



**Steve Lopez**

## *Our senator of high caliber*

I hadn't seen much of Pennsylvania Sen. Arlen Specter in the news lately, but he popped up the other day.

This would have been the day the newspapers carried stories about the two hoods walking into a gymnasium in Southwest Philadelphia, pulling out a gun and an automatic rifle, and spraying the crowd in the middle of a basketball game. Five people were injured.

There was also a followup about three slayings the day before.

One involved a Federal Express worker shot in the head while making his rounds in North Philadelphia. Then there was the newlywed medical student blown away as he got into his car on City Avenue. And finally, the woman who was fatally shot in a Center City law office, allegedly by a man who had stalked her.

Those murders gave Philadelphia 448 for the year.

But back to Darlin' Arlen. He appeared in the paper the same day that Wal-Mart was in the news for its decision to ban handgun sales, "a move reflecting the growing sensitivity to the use of pistols and revolvers in the United States."

I guess it's really no surprise what Arlen was in the paper for. If you're going to be a National Rifle Association poster boy and take its money every time it holds out its hand, the script is no mystery.

### **Don those hip boots**

"If I thought the Brady bill would have a real impact on violent crime, I would have supported it," Arlen said, explaining his vote against. He also explained his voting against a ban on military-style assault weapons.

"The criminals don't have any problems getting a hold of [assault] weapons, no matter what you do. They get them illegally. It's just a limitation on hunters and sportsmen."

I tried to reach Specter on Friday at his Philadelphia and Washington offices. No answer. They might have been in full waders and fluorescent hats, armed to the teeth with assault weapons and stalking a holiday goose.

A couple of thoughts.

I have a problem with the Brady bill, too. It doesn't go far enough.

Private ownership of guns ought to be banned. Only cops should have guns.

But we all know that's not going to happen, and that's why the Brady bill came along. And frankly, the pro-gun babble about it has become fire-some. Nobody expects the Brady bill to stop crime. But it accomplishes three things.

It proves that a majority of people in Washington have finally found the courage to tell the NRA to take a hike.

It will keep some guns away from some nut cases and save a few lives.

And it's a symbolic first step toward sanity and control in an increasingly violent, dangerous, gun-crazy nation.

### **A couple of sports**

Arlen argues that a better solution is to do a better job of rehabilitating juvenile offenders, locking up career criminals and executing bad guys. And he's not too far off base with any of that. But gun control would complement those things.

I guess that's hard to admit, though, when the NRA has pumped \$170,000 into your Senate campaigns and you look across a state that has 12,000 gun dealers and 1.1 million hunters.

As for Arlen's comment that a ban on assault weapons is a limitation on hunters and sportsmen, I can certainly understand the concern. State Sen. Vince Fumo has pointed out that it just wouldn't be sporting enough if, the next time he went quail hunting, he couldn't take the automatics along.

I wonder, though, which limitation we should be more concerned with. The limitation on hunters? Or the limitation on a person's right to walk the streets, or go to a damn basketball game, without Rambo showing up?

Oh well, you know what they say: Good guys need guns to defend themselves from bad guys. And in response to notorious shootings across the nation, and the Brady bill, true Americans are rushing out and buying more guns than ever this holiday season, despite mounting evidence that guns purchased for protection create more tragedy than they prevent.

Which reminds me of one more story that appeared the same day Arlen did his gun promotion song and dance.

A 22-year-old man in South Philadelphia, thinking a burglar was at the door of his apartment, fired his gun at him. But it wasn't a burglar. Or, as the distraught man explained it to police:

"I killed my best friend."

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