

Gun lobby fires shot for 'free speech'.

Level 3 | Advanced

1 Key words

Match the verbs with their definitions

circumvent	curb	veer	proclaim
threaten	figure out	launch	query

1. To start a major activity, such as a military attack, an investigation, a new career or a project.
2. To move suddenly in a different direction.
3. To solve a problem.
4. To control or limit something that is harmful.
5. To state something publicly.
6. To find a way of avoiding a law or a rule.
7. To ask a question about something because you have doubts about it.
8. To endanger.

2 What do you know?

Decide whether the following statements are True or False.

1. There are 80 million gun owners in the USA.
2. NRA stands for National Rescue Association.
3. The First Amendment is an American law which allows people to own guns.
4. Free speech is guaranteed under the American constitution.
5. John Kerry is the Republican presidential candidate at the next US presidential election.
6. ABC news is owned by Disney.

Now look in the text and check your answers.

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American talk radio tends to veer to the right of the political spectrum, but a new station launched last week eliminates the last trace of ambiguity on the matter. It is owned and operated by the National Rifle Association, the loudest voice lobbying on behalf of the nation's 80 million gun owners. NRA News, which began broadcasting a fiercely partisan schedule of firearms-related coverage last week, has been condemned as an attempt to circumvent new US laws curbing political campaigning.

The legislation severely limits special interest groups' ability to buy advertising to argue on behalf of a candidate. But the NRA says the radio station makes it a media organisation, so its broadcasts are journalism - not adverts. Within minutes of the start of broadcasting the NRA's executive vice-president, Wayne LaPierre, told listeners: "The great thing about the USA is that anyone can walk into a radio studio and proclaim themselves a journalist."

The broadcasts were launched via a satellite network which reaches 400,000 listeners. Politicians in Washington wanted "some nebulous agency" to decide who could and could not broadcast, threatening free speech, Mr LaPierre added. "I hope we open a Pandora's Box on what they're doing to the first amendment," he added, referring to the clause in the US constitution protecting free speech. Until now the NRA has been more concerned with the second amendment: the right to "keep and bear arms".

It interprets this as an individual right, while opponents say it refers only to the US military. Mr LaPierre said he hoped that NRA News would be "a shot heard round the world". Initially it will be heard for only three hours a day. "Some of these big media conglomerates have so warped coverage of the firearms industry," he said. He promised that his station would be "balanced, objective and the truth".

He followed this with a vigorous condemnation of the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, and an interview with a college student who had received a

C grade for writing a pro-gun essay in a philosophy class. "They're trying to bend the law," said Robert Ricker, a former lobbyist for the firearms industry who switched sides and now works for an anti-gun campaign group.

The NRA is now simply trying to drum up publicity. "Do you think John Kerry could all of a sudden declare himself a journalist, start his own newspaper and legitimately claim he was a news outlet instead of a candidate for president?" he said. "The NRA was formed to get involved in elections and to lobby Congress. But I think the American people are smart enough to figure it out."

Despite the traditional alliance between rightwing lobby groups and big business, the NRA is skillfully trying to play on the unease that many people have expressed about the fact that CNN is owned by Time Warner, ABC by Disney and NBC by General Electric. "They often contribute to political campaigns and are still able to maintain their news source," said Kelly Hobbs, an NRA spokeswoman.

The Guardian Weekly 20-04-06, page 6

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What is the main purpose of NRA News, according to the article?
 - a. To oppose the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry.
 - b. To campaign for the right to own firearms.
 - c. To fight for free speech.
2. How did the NRA get round the new laws curbing political campaigning?
 - a. It used a satellite network.
 - b. It used the first amendment.
 - c. It started its own radio station.
3. What is the second amendment?
 - a. The right to keep and carry firearms.
 - b. The right to freedom of political expression.
 - c. The right to oppose the government.
4. How do the NRA's opponents interpret the second amendment?
 - a. They say it only applies to the army.
 - b. They use big media conglomerates.
 - c. They say it is illegal.
5. What is a lobby group?
 - a. A political group.
 - b. A group that tries to influence politicians on a particular subject.
 - c. A group that is only interested in one subject.

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4 Vocabulary - collocations

The 5 verbs on the left each 'go with' two of the nouns or phrases on the right. Decide which ones they collocate with.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. to drum up | a. the rules |
| | b. people's fears |
| 2. to disband | c. support |
| | d. inflation |
| 3. to bend | e. a group |
| | f. political activity |
| 4. to play on | g. the law |
| | h. publicity |
| 5. to curb | i. people's prejudices |
| | j. an association |

5 Vocabulary - definitions

Fill the gaps using one of these words from the text:

nebulous	warped	vigorous	partisan (adj)
unease	smart	lobbyist	Pandora's Box

- Someone who is _____ has ideas that most people think are strange or frightening.
- If you open _____, you do something that could cause a lot of problems.
- A _____ is a person who goes to politicians in order to campaign for a particular issue.
- If something is _____ it is not developed or clear enough to describe.
- _____ is another word for 'intelligent'.
- _____ is an adjective meaning 'full of energy, enthusiasm or determination'.
- If something is described as _____, it is very one-sided or biased.
- _____ is a feeling of being uncomfortable or unhappy about a situation.

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6 Grammar focus

Look at this sentence from the text:

'The NRA was formed to get involved in elections'

The infinitive is used here to express purpose.

Match the beginnings and endings to form similar sentences:

1. The main aim of the NRA is ...
 2. Apart from getting involved in elections, the NRA was formed ...
 3. NRA News has been described as an attempt ...
 4. The NRA says US politicians want to create an agency ...
 5. Critics say the NRA is simply trying ...
 6. The NRA's vice-president says the aim of NRA News is ...
- a. ... to get round new US laws limiting political campaigning.
 - b. ... to drum up publicity.
 - c. ... to decide who can and who cannot broadcast.
 - d. ... to lobby Congress.
 - e. ... to be "balanced and objective and to tell the truth".
 - f. ... to defend the right "to keep and bear arms".

7 Discussion

In the USA people have the right to own and carry firearms. Do you agree with this right?

If everyone owned a firearm to protect themselves, would the world be a safer place?