. It is a great lesson, in a sense. One has to have a certain amount of discipline. One needs to take responsibility." It is an argument he makes a lot these days. Donald Zilkha is all grown up now, and being a cowboy isn't nearly what it seemed.

"[The new Colt handguns] were designed to get you home at night, which is your God-given right." —JOE CARTABONA, former Colt official



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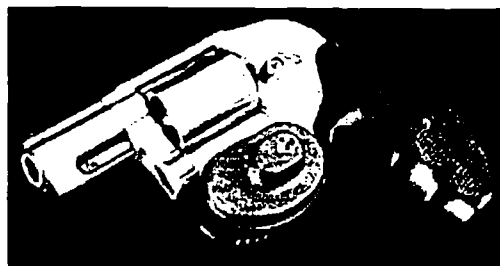
International Edition

Special Issues

High Noon in Gun Valley

Smith & Wesson's deal with Clinton on new safety rules is roiling the gun lobby. The inside story of the secret breakthrough.

By Matt Bai
Newsweek, March 27, 2000



Dealing in gun reform: a Smith & Wesson .38 caliber revolver with an attached trigger lock (Courtesy Smith & Wesson)



Ed Shultz is a hard guy to figure, even to fellow gunmakers. In a business often defined by ideology, Smith & Wesson's CEO is the ultimate pragmatist. A gruff Midwesterner, Shultz got his start in metals and office furniture—not firearms—and when the gun lobby and the White House start shouting at each other, it's not always clear whose side he's on. "I'm not willing to be a pawn in a political chess game," he says with typical bluntness. So when the industry abruptly decided to break off negotiations with the White House on new gun-safety rules early this year—and Shultz made it plain that he still preferred a deal—the other gun barons weren't sure if he was with them or not.

They got their answer last week. Shultz broke ranks and secretly cut a sweeping deal with the White House to keep Smith & Wesson out of court, agreeing to wide-ranging concessions such as locking devices and required training for its customers. To a stunned gun lobby, and to some of his closest colleagues, it was an act of treason. "Wow," exclaimed Jonathan Mossberg, whose family makes the venerable Mossberg shotgun. "It would have been nice to be told." Shultz's old friends at the National Rifle Association instantly became his mortal enemies, faxing members a scathing alert with his office number attached. To Shultz, typically, it wasn't personal—it was business. "I'm concerned for the industry," Shultz told NEWSWEEK in an interview just after the announcement. "But at some point, the company has to save itself."

In the gun world, that's getting harder to do. With more than 20 cities suing the gunmakers, claiming they make unsafe guns and do nothing to keep them from criminals, and with the Clinton administration and two states threatening to pile on, the companies are facing extinction by legal fees. Meanwhile the rhetoric in Washington is verging on the hysterical; even some Republicans—including George W. Bush—seem resigned to some kind of gun control. A bottom-line man if there ever was one, Shultz concluded it would cost less to overhaul his business than it would to pay an army of lawyers to salvage it. Never mind that Smith's revolvers are still assembled by old men at rusted metal desks; Shultz's story shows that the lawsuits have forever changed life in Gun Valley.

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Smith & Wesson may now face an even more determined enemy: the people who buy its products. Twice before in recent years, gun companies—Colt and Sturm, Ruger—have embraced far more modest reforms. In each case, a consumer boycott cost them millions. This time, the NRA lost little time in recasting the nation's most respected gunmaker as a greedy foreigner taking a torch to the Bill of Rights. (Smith is owned by a British firm.) Bracing himself at the company's Springfield, Mass., headquarters, Shultz said he'd take a rapid consumer uprising over years of costly litigation. "I'm willing to take my chances," he said, sighing. "It's the difference between dying of a heart attack and dying of cancer. The risk is the same. But one is considerably more painful."

The settlement was a coup for Housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo, who stepped into the fray of gun litigation last year. The gunmakers were looking hard for a way out of court, but the companies needed to cut a deal with someone who had the power to make all the city lawsuits go away. Cuomo and White House aide Bruce Reed were supposed to meet with industry negotiators at the annual Shot Show in Las Vegas last January to begin hammering out a compromise. But then the companies suddenly changed their minds; some execs apparently choked at the idea of giving Clinton an election-year victory at their expense. Shultz was annoyed. He had 800 employees, most of whom have been working in the plant for 20 years. A few miles down the road, Colt was already laying off hundreds of workers because of a cash shortfall it blamed on the litigation. When a Cuomo deputy called to feel him out, Shultz decided to listen.

Shultz met with Cuomo's negotiators first in Nashville, Tenn., where Smith has a subsidiary, and then in Springfield and Washington. It came down to a marathon meeting at an airport hotel in Hartford, Conn., last Wednesday, where Cuomo and Shultz finally met in person. In his usual tough manner, Shultz says the discussion was all business. But others in the room say he and Cuomo developed a mutual trust. The last sticking point was the most important: in order for the settlement to take effect, at least 10 cities had to sign on. Shultz worried that Cuomo wouldn't be able to deliver them. Sometime after midnight, Cuomo told him: "I'll bet you that I can." "You really think so?" Shultz teased. "Put your money where your mouth is." In front of incredulous aides, they structured a \$60 personal wager on the cities. A handshake sealed the bet, which Cuomo won.

The real goal of the lawsuits has always been clear: to take the gun-control issue away from Congress and force the industry to regulate itself. The Smith & Wesson pact went a long way toward making it happen. The agreement includes a weakened version of the "one gun a month" proposal so hated by the NRA; under the plan, anyone who buys more than one gun will have to wait 14 days to take the rest home. Smith won't allow any of its guns to be sold at a gun show unless all buyers are subjected to a background check. Dealers will have to make their gun stocks "theft-proof," walling them off in some cases, if they want to carry Smith & Wessons. And Smith will personalize all its new handguns with new technology—meaning that they can be fired only by their owners—within three years.

As it happened, the announcement capped the most dramatic—and least civil—week in the ongoing political debate over guns. In an unusually

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harsh exchange, Wayne LaPierre, the NRA's executive vice president, said President Clinton had "blood on his hands" for a murder in Illinois, because the killer could have been prosecuted under federal law for trying to buy a gun illegally. "He's willing to accept a certain level of killing to further his political agenda," LaPierre said. Seemingly unbothered, Clinton chided him for shedding "crocodile tears." LaPierre was probably playing, in part, to his own audience; the NRA's annual board meeting is a month away, and his comments about Clinton are likely to go over well with the true believers. But in more moderate Republican circles, the attack on the president was seen as less than helpful. Spooked House members urged a compromise on the Hill, while New York Gov. George Pataki endorsed a list of gun-control proposals—including trigger locks and a tougher assault-weapons ban—that even a liberal could love. Straddling the fault line in his own party, Bush seemed almost in denial. Responding in a statement to the Smith & Wesson deal, he praised the trigger-lock provision but ignored the rest.

Ed Shultz hopes he can leave all this behind and go back to his day job—making guns. It's not likely to be business as usual. The NRA needs money for its election-year battles in crucial swing districts, and Smith & Wesson is likely to feature prominently in its fund-raising appeals. The lobby never tells its members whose guns they should boycott, exactly, but it doesn't take a cryptologist to get the message. As of last week, a defiant Shultz hadn't tried to talk to anyone in the gun lobby. "I have no reason to," he says. Other companies are waiting anxiously to see if dealers or distributors will cave in to pressure and refuse to stock Smith guns. In a dwindling market, some gunmakers may even join the rebellion. "They'll demonize us and take whatever competitive advantage they can get by going to the user community and saying we've done some terrible thing," Shultz says. Still, if any gunmaker can survive the onslaught, it's Smith & Wesson. For one thing, the company sells some 25 percent of its handguns to cops, not general consumers. And those people who do buy Smith's vaunted high-end guns may not be quick to give them up.

It's probably only a matter of time before other big companies follow Shultz's lead. Sources say Shultz tried unsuccessfully to persuade another giant, Glock, to join in the agreement. (Glock officials couldn't be reached for comment.) Emboldened by the settlement, lawyers for the cities say the Smith & Wesson deal is a limited-time offer. "There is a risk to coming forward first," says Dennis Henigan of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. "So we made compromises with Smith & Wesson that we may not be willing to make later." One promise the lawyers made has held true: Smith & Wesson didn't pay a dime to settle the suits, and nobody appears to have profited from the agreement. Unless, of course, you count the \$60 in cash that ended up in Andrew Cuomo's pocket, his winnings from a gunmaker. The way Ed Shultz figures it, that's still a pretty good deal.

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NRA ADS
Released March 10, 2000

Script of "Crack House"

CHARLTON HESTON: When a 6-year-old in a crack house finds a stolen gun and shoots a schoolmate, the president doesn't demand gun theft prosecution or busting drug dealers. He demands safety locks.

Don't get me wrong -- nobody supports safety locks more than the NRA. But his solution is to give crack house drug dealers ... safety Mr. Clinton, when what you say is wrong, that's a mistake. When you know it's wrong, that's a lie.

(On screen: Paid for by the National Rifle Association of America)

Script of "Criminal Lottery" (TV)

CHARLTON HESTON: Mr. Clinton, before you peddle more gun laws, let's see if you're enforcing what you've got. Of all federal gun convictions in 1998, here's a chilling example of how many went to prison:

Eight in San Francisco, 14 in New Jersey, nine in Pittsburgh, two in Washington, D.C. With odds that good, criminals can't lose. (Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports 1998)

More laws won't make us safer, more prosecution will -- with a president who knows the difference.

(On screen: Paid for by the National Rifle Association of America)