

November 6, 2006 For most Americans, guns are not a political issue. People buy and own guns to protect their families, not to commit crimes. The truth is that even millions of Americans who support and vote for gun control own guns themselves, because deep down they share the basic human need to feel secure in their homes. The gun control movement has lost momentum in recent years. The Democratic Party has been conspicuously silent on the issue in recent elections because they know it's a political loser. In the midst of declining public support for new gun laws, more and more states have adopted concealed-carry programs. The September 11th terrorist attacks and last year's hurricanes only made matters worse for gun control proponents, as millions of Americans were starkly reminded that we cannot rely on government to protect us from criminals. Gun sales have gone up. Most supporters of gun rights take no pleasure in this fact, nor do they trumpet it as a political victory over gun control forces. The time has come to stop politicizing gun ownership, and start promoting responsible use of firearms to make America a safer place. Guns are here to stay; the question is whether only criminals will have them. The media has not been honest in reporting about guns, especially when it comes to statistics about law-abiding individuals who use firearms to prevent or deter crimes. Many of the "assault rifles" vilified by the press are in fact sporting rifles that are no longer available to hunters and outdoorsmen. Of course true military-style fully automatic rifles remain widely available to criminals on the black market. The gun control debate generally ignores the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the Second amendment. The Second amendment is not about hunting deer or keeping a pistol in your nightstand. It is not about protecting oneself against common criminals. It is about preventing tyranny. The Founders knew that unarmed citizens would never be able to overthrow a tyrannical government as they did. They envisioned government as a servant, not a master, of the American people. The muskets they used against the British Army were the assault rifles of that time. It is practical, rather than alarmist, to understand that unarmed citizens cannot be secure in their freedoms. It's convenient for gun banners to dismiss this argument by saying, "That could never happen here, this is America." But history shows that only vigilant people can keep government under control. By banning certain weapons today, we may plant the seeds for tyranny to flourish decades from now. Tortured interpretations of the Second amendment cannot change the fact that both the letter of the amendment itself and the legislative history conclusively show that the Founders intended ordinary citizens to be armed. The notion that the Second amendment confers rights only upon organized state-run militias is preposterous; the amendment is meaningless unless it protects the gun rights of individuals. Gun control may have faded as a political issue, but the mentality that Washington knows best-- and that certain constitutional rights are anachronisms-- is alive and well. Look for gun control advocates to bide their time and look for new ways to resurrect the issue in 2008 and beyond.