

Let's start with the good news since you deserve it: Your hard work stopped some terrible and hateful bills from becoming law this year. In some cases, you were the *only* citizens standing in opposition to bills that might have automatically moved forward otherwise. Good show!

I appreciate that so many of you use material from this newsletter, and I wish I had proven worthy of your trust this session. That's an awkward way of saying, a bill leaked through. Gun avoidance training will become part of each classroom in Maryland. As one legislator noted, the *only* named topic a school must now teach by law is gun safety. It's more important than reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. We'll give you a full rundown on all legislation.

Once a bill like the gun safety education mandate becomes part of leadership's agenda, I'm not sure words exist to persuade some legislators that they should vote based on the merits of the issue. Facts don't count at that point, so it's silly that I keep trying to articulate our points as if facts *do* matter. The anguish I experience at the end of these recent legislative sessions comes from me violating the advice I give to others: never make the mistake of trying to think about gun control like it's supposed to make sense. Well, the existence of a newsletter like this – intended to arm you with information to help you witness for our cause – shows I still find the alternatives unthinkable. We'll keep arguing the issue as if reason matters, trying to fix the system from within. If better words, investigation or analysis could have better advantaged our cause then I am sorry not to have found them, and I apologize.

Thanks to everyone who pitched in this legislative session. Towards the end, those of you working email, phone trees or fax machines for us were the only ones able to keep up with the fast pace. Now it's time for you to relax, get back to the range and enjoy some of the spring. The summer fund raising circuit starts soon enough (though you can get a jump on it with the PAC's raffle tickets now!) Think a bit about how you'll tell folks the difference between "gun safety" and "gun avoidance" programs. We'll need it. Be safe! Jim

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

The best line of the session came after a hearing on one of the several gun education bills. One moderate, pro-gun legislator endorsed an education proposal as a way to get pro-gun and anti-gun Senators on the same side of a bill. Hoping to heal wounds opened by last year's fight over SB 211, he asked his colleagues "Why can't we all just get along?" Whispered a hard core anti in response: "Ya gotta love it. They take a kicking and keep on licking."

Second best line from a legislator: "You gun people voluntarily taught safety for years, and the accident rate with guns is as low as ever. Now state government actively stops you from giving classes, so tax payers can pick up the cost for school teachers who don't actually know about guns to teach gun safety. What planet am I on again?" The third best line was in response to that mini-speech in the lobby: "If public schools do as good a job teaching gun safety as they do reading and writing, then we'll be stacking up dead bodies like cord wood."

Best line from a policy wonk, in response to my frustrated question: "What is it with your boss letting this crap through? Is it ignorance or apathy?" Said the aide, "Jim, I don't know and I don't care." I guess I set myself up.

Kent Willis, Executive Director for the American Civil Liberties Union: "People who legally use this [product] – their names are going to end up in a database. That can only lead to trouble." Don't get excited, this was not from testimony he gave on ballistic fingerprinting. He gave this testimony on behalf of the ACLU in Virginia, opposing a proposal to require all prescriptions to be entered into a database for police to monitor.

Howie Denis, former State Senator and current GOP member of the Montgomery County Council: "I've always supported gun control. It strikes me as out of sync to have gun shows at the family-centered fairgrounds. There is so much rage in society and so many guns. We need to limit guns." (So ... apparently the rage part is okay.)

As reported: In the recent shooting of a Baltimore police officer by a thug using a stolen .44 revolver, police wanted to compare slugs from the recovered gun with those of other guns. But spokesmen publicly lamented that it would not be easy to match up other crime evidence since revolvers don't leave cases at the scene and for bullets to match you need a pristine slug. Well, duh ... where have we heard this before? Oh yeah, from testimony given last year in opposition to SB 211's ballistic fingerprinting mandate. MSP leadership sang a different tune when it sold the bill to the General Assembly. It's no surprise to us, but when will pols resent regularly being conned?

GUN AVOIDANCE EDUCATION TO BECOME LAW; EDDIE EAGLE GETS PLUCKED

An acquaintance's daughter attends first grade at a public school in Maryland City. She came home the other day and asked her Dad if it was deer hunting season right now. No, he said, deer hunting is in the fall. He asked why she wanted to know. It turns out the girl had just been given a 'gun safety education' class at school. The teacher told her that she shouldn't have anything to do with people who kill deer or have guns because they are bad. The little girl said she was glad she could still like Daddy until fall.

This breaks my heart, but it is likely to be the norm across Maryland now that the state will mandate "gun safety" education in all grades and all schools. HB 791 passed the General Assembly with the strong backing of both gun groups (eager to see the NRA's Eddie Eagle program listed in law for the first time, even if only as an option) and anti-gun groups (openly eager for the opportunity to change the culture of firearm ownership.) Governor Parris Glendening will sign this into law, an unexpected bonus after leadership declared no more gun bills would pass following the hard fight over SB 211 last year – the "Gun Safety Act."

What does this law do?

HB 791 requires the State Department of Education to prepare guidelines for gun safety education. Each county Board of Education will then prepare a plan for implementing the state's criteria. By law, those who prepare these plans may consider each of three example sources of material: The NRA's Eddie Eagle program, MAHA's STAR (Straight Talk About Risks) program, and a program called "In a Flash" prepared by a group of emergency room physicians. The state may elect to use parts of all, some or none of these examples. At that point, all schools in a given county must use that county's program.

By law, no class used in the schools may involve the display or handling of any firearm or ammunition. There is language stating that if the county elects to use a hunter safety class in upper level classes, then firearms may be handled at a sport shooting range.

The first grader's story above makes clear what gun safety education already goes on in some classrooms. Some rooms are obviously already lost to us. What's at issue is treatment of firearms culture in the rest of Maryland's classrooms. What used to be gun-neutral environments, with safety treated as the parents wish at home, must now become an issue everywhere. Our frank expectation is that more classrooms will end up teaching gun hatred (as above) instead real gun safety. Gun ownership will become demonized in population centers of the state.

Nobody knows now what the actual curricula will look like; we must wait for bureaucrats to build the guidelines. What we do know is that those in charge of making the decision aren't friends of gun owners. Who is the head of the Department of Education? Dr. Nancy Grasmick. That's a name you would recognize if you watch MAHA's newsletters. Grasmick shows up there being thanked by the anti-gun group for her service in promoting MAHA's agenda. The other teaching organizations that will surely become involved represent a veritable who's who list of groups on record in the bill files of other legislation as opposing private ownership of firearms. Ironically, most education groups providing testimony on HB 791 opposed it as either an unfunded mandate or contrary to a state tradition of allowing each county to control its own curriculum.

The bird is now a political animal.

During this debate on public policy, a great deal of misinformation circulated. One spin was that this is a mandate for Eddie Eagle, the ostensible 'pro-gun' option. (In truth, Eddie is as apolitical as it gets.) Another story was that now by law schools cannot be denied use of Eddie Eagle. That's not true either. All that can be said of the NRA program is it's one of three examples that be considered by those who will ultimately make decisions. Ironically, this mandate may well result in a net reduction of the number of schools using NRA's program in Maryland, once county operations are forced to come up with a program to supersede what might have been done before.

More disturbing was misinformation about the extent of the problem this education mandate is intended to solve. Some proponents of the bill portrayed a shocking level of 'gun violence' in Maryland that cried out for redress. A critical look at the data shows the rate of accidents involving firearms could hardly be lower; high rates of firearm injury are what come when you count *criminal* misuse of guns, not accidents. If proponents believe the state class will somehow reduce criminal misuse of guns, they're surely contemplating a very different classroom story than they portrayed to the legislature. (Of course, that's what we have figured all along.)

What started all this?

The driver in this play was MAHA. Without them promoting their final solution, mandates would never have gotten near a front burner. (This is unlike last year, where the drivers were Parris Glendening and Mike Miller, serving Bill Clinton's plan for pushing through at state levels that which could not get federally.)

MAHA's proposal has been a regular in town, and we've fought it for each of several years. The lobbyists paid to get our guns work a willing media expertly, and the Prices have been a gold mine for them. You know the Prices: they're the parents who cry on demand for cameras following the death of their son Jonathan, for whom MAHA has named their education proposal. We had sympathy for them up until the umpteenth time they blamed firearm owners for their 13 year old's accident. Our sympathy gets used up fast when it is turned against us. They say the problem is he had never been taught by schools to avoid guns; we think their son would be alive if they'd taught him not to run with a gang that goes into another's home, steals a gun, loads it and points it another human.

[As we have said before: We understand the Price's desire to blame anyone but themselves for Jonathan's death, but that doesn't translate into a willingness to overlook MAHA's shameless exploitation of them. Are the Prices used? Obviously. After each carefully scripted performance, they're whisked away lest they accidentally hear the views of opponents. Their story is adjusted depending upon which bit of MAHA legislation is being promoted.]

If we've defeated this legislation before, what was different this year? There were several contributing factors. The first was that a safety bill was submitted by a strong pro-gun legislator, Delegate Carmen Amedori. This sent a message that the firearms community had placed education on the table. Then in short order, MAHA's SB 124 cleared the Senate by a vote of 41-3. (We don't blame our pro-gun Senators on this vote; at that point nobody had given them a detailed briefing on the bill. Maybe some of us got too comfortable with the promise that 'nothing else goes through after SB 211' but by the time we found that gun groups we thought were *stopping* a bill were instead trying to *pass* a bill it was too late to stop MAHA's handiwork in committee.) All of a sudden *some* gun safety education mandate became a real possibility, in a year that gun policy debate should have been slow.

The second difference from previous years was that House Speaker Casper Taylor was carrying the baggage of his role in passing SB 211 last year for Miller, Glendening and Clinton. His constituents in western Maryland showed what sustained, grassroots expressions of outrage can accomplish. (Thank you, Cumberland readers!) The pressure at home resulted in Taylor involving himself in a string of ostensibly pro-gun moves as damage control. With signs that the NRA wanted a gun safety bill (for political if not public policy reasons), Taylor submitted HB 791.

By this time, alarm bells were sounding, and we saw another concrete example of how you can make a difference. HB 791 passed committee and went to the House floor for debate, but based on alerts that went out, public outcry caused the bill to be returned to committee – we *thought* to bury all education bills for the session there. This was a real coup all by itself, folks, and **you did it**. No other gun groups in Maryland went on record in opposition.

But within a few days, classic Maryland power politics came into play. Once again, leadership wanted to ensure that 'everybody gets a little something.' MAHA still wanted education policy placed in bureaucrat hands, NRA appeared reluctant to dogmatically oppose all proposals, and Taylor still wanted to muddy the water back home. Hence the current and ultimate language of HB 791 was born. This is what swiftly went the legislative distance, demonstrating that the Speaker can indeed pass gun bills (as we more or less knew from last year anyway.) Pro-gunners who backed HB 791 thinking politics had been removed were then given a surprise: leadership amended MAHA's SB 124 to match 791's language then passed it. ("There, the Prices get a bill too. Everyone happy?")

Ultimately, grassroots operations working from our information service could not overcome the combined will of pro- and anti-gun groups behind what was widely reported as compromise language. Some voted for it because of leadership's request, some because they knew the fix was in, some because of NRA backing and some because of MAHA backing. The House's final vote on it was 98-33 (for HB 791) and 100-30 (for SB 124); the Senate's final vote was 33-11 (for HB 791) and 36-10 to concur with the version of SB 124 as moved through the House.

All votes will appear in the post-session legislative directory that we are preparing now. We also have votes listed on our web site, www.direct-action.org and of course you can get the details for yourself from the good folks at Legislative Services at mlis.state.md.us (Remember you can call them toll free for bills, votes and other info, at **301 970 5400** or **410 946 5400**) During session we published "Top Ten Reasons Local Gunowners Oppose HB 791" ... feel free to ask us for a copy next time we correspond if you didn't get one already.

REALITY CHECK FROM THE LEFT FLANK

One of the benefits of a liberal arts education and a job in academia is that chums pop up in all walks of life. A political strategist in, hmmm, let's say other causes than ours is such an example of someone with whom I've stayed friendly over the years. When it became clear that HB 791 was greased to pass, I set up a consultation at the usual rates (i.e., I buy the 'good stuff' at a bar we enjoy downtown) and asked: *How bad is the damage from this law?*

"Wow, you gun guys really are like dinosaurs working to bring on your own ice age. Let me get this straight. You worked a special interest group hard to expose a member of leadership in his home district, and what he gave you to get right is a law that we'll use to own your kids. Along the way, Republicans piled on to give him cover, so no party wedge issues will dog him next election, and he's come close to totally neutralizing you guys too. Jesus, we thought Miller was the top dog, but this Casper Taylor is a genius."

Run that 'neutralizing' by me again?

"It's all about resources and how you use them. You use what you've got to get out your vote, we use what we've got to get out our vote. Gun control won't elect a candidate, but it can reject one. We just lost a Presidency over it, so we're cautious about guns now. Even though Maryland isn't a state we agonize over, we apparently gave you a good and proper [thumping] with that smart gun thing, so there's always the slim risk your people will actually use it effectively for a change. That's the background, am I right?"

That's textbook. I'm still waiting for the neutralizing part.

Every time we drink together, you whine about not having the long green to run a bigger operation. Jim old buddy, now you'll never have the cash to get involved everywhere you need to be. This education thing puts you in a lose-lose box. Whatever resources you bank, you've got to make a decision. Do you get into every school board race to affect gun education policy? Maybe, but you won't have much influence once you divide your effort and cash into more races. Besides, it won't work – teacher unions there are ours and you can't take us on labor. Can you watch every classroom once you've given us entrée? Our people know what to do. Your other option is to focus effort on legislative races like you did before. But that abandons your kids, and besides, it's not like you're blessed with a candidate everywhere you need one. Take this option, and in twenty years we'll be hunting your kind with dogs."

So what's my play? Any good advice I can share with my readers?

Hey, you and I work different sides of the street, remember? A drive to rally your people around education sounds super to me. Seems like a great way to keep 'em busy. We can't risk having them mucking around in elections that determine who controls the real power. Have them donate a lot of money to schools too. Every buck I can get them to spend on promoting safety stuff in schools is one less dollar I have to worry about disrupting my clients' races.

I'll be sure to tell them that. Any more good news for me while I order another bottle?

"Let me guess, your [groups] are going to make a big media buy on this, right? Our people won't even have to pay to put this on at [conferences that legislators attend in order to pick up bill ideas], you'll get the blueprint out for us nationwide. Here, Jim, let me buy the next round. You've got to get something out of this besides [screwed]."

SENDING YOUR KIDS TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS? **MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T!**

Parents who are fed up with claptrap in public schools increasingly elect to homeschool their children. This is more appealing than ever with the expectation of that public classrooms represent the next battleground over guns and policy. These institutions already routinely punish students merely for drawing the picture of a gun; nobody is really going to believe these schools will now become *more* hospitable for our children under the new mandate.

Homeschooling takes some more work; it isn't as easy as subcontracting your childrearing obligations to the state. But the state doesn't give warranty service on *its* job performance in the classroom, and some of us believe this is a task we can't risk having done wrong. Homeschooling is still easier than some might think, and every day there are more support resources and services. Ask me how I know! The state can have my taxes, and can think it's taking all my guns, but it cannot have my kids. Homeschooling is an idea I commend to parents for consideration.

For information write to Maryland Home Education Association, 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia MD 21045, or visit them on the web at <http://www.mhea.com> Stop by one of the many gatherings of homeschool families in your neighborhood and tell me if you can't see the difference from your kids' public school classrooms!

A PAGE FROM THE “WHY DO I EVEN TRY?” FILE

We’ve known the truth for years: until we take care of business in state elections, we’re never going to pass laws we want on straight gun issues. Things like restoration of right to carry, for example. It’s not in the cards. But for a long time we’ve tried to squeeze what we could on the edge of our issue, sadly without much success.

One notion in particular has been close to our heart: Protect citizens who use deadly force in self defense against a home invasion. They should be presumed to have been in fear of immediate death or severe injury, code words to deny prosecutors a chance to make an example out of the homeowner for surviving an attack. Equally important, survivors should be free from civil liability. If you hurt a thug while defending yourself, you shouldn’t become a blank check when he (or his estate) subsequently sues you for not giving up your life to his home invasion.

In 1998, we got this in as HB 1249, with the gracious sponsorship of Delegates Schade, Baldwin, Burns, Ports and Rzepkowski. It didn’t go far, killed in committee. In 1999, we got in as HB 652, sponsored by Delegates Boschert, Greenip, Rzepkowski, Baldwin, Guns, Owings, Leopld, K. Kelly, W. Baker and Amedori. Again, shot down.

Fast forward to this year, when bill SB 901 set a land-speed record, rocketing through the Senate in slightly over two weeks. It’s crossfiled House bill (HB 1462) also had a host of co-sponsors. These bills have *almost* the same language as we sought before, so the differences between this and previous years are quite instructive.

First difference: This proposal was filed shortly after a highly publicized defensive shooting in Baltimore, where a business owner shot and killed one invader, and helped capture two others. He’s now facing charges and civil suits galore for not just leaving the door open for thugs to repeatedly break and enter his place of business. The second difference is that ... err ... the legal protection this legislation gives would apply only to business owners.

Silly me! You’d think by now I’d have figured out how things work in Annapolis. You and I wouldn’t enjoy legal protection from this measure in our home. If you or I shoot someone in a home invasion, we’re likely to be forced to prove our innocence at great cost to our families. Ahh, but when it comes to the place of business, now we’re talking about the mother’s milk of politics: money. Cash puts on the green lights for all sorts of measures.

What made the difference for this bill, publicity or cash? Apparently the cash. Four days after the Baltimore event a 45 year old Suitland firefighter successfully defended himself from a violent home invader. Judging from reports published concerning his survival he could be the poster child for our original legislative proposals, yet nobody in leadership cites his case as the basis for greasing a bill through legislature. The difference was business, aka cash.

[It’s kind of like right to carry. MSP won’t issue a carry permit for you and me to protect ourselves from thugs on the street. They won’t give it to someone with a physical disability that would make him even particularly open to an assault. But they *will* give it to a businessman carrying large sums of cash. Cash is the reason to issue a permit. Message to citizens: leadership loves our money more than it loves us.]

We’re not knocking the bill itself. *Of course* any businessman should have this protection. Just like we should in our homes. Some sponsors are strong pro-gunners, and we’re happy they seized the opportunity once leadership signaled it was receptive, at least in part. The measure languished in the House after sprinting through the Senate.

Nevertheless, I hope I sound frustrated, because I’d hate to feel like this and not have it show. This legislation demonstrates once again that Annapolis directs public policy by listening to crying moms (instead of experts), by reading headlines (instead of strategic plans) and by plotting party gambits. Money talks and we haven’t come up with enough cash to buy into the game. Those of us who are just-plain-folks will never really be at the table. Not until we decisively take care of business at the ballot box, that is. That takes cash too, but remember, in that case we not only get to sit at the table ... we get to hold some of the cards too.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY UPDATE

Montgomery County Council continues its consideration of a proposal to expand the “gun free” zones first created back 1997. This legislation clearly targets gun shows held each year at the fairgrounds, though its affect would be much broader than that. We previously reported on the proposal’s hearings. More recently, the council’s safety subcommittee voted on April 5th to recommend against adopting the measure. This is of course good news, but we must remember it is only advisory. The full council is expected to vote on the ban shortly.

Remember what has already been reported: This county has protected hate groups to demonstrate based on free speech issues. But trade in legal products, even held under law enforcement’s most powerful magnifying glass, must be banned. Kind of tells you where we rate in the food chain.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE WRAPUPS

Governor Glendening backed a state ban on private ownership of bullet proof vests. In arguing for it, State Police claimed body armor is an “offensive weapon” that should not be in civilian hands. Party officials ought to get their stories straight. AP Wire reports that Hillary Clinton is raising funds for a project to buy body armor for donation to civilians in Israel. Unprotected citizens walking the street late at night in Baltimore’s Druid Hill area will surely be comforted to know leadership is doing everything possible to protect workers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Maryland will now have a state cat. Calicos will join such official symbols as *astrodon johnstoni* (state dinosaur) and *diamondback terrapins* (the state reptile.) This legislation was the idea of a group of school children, who got a sponsor then worked the issue hard. (I say we pass the hat and hire these kids to work ‘right to carry’ for us.)

The proposal to tax ammunition at a rate of \$5 per round of “antipersonnel” ammo or \$0.50 per round of any other cartridge was panned in committee. If any one proposal generated more public outcry, I don’t know what it was. Thanks to all who helped dump on this notion, you made a difference. Legislators now know they can expect their phones to be tied up for a long time after trying to sneak little gems like this through a tax committee.

The ban of gun shows on certain public property languished in committee. It wasn’t voted down as we might have hoped, but it died, and that’s what counts. Expect the Prince George’s and Montgomery County delegations to be back shopping for this one again next year.

The hearty perennial, a bill to allow people to be totally disarmed in an ex parte domestic proceeding, failed again, as it should. It’s embarrassing this is proposed in the first place. It’s a Constitution thing, I guess they don’t get it.

Delegate Kevin Kelly’s proposed repeal of ballistic fingerprinting failed in committee. This bill will resurface, as the reality of MSP’s mandate sets in. More information is emerging on this technology and program every day, as we will report in upcoming issues. The chief blow to this bill’s prospect for success this session was Speaker Cas Taylor’s negotiated six month grace period for shell cases to be harvested in-state. This bled off any pressure we’d built towards fixing the problem, and moved debate back until after the legislature was in session (and so could do anything about it.) Good Readers, this bill can come back and stronger if we do the right things before next year!

Delegate Tim Hutchin’s bill to give let you take an income tax deduction for the cost of buying a gun safe got high marks in the House, but languished in a Senate committee whose co-chair was sponsor of MAHA’s Price bill. The Senator nixed Hutchin’s bill because Tim wouldn’t give her his vote on the MAHA bill. Such is the way of life in Annapolis, where leadership wants to make us comply with their demands not with the carrot but only the whip.

The NRA succeeded in getting through a small change to existing range protection law, expanding its coverage to include two additional ranges on Eastern shore. This was small victory but an important one nonetheless for those shotgunners who enjoy use of the facilities that were looking at closing had not this gone through.

In my January issue I published a Top Ten list of ways that legislators could make a real difference on behalf of integrity in government, for example, put some teeth into the Public Information Act, which requires officials to make available to us the information we as citizens own. I had privately bet a friend that none would get action, but I was wrong! Exactly *one* of the areas was opened for consideration! Of course, it was a proposal submitted by Del. John Hurson to *add* loop holes to the PIA and give officials immunity from liability if they stonewall the public release of information. (The bill failed.) Now I have to figure out if this means I won or lost the bet.

THANKS, I NEEDED THAT!

It was the morning of 8 March as I flogged my poor 14 year old rice burner to keep up with traffic heading east on 50. Off for another day of sleuthing out political news! But this trip nearly had an abrupt end, when a late model SUV with House of Delegates vanity plate #78 blew by, weaving from lane to lane and leaving a trail of shocked motorists in his wake. He drove like he legislates: fast, loose and with arrogant disregard for constituent safety.

Here’s the up side to the story: by the time I got to Annapolis, two State Police Troopers had the SUV by the side of the road. **Thank you, guys!** I wish I knew who you are to give you a medal in person. You couldn’t pay me enough to jump out and stop traffic in the first place, but it takes even more courage to pull over a legislator in this day in age. Judging by the other motorists who gave you a ‘thumbs up’ sign, I’m not the only one who appreciated seeing that safety is a priority and the law applies equally to all of us. That’s a concept I wish your bosses shared. Stick with the job, I’m looking forward to working with you when you’re in leadership some day.

QUICKIES

Least you missed it before: It was reported that on March 13 a gunman entered and robbed a Canton bar, wherein a political fund raiser had just been held for former Delegate Frank Boston. Political observers see this as a way to illustrate differences between fund raising techniques. Said one pundit, "Using a gun shows no finesse. Sure the technique has low overhead, but what can you get out of a register, maybe \$1,500? Chump change. If you want to hold people up for real money, make sure you schedule in a member of leadership plus lots of shrimp cocktails."

The Stephanie Roper Committee, based in Upper Marlboro, has for a number of years done a fine job as advocate for crime victims. We're sorry to report that their latest newsletter aligns them with MAHA, and refers members to the anti-gun HCI affiliate on related political matters. Supporters may wish to adjust donations accordingly.

There I am in Upper Marlboro's law library doing research on another story, and what do I find? Prince George's County gun laws appear on the books between "Offenses against public safety and morals" and "Obscene matter." It sure telegraphs how lawmakers think of gun issues there, doesn't it? The delegation's regular assaults on lawful gun ownership make more sense once you understand where they're coming from.

In the hearing on our proposal to repeal ballistic fingerprinting, a delegate asked Superintendent David Mitchell why he wouldn't allow dealers to test fire the guns in order to get a case and satisfy the mandate. In response, he testified that one look at gunshop floors would reveal that dealers are already discharging guns in stores, and not intentionally either. We get into a lot of shops, yet that testimony is still news to us. Here's a special offer: we'll send a full set of attitude-ridden Tripwire bumper stickers to the first reader who sends us a photo and description of one of these negligent discharges. (No fair going hot just to win, now, play by the rules you guys.)

BEWARE FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

In the spirit of Megan's Law and other public services intended to protect the innocents, we'd like our readers to know that Friendship Heights' mayor, Dr. Alfred Muller, is now a registered sex offender, having pleaded guilty to a charge of sexually molesting a 14 yr old boy.

Muller is of course an expert on "registration." He was on the cutting edge of gun control, having first proposed a total handgun ban within the borders of his special taxing district. Then in December 1981, after state preemption barred his gun ban, he proposed another first, a ban on possession of bullets. He is quoted saying "We will submit the same ordinance, but change the word 'handguns' to 'bullets.' We feel that since this is an urgent situation, we will use what I consider to be a legal loophole."

Loopholes aren't exactly what he was looking for when he groped a young boy at his church. Muller's career over the two decades before his outing shows him to be a champion of left wing causes. His proposed ammo ban turned into a county-wide ammo registration scheme, ultimately struck down in court. More recently he's championed the ban on smoking in his district – that's outside, folks, not just inside public places. That cause cost taxpayers dearly too, and is also on the way to being struck down. Good thing tax money grows on trees isn't it? (Who knows what silly and irresponsible thing we'd would do if we had money in our pocket. Please, Al, protect us from ourselves!) Alfred Muller: Another classic example of a liberal who thinks laws are things that only apply to everyone else.

ROSTER BOARD UPDATE

Big changes on the Handgun Roster Board, charged with deciding which handguns shall be authorized for sale in Maryland. A short time ago, citizen appointee Paul Rodbell suddenly passed away in what is surely a tragedy. No matter what we think of the gun ban that brought us this Board, our sympathy goes out to his family and friends.

Also ... one of the two 'Ferguson' slots has been filled. Parris Glendening's gun control package last year expands the board to include two engineers, at the inexplicable request of Senator Tim Ferguson who in return threw away efforts to stop the bill. Mr. Gary Weibold of Bowie received legislative approval of Glendening's appointment in the last days of the session. That having been said, we can't tell you much about him, like, for example, if he is an engineer. The appointments office will not give out information to us ... by order of Attorney General Joe Curran. We managed to talk with Mr. Weibold, who politely states he is qualified, but declines to say why, who he works for, or whether he has ever even seen a gun before. Further inquiry is referred to the Maryland State Police.

Earth to Parris, don't you think we have enough legitimate beefs without slathering conspiracy theory and mystery on top? We'd love to give this man the benefit of the doubt and start out on the right foot. Is that a problem?

BALLISTIC FINGERPRINT SCORECARD

Taxpayers and gunowners alike might be interested this year's box scores on ballistic fingerprinting:

Purchase price of IBIS, the software system MSP uses to manage all the shell cases it expects to collect from the ballistic fingerprint mandate:	\$1,100,000
Deallocation of funds from the S.T.O.P. program (a community oriented policing project) in order to pay for the IBIS software:	(\$1,000,000)
Average annual cost of extended warranty on IBIS:	\$150,000
Annual operating cost, according to legislative analysis of MSP budget: <i>"In fiscal 2001 and 2002 combined, 17 people will be hired to examine shell casings, operate the database, and audit firearms dealers. This results in ongoing annual personnel costs of approximately \$643,000; annual operating costs are expected to be approximately \$112,000. Thus, annual operating costs for the shell casing component of the 2000 legislation will be approximately \$750,000."</i>	\$750,000
Number of officer personnel lines MSP will give up to attrition this year:	(12 troopers)
Number of new handguns lawfully transferred into the state with shell case, between October 1 (when the law took effect) and March 13 (when MSP Superintendent David Mitchell gave this in testimony):	400 guns
According to MSP figures, the number of new handguns that would typically have been sold in MD between October 1 and March 13 before the shell case mandate took effect:	17,500 guns
Number of crimes solved using shell cases available under this mandate:	ZERO

So let's review: At an average cost of \$5,000 per shell case, MSP has so far solved zero crimes. Along the way, it's boosting the number of laboratory personnel and administrators to run the program, while losing 12 troopers who would normally do the hard job of ensuring public safety. By paying for IBIS out of STOP funds, it's taking money from a program that monitors criminals and allocating it to a program that monitors honest citizens. And MSP declares victory since only 2.2 percent of new guns normally sold in this period have reached citizen hands.

And you know what? This is not only exactly what we predicted, but exactly what proponents wanted.

The number of pre-October handguns (those that shipped from the manufacturer prior to when this mandate took effect) is dwindling as fast as their cost is going up. Those can still be bought without the dealer having to ship a shell case to MSP ... if you can find one. The six month grace period won't start for months, and so far we have no distributors who plan to change policy and ship guns into Maryland during this period. The shell case is not a big issue for them; being terrified of AG Curran bringing litigation backed by free taxpayer money is a *big* issue.

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Authority: Mike Fleisher, Treasurer

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