

*From the Archives - Interview with Larry Pratt*

*Larry Pratt is the executive director of Gun Owners of America. This interview was conducted in December of 2001 for the ETS Pictures documentary "Urban Warrior."*

Q: There's been a long tradition in this country of separating the roles and jurisdictions of the military and domestic law enforcement. It's something that's served the country well for a long time. Those jurisdictions and definitions seem to be blurring somewhat these days. Could you talk about how the Founders envisioned the use and role of the military?

PRATT: Historically in the United States the military has been intended to be small. It was not supposed to be a standing army - and if it were, it was to be small. The Founders had direct experience with standing armies. They found that to be a very dangerous and unpleasant experience. They wanted to rely on an armed citizenry, and that's why they actually ended up wording the Second Amendment the way they did: "a well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state." Not a standing army, not a central police force, but a well regulated militia. And therefore, that is intended for us to understand why the right of people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed - which is the main central core of the sentence - which can stand with or without the militia clause. The right of the people to keep and bear arms was seen as an essential, God-given right that would fuel the militia component of public safety.

And five months after the Bill of Rights were finally ratified in 1791, Congress, in 1792, passed the Militia Act. And in that act, they required that every military-eligible man own a military rifle, ammunition - and keep it at home. Very, very different from our National Guard, which has government guns, government bullets, and they're kept in government armories. So you can see that they were even desirous of relying on the national - on the militia for national defense to a great degree, as well as suppressing insurrection - with the militia - something that would come from the people. So obviously if the government were doing something ill-intentioned and the people didn't agree, the people didn't even have to fight back. All they had to do was to say, "don't think so," and that would have been the end of the problem.

Q: A piece of legislation that doesn't take us quite back to the beginning of the country, but has demarcated these jurisdictional boundaries, is the Posse Comitatus Act. Can you talk about the history of that act?

PRATT: Well, following the Civil War, the Democrats, particularly from the South, were able to make the point that the military, when it's used for police functions, is out of its element. It's not been trained for that. It does a poor job for that. The military's been trained to kill and kill as quickly as possible. That is not the training or the role of the police. The police role is to go get a live body, bring that live body before a magistrate, and begin a judicial process. And so the Southern senators and representatives were successful in convincing the rest of the country that the military should be withdrawn and not allowed again in what amounts to civilian law enforcement, policing functions. That remained pretty much the view of everybody in the United States - there was quite a consensus for perhaps a hundred years.

Until the war on drugs and - I think language is so important, because when we call it a war,

"Well when you're at war, you use the army, right?" Well, wait a minute - we're talking about bad guys doing what Al Capone did. We took care of the Al Capone problem without an army. Actually, we decided that maybe if nobody in the country, or a substantial minority, was not interested in a law - we ought to back off. But you don't do that as readily when you're at war, because then it's a question of national honor. And so we have got the result of the war on drugs that has increasingly been used to water down, by law, the barrier that had been drawn up by the Posse Comitatus law. So that the military is no longer more than arms-length from civilian law enforcement. The military is increasingly able to intrude into the war on drugs. And as a result, not surprisingly, since the military function is not compatible with the Bill of Rights, the Bill of Rights has suffered. And our trial by jury has been greatly impinged. Our freedom of speech has been impinged. Our Fourth Amendment has been knocked cockeyed, almost completely on its back. The Second Amendment is also in retreat. So we've seen massive invasion of the people's liberties in the name of prosecuting something that really wasn't a war. So we've confused functions, and we're paying a serious price for doing so.

Q: Although the legal firewall of Posse Comitatus has been with us for a long time, it has come under increasing strain recently. But other incursions have happened. When I was reading the memorandum that your organization put together on martial law powers, I saw that you mentioned a couple of interesting examples, such as the use of federal troops to quell labor unrest in Colorado in 1914.

PRATT: Without even a curtsy to the Constitution, without any acknowledgement that the Framers had explicitly left law enforcement to state and local - and particularly under the 10th Amendment that's very plain - that if it's not spelled out anywhere else in the Constitution, the federal government, without that express explicit grant of power has no authority - and Wilson just up and went in - sent troops in to get involved in a labor dispute. In fact, there was a court martial in West Virginia of Mother Jones, who became a folk hero on the left - and now the name of a left-leaning magazine. But the fact that there was a court martial of a civilian during a time of peace is an extraordinary event. And it was just handled as if, "So what else is new? May I see the next page of the newspaper?"

Q: Are there any other similar events that have happened in the last hundred years, before the current 20 years or so that we're discussing today?

PRATT: Well, certainly during desegregation federal troops were brought in. That at least had the backing of federal law. But still, it was law enforcement being involved at the federal level. When even with federal laws - in the early republic marshals were all that were available and they would go out and seek to get whatever they needed to get done by the local sheriff. By the time of 1835, we had our first full time daytime police department in Boston. Those were the people with whom the marshals would work. There was no federal constabulary of any sort - other than this arguably constitutional arm of the Justice Department that could reasonably be said to be enforcing those few areas where the federal government does have original jurisdiction in law enforcement: counterfeiting, postal matters, treason, laws of nations, those sorts of thing. That's a list that, by the way, was provided by James Madison. So I'm not making that up.

Q: In 1992, federal troops were used to supplement National Guard and civilian law enforcement

in Los Angeles. You mention that the commander of the JTF would not allow his troops to be used, or, at least only in a very limited way because of the Posse Comitatus Act.

PRATT: During the Los Angeles riots in 1992, federal troops were brought in. And the commander, rightly, had a lot of doubt about what his role could be. And as a result, many times he was not nearly as proactive as others were wishing that he would be.

Unhappily, that same concern wasn't present during the Waco tragedy, when under the name of drugs, which was a bald-faced lie on the part of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. The drug nexus was alleged by them, when actually one of the things Koresh was not guilty of was drugs. He was quite against drugs for anybody and he himself did not participate. And he had even dropped a dime on other Davidians who had been involved drugs. So in any case, that was the excuse for penetrating the Posse Comitatus doctrine in 1993. And a great deal of materiel and training and allegedly some other participation of federal forces was involved during that Waco standoff.

Q: Can you talk specifically about the architecture of JTF 6? How it is used as a drug interdiction?

PRATT: The way we saw Joint Task Force 6 operating out of the Waco area, where they're actually stationed nearby - was they were - a request that should have gone through the governor of the state bypassed the governor, went directly to the joint task force. And after consideration, they considered that they would make various equipment, certain kinds of pyrotechnics, and firearms and training available to BATF agents. Now, they conceivably could have involved local law enforcement in that joint task force. They didn't in this case. In fact, the sheriff, as far as we can tell - perhaps the only thing he did wrong was not to tell the BATF that what they were doing was wrong - and they ought to take a deep breath and chill out. Because under the law and under the Constitution, the sheriff is still the chief law enforcement officer of a county. But the sheriff did nothing in any positive way that was improper. So he was not part of that. He could have been. And in many other cases of civilian law enforcement working on drug matters - there has been local law enforcement with various kinds of federal agencies and sometimes even, we suspect, elements of military being involved.

And there's been a lot of practice by military in cities for urban warfare. And actual simulated invasions and pyrotechnics going off and machine guns being fired and buildings being repelled and troops being dropped in by helicopters. And in some cases, maybe only the mayor knew and everybody else in town is running around thinking, "What is happening? Orson Welles' Martian invasion is here for real."

Q: Do you have any case studies of those kinds of instances, like Operation Urban Warrior in Oakland?

PRATT: I know Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had such an operation. Towns whose names that I forget in the Carolinas have also been subject to these kind of joint task force urban warfare type of assaults - where Marines and presumably Special Forces are involved in testing out urban warfare. Now nobody's going to object if the - although the use of live rounds and pyrotechnics

in a civilian U.S. populated area is a little problematic. But perhaps people will say, "Well, now that we're at war in urban areas in Pakistan - Afghanistan, and we're rooting out terrorists in various urban environments, maybe that's a justification. And as long as that's where it's headed that's fine, but it's raised a lot of concern. And I think the concern is primarily that a lot of civilian law enforcement has been involved in warfare operations. And so there's not only an unconstitutional blurring of what level of government is to be involved but how law enforcement is to be conducted. And when we have the specter of a rising attachment to paramilitary techniques on the part of local police departments, I submit we've got a real problem. Because again, we're going to be confusing the role, and are confusing the role - of a police officer who is to restore the peace by getting an alleged bad guy, alive, whenever possible, and bringing him before a magistrate. Whereas, the military's training and function, as it should be, is to kill as quickly and as efficiently as possible. You don't ask questions. You don't deliver Miranda rights. None of that kind of thing goes on in a military operation.

SWAT teams are paramilitary operations. And we have an increasing problem with SWAT teams in this country - some of which have been so Keystone Cop-ish that they have bankrupted the jurisdictions in which their escapades have gone awry. One of the California towns whose name escapes me suffered that fate. Others are paying out large settlements because of what these teams have done.

Q: When you talk to certain local law enforcement officers — I've talked to SWAT team boosters about this — they justified the use of this sort of paramilitary approach by saying, "We're outgunned out there and so we need the hardware, we need the training." What are the situations where that might be the case, and others where it's clearly not?

PRATT: I don't accept the argument that the police departments are outgunned. Still the overwhelming choice for criminals in committing crimes, when they use guns, is the 38 revolver and the 9 millimeter pistol. That clearly is not an outgunning. What we're really dealing with is the perception that you can't serve a warrant unless you've got 10, 20, 100 guys standing around with their fingers on the trigger with the justification that, "Well the suspect might flush the heroin down the toilet. So we can't knock. We can't go through all those constitutional niceties." Well if we weren't involved in a war on drugs, I would submit we wouldn't have that problem to begin with. And we would deal with it like we do any other criminal offense. If the evidence is destroyed in some cases, I'm willing to say, "So be it." Better the evidence be destroyed than my Constitution and my freedoms.

And is - if the American people are willing to go along with this kind of police state tactic in an area that's viewed as justifiable - what we've done is establish a precedent for the next area that [indicating quotes] 'needs' to be addressed with wartime tactics. And we've seen that's actually happening in an immediate threat for the Second Amendment - where in those kinds of neighborhoods, center city areas, where supposedly the drug problem is the greatest - no-knock door-to-door searches are being done from time to time - of people's homes, looking for guns. Sometimes they force their way in. Generally, they can intimidate their way in. And if somebody absolutely stands on their rights, then they become a marked person, a suspect. Every time they don't put their turn indicator on, they're going to get harassed.

Q: For people who aren't familiar with the types of armaments you find in the average SWAT armory — AR-15's, M-16's — can you talk about what has flowed into local police armories?

PRATT: SWAT teams are typically equipping themselves with fully automatic machine guns, such as the 9 millimeter Heckler & Cock. It's small. It's actually a submachine pistol. Or the M-16, which is the fully automatic U.S. Army rifle. Other kinds of sniper rifles, high-powered scopes, body armor, armored personnel carriers - which is just another word for tanks. And I have yet to hear about the criminal element that's employing tanks. We're talking about the use of explosives. In one case, a SWAT team burned down a whole city block, because there was a recalcitrant group of center city residents that were politically incorrect. I'm not sure they were really a threat. They were certainly less of a threat than the cops that burned down the city. But this mix of tactics and military weaponry is a very dangerous, explosive combination - and the number of mishaps has been increasing.

There was recently a raid in Lubbock, Texas. A man, I'm sure he was admittedly a jerk and a stinker, was involved in a domestic dispute. He decided to burn some furniture out on the front lawn. Well, that might be an environmental offense, but otherwise I'm not sure that there's really a crime being committed. The man obviously has a very bad temper and I wouldn't want to live next door to him. It was answered by a SWAT team of over 100 men. They decided that they would have a rake-and-break to begin - the man by this time had retreated into the house - was known to have guns, and so they came equipped for a fair fight. Began by 100 rounds of ammo through the windows - to be followed by tear gas. Well, in the process of rake-and-break, they put a bullet through the head of one of their own officers from behind. Now they're really mad, because this guy inside has killed one of them. Something like 300 rounds were fired. The guy inside happily was untouched. Never fired his gun. And they arrested him for murder until the forensics examination made it very clear that they had murdered their own man.

Q: Can you talk about Ruby Ridge?

PRATT: Ruby Ridge was another example of the cops being out of line. Perhaps even shooting themselves, but certainly getting shot for doing something they had no business doing. And then getting mad at the victim because the victim had actually fought back, not even knowing who they were shooting at at the time. To back up, Ruby Ridge occurred when there had been an entrapment of Randy Weaver. The government had wanted him to infiltrate the Aryan Nations, which had a compound nearby. And Randy Weaver, even though he was hard up for money, refused to cooperate.

Then they set him up on commission of a technical gun violation. And he did something which if he had thought about it - the entrapping - a very bad guy that was used for it - a criminal himself - who was an informant for the BATF - if he got a conviction was going to get a \$3,000 bonus - got Weaver to saw off a shotgun shorter than federal law allows. An unconstitutional law, but it's a law. Once they had that violation, they thought they were going to turn Weaver - but Weaver refused. And Weaver basically holed himself up and seldom came out of his mountain cabin or left that property. So the marshals began surveilling. Weaver didn't go to a court date because he had not been correctly informed of the court date. But that was used as the reason to send the marshals.

The marshals began a warrantless search of his property - were up there with the equipment of war: night scopes, automatic weapons. Lured the family dog, to get him away from the family, and in the process shot the dog. The 14 year old - actually almost 14 year old Sammy Weaver saw this happen. Saw somebody - I'm sure he didn't know who these guys in black body uniforms, in battle dress, were. But he shot one of the marshals who had just shot one of his dogs for no provocation - something that's not an entirely surprising response. In the firefight, Sammy himself was killed by another marshal. And that led to the standoff - that ultimately, Lon Horiuchi, following an order that now has resulted in the government paying a monetary restitution for the murder of Vickie Weaver.

Led to - these orders allowed Lon Horiuchi, with a spotter, to murder Vickie Weaver, standing in a door with a baby. The regular FBI agents refused to even acknowledge and go along with these military rules of engagement that had been given to them up on the mountain. But Lon Horiuchi, from the so-called hostage rescue team - there were no hostages at Ruby Ridge except for the hostages of the government - and Lon Horiuchi was willing to do it, because he just follows orders like the Nazis of sixty some years ago. But unlike the Nazis, he has not been tried by U.S. courts, and so far the government has refused to prosecute.

Q: Witnesses to SWAT raids have consistently noted the all-black uniforms and ski-masks worn by the officers. Often there's no announcement that these people are law enforcement officers. What kind of problems might this pose?

PRATT: One of the problems of the sudden attack of a SWAT team is that people don't know that these are police. They don't look like police. They just look like bad guys trying to hide their identity. Sometimes they even do have face masks on. But in any case, there's no badge - there's no identification that says, "Officer Francis O'Malley." If you get to see their back, which you're not likely to, it may say "BATF" or it may say "San Diego SWAT" or just "SWAT." But when they're coming at you, you don't see anything except black - if you see anything at all. There was a man in Denver. There was another man in - I believe Fresno - but it's happened in many different jurisdictions. Wrong address, but the guy gets killed because he reaches for a gun thinking his home is under attack - and he's dead. "Sorry." That's the problem when you play war in a civilian environment. There will be collateral damage. That is a necessary consequence, however regrettable, of war. But we're not in a war against the American people. And yet these tactics lead increasingly to a mindset among an increasing number of police that it's us versus them. And all Americans, if they're not brothers in blue, are a suspect. That's why we need Brady instant background checks. That's why we need to fingerprint everybody. That's why we need national identification cards with Social Security numbers and - holographic pictures on them. All of these kinds of things that actually are more intrusive than anything the Nazis had the technology for.

Q: Can you talk about the study that your organization commissioned related to martial law powers that study and why your organization conducted it?

PRATT: Because of the concern that we have at Gun Owners of America for the growing misapprehension of what the Second Amendment is about, and what is the proper role of

constitutional government in its police function - we commissioned a constitutional attorney, William Olson, to do a study of the power of the government that's been subsumed under the notion of executive orders and the invoking of martial law, and the role of the Posse Comitatus. And these executive order powers that have overridden Posse Comitatus or even before Posse Comitatus - that have been used historically by American Presidents when they felt the urge to go out and shoot somebody. And this - the conclusion was that we're very far along to the government - to the Congress accepting, to the courts acquiescing, to the American people, to the extent that they're even aware of it, saying, "Well I guess it's our government. I guess they would never really do anything bad." We've come to the point where by self-determination on the part of the President, "We're in a national emergency." He can declare a national emergency for fill-in-the-blank. And he can invoke incredible unconstitutional powers that the Congress has unconstitutionally ceded and allowed him to declare.

At one time, and we may still have - we had a state of emergency because of the country of Angola. Now I'll bet you most of us don't even know where Angola is, and probably almost as many don't even care. But Angola was a place where freedom fighters were fighting against a U.N. arms embargo - against a communist country, a dictatorship. And a man by the name of Jonas Savimbi was on the verge of establishing a free government throughout the country of Angola. And Clinton, declaring a national emergency, used those powers to stifle the non-governmental office of the government of Savimbi in Washington D.C. - which was basically their propaganda arm - their effort to get the American people the news about what was going on to stifle freedom in this remote part of Africa.

That's what they can do toward a foreign government. But these powers are written in such a way that they can just as easily be applied here on the soil of the USA. Take, for example, the military tribunals that the Congress has now pretty much acquiesced in. By executive order, the President has said, "Hey, if we catch one of these bad Muslim terrorists, we have the right to bring him to a secret trial." Where a two-thirds vote can convict him and get him executed. Where the evidence will never be made public. Where the trial itself may never be made known. And ultimately the accused can be put to death and perhaps that will never be made known. All that can happen. And they claim they have the right to do that here in the continental soil of the United States. That is not true. The Constitution protects all persons. It doesn't limit its protections to citizens. Now, if they want to shoot Osama Bin Laden in a cave in Afghanistan, hey, I'll pull the trigger. But if they bring him here, not because I like Osama Bin Laden, I want to see the rules applied to him. Because once we start making exceptions that that bad guy shouldn't have the benefit of American rights, then the next time somebody else is declared the bad guy - what grounds do we have to resist that?

Q: There's been a lot of talk in the Department of Defense — and John Warner has discussed it in the Senate — about revoking or reworking the Posse Comitatus Act. Can you talk about that ongoing discussion, and your personal reflections about it?

PRATT: The efforts that are at least being discussed to revoke or greatly reduce what's left of the Posse Comitatus Act really are nothing new. There's been a consistent march, Republican and Democratic Administrations alike, against the First Amendment, against the Fourth Amendment, certainly against the Second Amendment. After September 11, the terror bill, the

so-called USA Patriot Act that was brought out almost instantly by the Justice Department - was something that had been attempted by Clinton after the Oklahoma bombing. And was simply that which he had been unable to get enacted into law that time. It doesn't matter if it's a different Administration. The folks working down in the bowels of the bureaucracy are the same. And they just reached up on the shelf and pulled out the stuff that they were looking for the last time. They basically passed this - much of this legislation that restricts our liberties during times of crisis. It provides the opportunity when we're all out waving a flag and we're not looking down at our pockets to see if anybody's got his hand there.

Q: It's been said that in a time of crisis, liberty must be defended with extra vigor. Can you reflect on that statement?

PRATT: The history of our country, just of the last century, is a history of the erosion of liberty that was greatly accelerated every time we were at war. And following the war, there would be a resumption of some of the liberties, but never all. And, generally, the laws that were used to curtail our liberties were left on the books. And in any case, there was corporate memory - of, "It was really neat to just be able to pick up the phone and call anybody in the country and tell them 'this is what you will do.'" Franklin Roosevelt worked in the War Department under Woodrow Wilson. When he became President, he remembered those good old days when he could just pick up the phone and tell a tycoon of industry, "You will do such and such - whatever we want." That kind of power can be very intoxicating. And it was certainly drunk out of - that bottle was imbibed from greatly during the Second World War. We almost immediately got into the Korean War. We never really got our breath after that, and then we were in Vietnam. And so the Leviathan state in our country has been growing under our nose. We talk about us being the freest country in the world, and I think we still are. But that doesn't say much about the others. And it doesn't say anything about what we used to be not all that long ago. We've had it happen kind of like the frog in the water that is slowly boiled. He never gets the point - even the moment he dies in the boiling water. Because it happened so slowly, he didn't notice.

And the same thing has been done with our liberties. And often we are the first to celebrate the loss of our liberties, "Oh, for a little security - let's get rid of these liberties that have put us in such grave jeopardy." It's a shame that we don't remember the mettle and the world view of those who gave us our freedoms and our prosperity to begin with. It was Benjamin Franklin who said that those that would surrender their freedom for even a temporary security will end up with neither. That's not prophetic, that's a reading of history. That's what has always happened. And it is what is happening to us, as we do the same thing.

Q: As the country seeks to find a balance between liberty and security when something like September 11 happens, what guiding principals should we look toward to find the proper balance?

PRATT: Well instead of taking away further liberty, restricting freedom of speech, restricting greatly, increasingly, our privacy, subjecting us to pointless invasions of our privacy at the airport, which are really no more effective anyway than before. The problem that we had on September 11th was not lax airport security. The problem was that there were no Americans with a gun in the cabins or the cockpits of those planes. And so, men with teeny, tiny, little

weapons that had been rightly allowed on board - therefore were able to carry out an atrocity. Also, because Americans didn't realize that the hijackers had just changed the rules. There's no more, "Oh, we're going to have to go to Cuba and it'll be another day or two before I get back to Des Moines." No, they began to realize that there's not going to be any return. And actually, Americans were quite effective in taking matters into their own hands, and the militia mobilized in the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania. They saved countless lives in Washington D.C. So once again, as soon as the American people have even a little bitty piece of the puzzle, they're quite capable of effective action. The militia acquitted itself when all of the national police force, all of the security so-called at the airports, had failed. The government's solution was to shoot that plane out of the sky. The militia's solution was to kill bad guys. It seems to me we ought to go with the militia. We ought to be arming pilots.

Which, happily the Gun Owners of America was able to help get into law. And now we're trying to make the Administration go ahead and do it. So that we can get on a plane and know that at least somebody who's on our side will have a gun. And you need to actually take that basic recognition that gun-free zones amount to victim-disarmament, criminal-friendly zones. And go and roll then back at schools and every other place where gun-free zones have been imposed. Because if we don't understand it after September 11th, I don't know what it will take to realize - is that criminals don't obey laws - and particularly those that are eager to die.

Q: When you look overseas at other nations that have longstanding policies of using military assets in their domestic sphere — Israel, the U.K. in Northern Ireland and so forth — what do we see happen?

PRATT: The foreign experience gives us conflicting evidence. If we look at Britain, we see a society devoid of civil liberties. A society where the Prime Minister has begun to talk about putting people in concentration camps on the basis of suspected violent behavior without any proof whatsoever - without any adversarial process whatsoever - on a suspicion. Arresting people and incarcerating them until their thinking satisfies the government. Well that's a concentration camp mentality. It's a disarmed society, where domestic criminals are having a wonderful time.

The government there has confiscated the guns. But somehow, they didn't get the criminals'. And so crimes with guns skyrocketed some 40 percent in the three years following the gun ban. And their violent crime rate is now actually above that of the United States. And Israel, which is in a war zone - and certainly we don't have any difficulty accepting that - their first response to the initial renewal of the escalation of terror was to encourage people to carry guns. And in fact, one of those armed Israelis was the one who shot and killed people, terrorists - that were killing people on a bus in Israel. There would have been a much greater carnage had the armed citizen not been there. So I think I would much prefer to go the Israeli route than I would the British route. Because you lose your civil liberties and you end up actually in a much more dangerous society. The murder rate will shortly surpass in Britain what it is in Israel - in a war zone.

Q: Coming back to Waco and Ruby Ridge: those two incidents galvanized certain segments of the American public. The Second Amendment community was certainly one of those segments. How has this community become aware of the problem of military and law enforcement

confluence?

PRATT: Waco and Ruby Ridge provided a kind of wake-up call for those in the Second Amendment community, but not all - those in the Second Amendment community who were aware that the Second Amendment is not the only part of the Bill of Rights. And that our freedoms are pretty much like an interrelated set of threads in a fabric. And if you start pulling one out, pretty soon the whole fabric is going to come apart. When we saw warrantless searches. When we saw the confusion of military action for police action. When we saw a government police agency involving itself in an unconstitutional law - enforcing that law. We saw this growing lawlessness that was occurring, that was much beyond the fact that Randy Weaver had violated a gun law at the federal level that shouldn't have been on the books. There was a systematic violation of the Weaver family's constitutional rights. And the same thing was the case at Waco.

The brilliance of Bill Clinton was to turn something at Waco that was threatening to spread well beyond the Second Amendment community to the whole rest of the population. Following that - even after the Oklahoma City bombing, more than 50% of the American public feared the government more than they did anybody else. And they thought that it was an immediate threat to their liberties - which was the way the question was posed by Gallup, I believe. That shocked the government. And I think it was Clinton's political brilliance that took a bombing and made it into a reason to fear people who had guns - and thus led the charge against the Second Amendment community. And more importantly, spiked the Republican effort to question what the government had been doing anyway in these lawless activities that had gone on in Waco and Ruby Ridge. And as soon as Clinton was able to go on the offensive, said, "Well, it's you right-wing critics of the government, and you men marching around with guns and right-wing talk show hosts. You created a climate of hatred that led to this terrible event in Oklahoma City."

And the Republicans just collapsed, wilted at that. And they've really never been able to regain the offensive that they had in 1995. Even after the gun control issue cost Albert Gore election as President, an election he should have won. A prosperous economy, an incumbent President of his party, issues galore. But the gun control issue killed him. And still the Republicans have failed to take that issue up and use it as the effective cudgel that it is against the Democrats - so that even more Democrats get wiped out on the gun issue.

Q: In closing, is there anything else you'd like to add to this discussion?

PRATT: Our hope at Gun Owners of America is that all Americans will be led to go and study why was it that America was once an incredibly free land where people could start a business without a license; carry and buy a gun without a license; build a church without a license; educate their children in any which way they wanted - and became the most prosperous land in the history of mankind - with all these freedoms? Why did freedom work so well then? And why do we need all of these restrictions on our freedom now? And isn't it actually beginning to kind of bind pretty tight? Isn't it actually beginning to cost us a lot of prosperity, even though we have a lot of good things in our country? And there's a lot of things that are going well for most of us. If we take a look, we can see that the seeds of a government that is way too big have been planted and nourished now into rather more than a bush. Rather much larger until - to the point

that it's going to become a plant that nobody's going to be able to control. Nobody's going to be able to climb. Nobody's going to be able to cut down. So we would urge that, ultimately, that people study the roots of our freedom and get serious about returning to those roots.