

b. SUNDAY 3-21-93



Steve Lopez

## The Specters: United on guns

In the interest of accuracy, I'd like to clarify something in last week's column. Something about guns.

This was the column in which I wondered what it must be like at the Specter family's kitchen table here in Philadelphia, given that Councilwoman Joan has done a public soap opera about the tragedy of guns and violence in the schools while U.S. Sen. Arlen is against gun control.

But after more research, I'd like to apologize for hinting at hypocrisy.

It seems that Joan — despite working herself into a lather over violence and cheering the arrival of metal detectors in schools — voted against a gun control bill last year.

So there's no disharmony after all. I'm sorry, Arlen and Joan.

I'm not sorry, however, for anything I said about your son, Shanin.

Yes, the Specters are consistently and undeniably against gun control, even at a time when polls tell us that much of the nation, horrified by violence, is moving the other way.

Let me say, in Joan and Arlen's defense, that gun control won't end violence. You can't eliminate all the guns out there. And yes, violence is largely a product of poverty and unemployment, and we ought to pay closer attention to that.

But I wonder if the Specters are against brushing their teeth because they might get cavities anyway.

### Shot down bill

Joan Specter's vote in 1992 helped kill a bill by Councilman Angel Ortiz. Ortiz says the bill would enhance a state law by identifying specific automatic and semiautomatic weapons that are illegal.

I called Joan Specter's office Thursday and Friday to see how she can vote in favor of guns one day and cry over spilled blood the next, but Annie Oakley didn't call back.

So I looked up a 1991 story about debate of the bill. In it, Specter said she thought only the state could pass

gun bills. The story went on to say:

*Some supporters of the proposed law contend that Specter is trying to block the bill to avoid embarrassing her husband. He advocated gun-control measures when he was Philadelphia district attorney but has opposed gun control as a senator and has received large campaign contributions from the gun lobby.*

To say Arlen advocated gun control is misleading. In 1970, he criticized a state court ruling that said it

was OK to wander the streets of Philadelphia brandishing a gun.

### NRA support

Put the gun in your pocket, though, and Arlen doesn't have a problem. In fact, he's been so consistently pro-gun, Arlen is the darlin' of the National Rifle Association.

It especially liked his 1985 support of a bill that made it easier to buy, sell and transport guns. And just before Specter's re-election last fall, the NRA sent a bulletin to its 200,000 Pennsylvania members. It warned, "We can't afford to lose Arlen Specter" because in the victory over anti-gun forces, "ARLEN SPECTER HELPED MAKE IT HAPPEN!"

"Firearms owners ... everywhere owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to ... Specter, without whom we could not have prevailed. ... By sheer determination [and] the support of pro-firearms senators such as Arlen Specter ... your Second Amendment rights today remain undiminished." Way to go, Arlen!

Since 1986, the NRA has put more money behind Arlen than anyone in Congress except Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, where, I believe, you can purchase bazookas in 7-Elevens.

According to the Washington gun-control center run by Sarah Brady, wife of the Reagan press secretary who was shot in the head, the NRA spent \$129,000 on Arlen or on campaigns against his opponents.

### A waiting period

Specter is against the Brady bill, which proposes a seven-day waiting period on handgun purchases. In the Senate, this puts him in with an all-star cast of major league rubes.

Jesse Helms (North Carolina), Orrin Hatch (Utah), Alan Simpson (Wyoming) and two senators who hold office in the NRA — Ted Stevens (Alaska) and Larry Craig (Idaho).

It also puts Specter to the right of Sen. Strom Thurmond (South Carolina), who voted for the Brady bill, and Ronald Reagan, who supports it.

As you know, the NRA has shot its own lights out lately by threatening to destroy politicians who oppose guns. And its chief lobbyist quit after admitting that he spread lies about the U.S. attorney general nominee.

But I think with the right TV ad campaign, like the one that used to feature Charlton Heston, the NRA can restore its image.

I see two hunters in a low crouch, assault rifles at the ready, stalking wild turkeys. One is wearing a coonskin cap. The other is wearing a mink. They turn now to the camera.

Hi, I'm Arlen. And I'm Joan.  
And we're the NRA.