

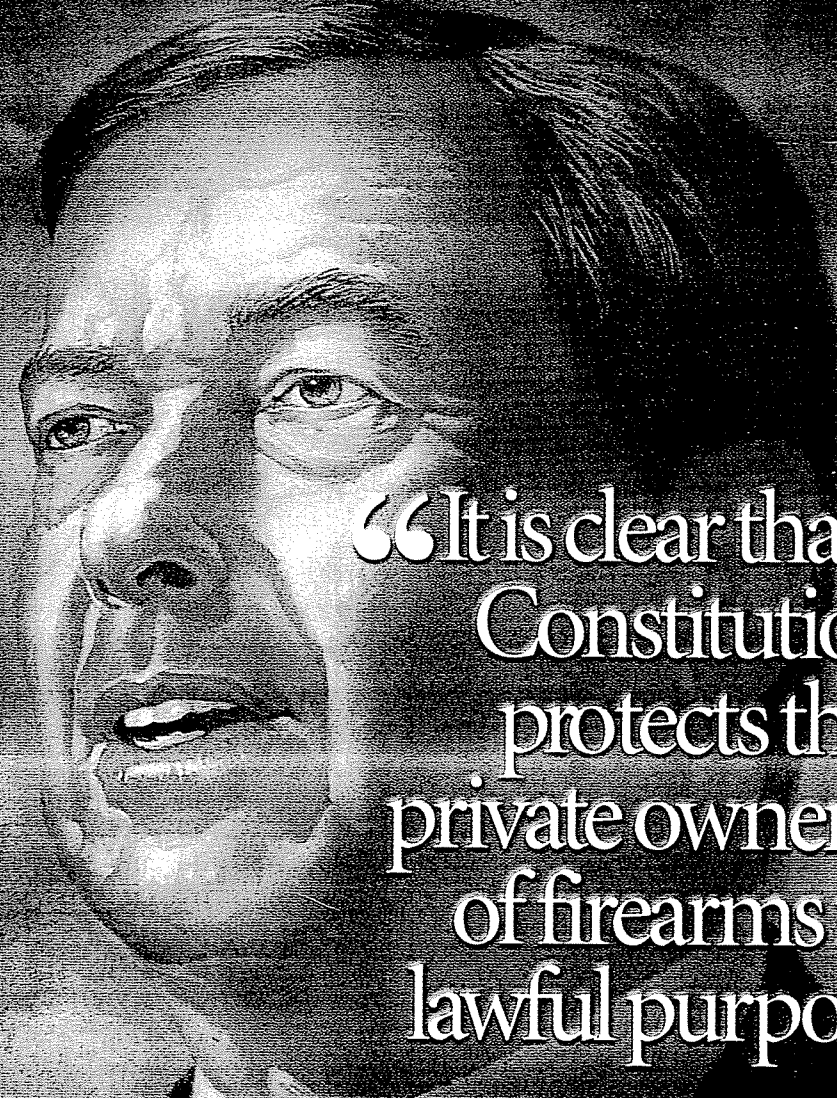
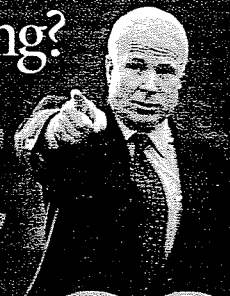
John McCain, What Are You Thinking?

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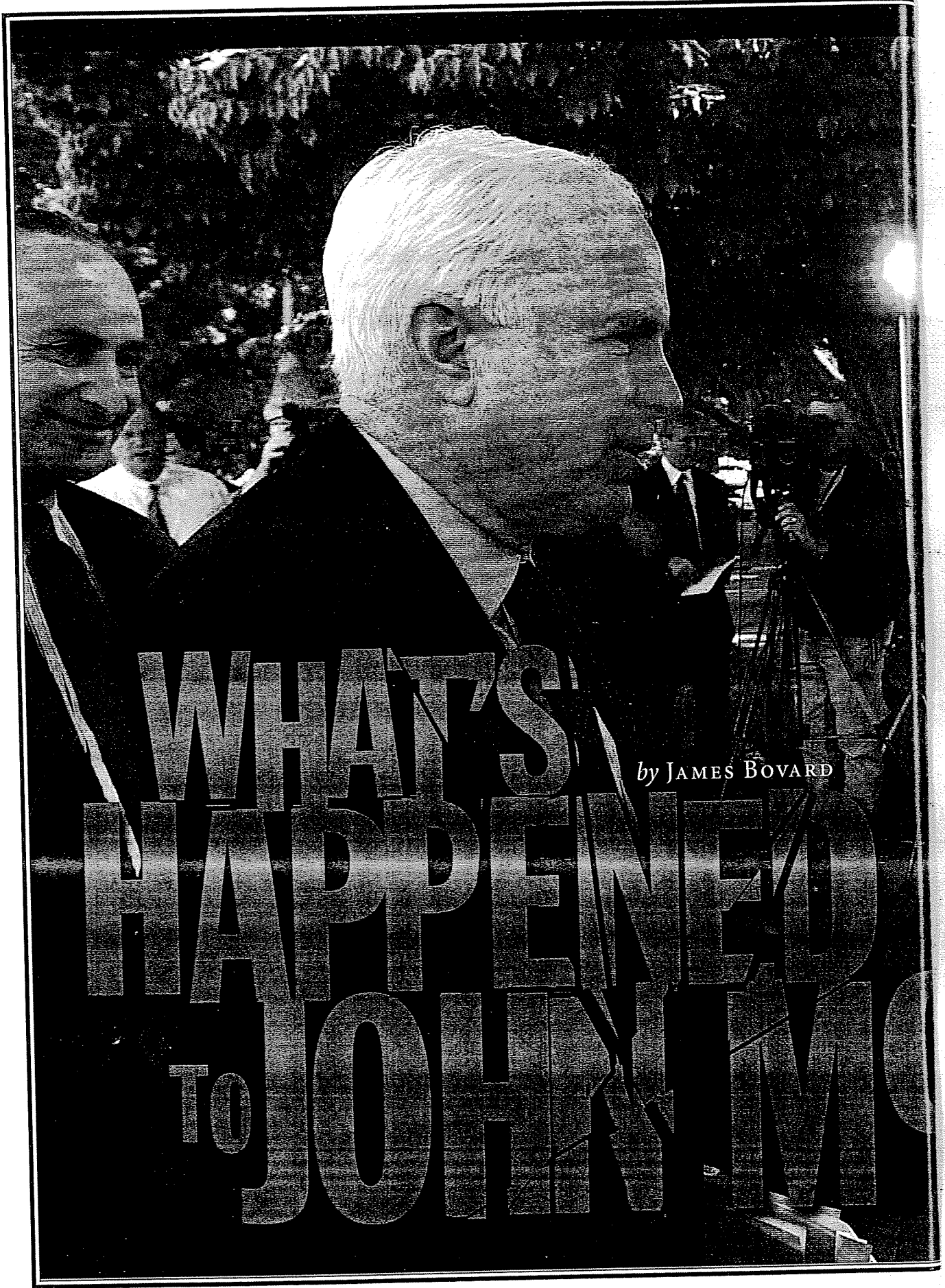
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“It is clear that the
Constitution
protects the
private ownership
of firearms for
lawful purposes.”

Attorney General
JOHN ASHCROFT

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WHAT'S
HAPPENED
TO JOHN
MCCAIN

by JAMES BOVARD



Lending his profile to a well-heeled anti-gun organization, Sen. John McCain is forcing the debate on federal gun control back to center stage—and jeopardizing the freedom of law-abiding gun owners.

McCain?

Y

OU DIDN'T HAVE a conservative senator from the West leading the charge for gun control before now," Michael Barnes, the head of Handgun Control, bragged to the *Los Angeles Times* in April.

The gun control debate in Washington has hit center stage because Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has now become one of the premier flag carriers for the enemies of the Second Amendment.

In early April, the Senate passed McCain's campaign finance reform bill to severely restrict Americans' freedom of speech. Now, McCain has joined with Al Gore running mate Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn.—a gun ban advocate rated "F" by NRA's Political Victory Fund—in championing legislation to close the so-called "gun show loophole." McCain is the poster boy for Americans for Gun Safety (AGS)—the newest high-profile anti-gun group—appearing in their television ads calling for new federal restrictions on gun shows. Andrew McKelvey, the billionaire founder of AGS, also bankrolled key television ads supporting McCain's campaign finance bill.

Muzzling Critics of Politicians and Government

FUTURE BATTLES FIGHTING government gun grabs will become far more difficult if McCain's campaign finance reform bill becomes law. The McCain-Feingold bill, which passed the Senate by a vote of 59-41, could be altered in the House and moved into a joint House-Senate Conference Committee.

If the bill is signed into law, it will severely chill citizens' right to effectively complain publicly about political and government abuses. As Laura Murphy of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) observed, the McCain-Feingold bill "imposes a year round prohibition on all communications that are deemed 'of value' to a federal candidate. The bill wrongly asserts that issue groups are 'coordinating' if they merely discuss elements of the lawmaker's message with the lawmaker or his or her staff anytime during a two-year period."

The bill creates a new category of speech — "electioneering communication"—which is loaded down with restrictions and criminal penalties. As Cleta Mitchell, a highly-respected Washington lawyer, noted in a report on the effect of McCain-Feingold on the NRA, "If the

'electioneering communication' is deemed a 'targeted communication' [one which is broadcast to an audience consisting 'primarily' of residents of the state for which the clearly identified candidate is seeking office] then it is prohibited and cannot be made even if paid for by individual contributions only. It appears that this may be directed at protecting senators specifically because there is no requirement that the 'candidate' must actually be on the ballot during that 30- or 60-day period preceding the election, which would protect senators from being referenced even in years when they are not up for reelection."

The new law would count as a campaign contribution "any

coordinated expenditure or other disbursement made by any person in connection with a candidate's election or made in coordination with a national, state or other political party committee, regardless of whether the expenditure or disbursement is for a communication that contains express advocacy." This could effectively prohibit the NRA from even mentioning in a public mailing which candidate it supports or opposes.

In late March, when the fate of the legislation in the Senate was in doubt, the nation's airwaves were hit with ads supporting the McCain-Feingold bill proclaiming, "Let's take the \$100,000 check out of politics!" Ironically, the ads were paid for almost entirely by a

\$114,872 check from Andrew McKelvey and by another \$100,000-plus donation from a second fat cat.

McCain is, however, gung ho about free speech for billionaires. "I'm glad a guy with a billion dollars, or two billion dollars, wants to spend his money on an issue he feels strongly about," he told *The Washington Post*.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., didn't see things that way. "These so-called reformers shamelessly solicit \$100,000 contributions from fat-cat special interests to fund an effort to deprive average Americans, groups and parties their First Amendment freedom to participate in the political process," McConnell said.

Rep. Tom DeLay, R-Texas, House Republican Whip, denounced McCain: "If, as you say, soft money is such an evil and corrupting influence in politics, why then do you use soft money to further your own personal and political agenda? This is the height of hypocrisy." (This is not the first time that McCain has been bashed for hypocrisy on this issue; last October, after McCain appeared in AGS ads in Oregon, the Oregon Firearms Federation ran radio ads pointing out that "McCain is using millions in out-of-state soft money to attack the privacy of Oregonians while condemning the use of soft money by others.")

The Washington Post reported predictions that AGS "may become even more powerful if the changes to campaign finance laws passed by the Senate are enacted ... It could give new power to independently funded groups such as McKelvey's, which would not be subject to the new restrictions." AGS chief Jonathan Cowan admits, "McCain-Feingold actually helps groups like us."

McCain's enthusiasm for campaign finance reform stems in part from his hatred of negative ads. McCain declared in March, "I am for free television time for candidates. I detest

TAKING ON MCCAIN



Wayne LaPierre on "This Week."

TAKING ON MAINSTREAM media darling John McCain on campaign finance reform and his recent gun control efforts isn't a proposition most people are willing to undertake. But that hasn't stopped Wayne LaPierre, NRA executive vice president.

LaPierre, in his address to attendants at NRA's Annual Meetings in May, politely but courageously issued a challenge to McCain.

"In the past two weeks, John McCain has made personal appearances to further the activities of a group called Americans For Gun Safety, which is just a new name for the same old anti-gun lobby," LaPierre said. "John, what're you doing hanging out with that crowd?"

"Whether it's the First Amendment or the Second Amendment, is it possible that John McCain is willing to take the point in an anti-freedom offensive? I won't go that far yet. But I will say that an anti-First Amendment John McCain, and an anti-Second Amendment John McCain, will put

John McCain on the wrong side of the Bill of Rights.

"I ask John McCain, what kind of reform is it that fears the participation of 4.3 million members of this Association?"

LaPierre later appeared on *This Week with Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*.

"I think he (McCain) is an American hero, to tell you the truth," LaPierre told Donaldson. "But I'm dumbfounded by what he's doing. This bill, the McCain-Feingold bill, sets up two classes of speech in America. One, the big media conglomerates, Viacom, Disney, Time Warner, AOL. They get all the speech they want. And yet, there's a forbidden category of speech and that's all the rest of us, private citizens, groups around the country, whether it's the NAACP, the NRA, the unions, you name it."

the negative advertising. I think it is one of the worst things that has ever happened in American politics, that we have these unnamed, unknown groups calling themselves by some attractive name (Ed. Note: Americans For Gun Safety comes to mind) and buy millions of dollars of advertising, and they basically viciously attack their opponents." McCain has said he would ban all negative ads if the Constitution allowed such a ban.

While McCain is vehemently opposed to negative ads, he apparently believes politicians have the right to denounce and smear anyone they please. In a speech early last year, McCain lashed out at Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "agents of intolerance;" he also maligned conservative Christian religious leaders as "forces of evil." In the South Carolina primary, the McCain campaign ran a television ad asserting that George W. Bush was as dishonest as Bill Clinton. In the Michigan primary, McCain's top campaign strategist wrote a script for a telephone campaign that accused Bush of severe anti-Catholic bigotry. McCain repeatedly falsely stated that his campaign had nothing to do with the smear efforts—and the truth did not surface until after he had already won the Michigan primary.

Media Darling McCain Meets Megabucks McKelvey

JOHN MCCAIN HAS recently become a prominent Washington champion of more federal gun legislation in large part because AGS has heavily publicized McCain. AGS is doing everything it can to keep McCain in the news. McCain and Sen. Lieberman are scheduled to appear in a multi-million dollar AGS television ad blitz attacking the "gun show loophole." The ads will show each of the senators "at separate town hall meetings, sleeves rolled up, talking to voters," *USA Today* reports.

Lieberman declares: "This is our attempt to find a third way here. Our intention is to try to reach a common ground that will allow us to close the gun show loophole." As usual, the "third way" and "common ground" always involve an increase in government power. The national media will likely write many news articles about the advertisements, professing amazement that an allegedly conservative Republican and a liberal Democrat can agree on one of the great issues of the day. Actually, this is no surprise, since McCain has lately been lending his name to many key parts of the Democratic Party's platform.

AGS also will be launching a full-scale assault on Capitol Hill. *National Journal*, a Washington "insiders" magazine, recently reported that AGS "has hired a bipartisan team of lobbyists from Griffin, Johnson, Dover & Stewart and promises to spend 'millions' to push [McCain-Lieberman] gun show legislation." One of the two lobbyists AGS hired is Leonard Swinehart, previously a top aide to deposed House Speaker Newt Gingrich. An AGS spokesman declared that McKelvey is "committed to spending what it takes to get the job done" to get gun show legislation passed in Congress.

On May 9, AGS announced that McCain would be appearing in "unprecedented gun safety announcements" in 2,500 movie theaters in 44 states. People who go to movie theaters this summer will see a 30-second clip of McCain before the movie fretting: "Every year over 40,000 kids bring guns to school. As adults, we owe it to our children to be responsible by keeping our guns locked up."

Thus, according to McCain and AGS, the only safe gun is one that is completely inaccessible to the owner in an emergency. The notion that all guns must be locked up all the time

McCain Waffling ON REGISTRATION?



McCain, on *The Early Show*.

SPEAKING WITH BRYANT Gumbel on the May 9 edition of the *Early Show*, Sen. John McCain addressed the question of gun registration toward the end of the interview. While McCain seemed to reiterate his long-running opposition to gun licensing and registration, he clearly left the door open to change his stance if current gun control proposals don't bring his desired results.

Gumbel: "... if PSAs like yours don't have the desired effect, could you see your position reaching the point where you might support registration, where you might support longer waiting periods?"

McCain: "I don't think so, but I clearly would be open to any suggestions or ideas. It'd have to be proven to me that those are effective, Bryant."

fits with the anti-gunners' notion that guns can never be effectively used for self-defense.

McCain and AGS derive the "40,000 kids bring guns to school" factoid from the number of children ejected from school for violating federal "zero-tolerance" guidelines for weapons. However, schools have found that almost anything counts as a "gun"—including a paper drawing of a gun, pointing a finger and saying "bang," or possessing a water gun. But as long as the statistics sound frightening to non-gun owners,