

CT Opinions

Quote of the week

“We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts.”
— MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

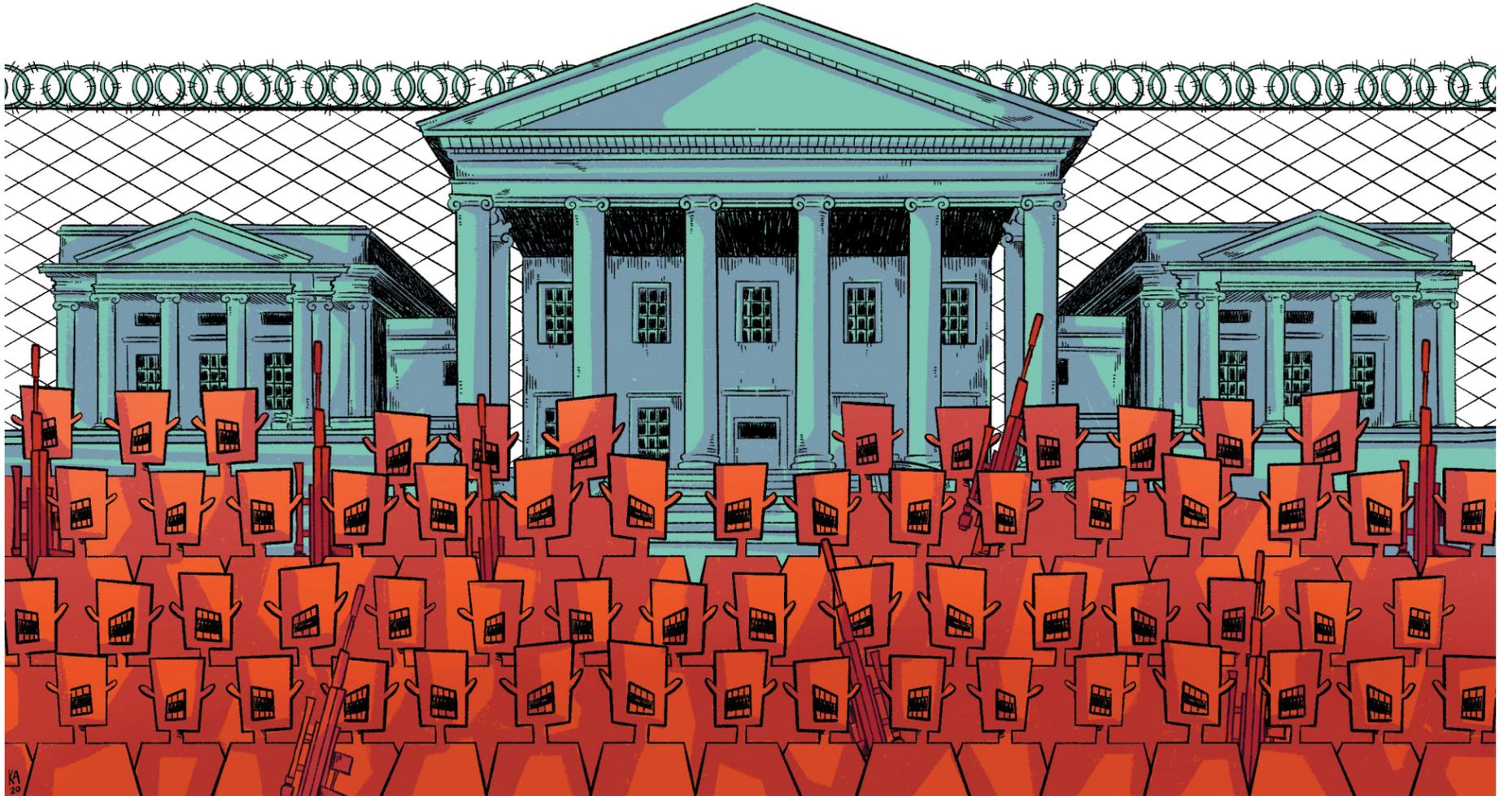


Illustration by Karly Andersen

PROTECTING THE SECOND AMENDMENT SHOULDN'T COME WITH LOADED THREATS

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

Rally. Next to sit-ins and petitions, it is one of the most popular forms of demonstration in the United States today. Thousands upon thousands of civilians congregate in one space to either advocate or protest a firm belief they hold. Citizens use their First Amendment right to assemble to voice their concerns. The Women's March. Pride. The Black Lives Matter movement. And on Monday, the thousands of people protesting gun control at the Virginia Capitol were added to the mix.

The right to bear arms is one of the biggest discussion points in the United States today. We have been fighting this domestic war for the past two decades, unfortunately to no avail nor agreement. This Monday, the conversation took a terrifying turn. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, thousands of gun rights activists gathered at the Virginia State Capitol. They used their First Amendment right to assemble in an effort to protect their Second Amendment right to bear arms, as if their arms were being threatened.

After the shooting in Virginia Beach last year, Democrats have made gun control a priority in 2020. They are not trying to ban guns, contrary to the extremist belief. They are trying to regulate accessibility to firearms in hopes of minimizing gun violence.

The Virginia State Senate has recently passed three bills that will soon arrive at the House of Delegates, where a Democratic majority will likely vote in favor of the legislation. These bills require background checks on all buyers, limit purchases of handguns to one a month and provide local governments the jurisdiction to ban guns in parks and public spaces.

Some protesters took their peaceful demonstration and turned it into threats against the Capitol. On Friday, Gov. Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in Richmond.

Isn't this country tired of having the same conversation that is more concerned with material violence than the lives of human beings? I know I am. I am tired of turning on the TV to be greeted with yet another shooting. I am tired of the “guns don't kill people, people kill people” song. I am tired of this country dividing itself over a contraption that has taken thousands of people from this world far too early. I am tired of people never learning.

But that's not what I want to talk about. I want to talk about the demented belief that violence will somehow provide an answer. For the people who threatened the Capitol building, what were you hoping to gain? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm certain that intimidating Northam and the entire Virginia Capitol will not help your argument. Your constitutional “right to bear arms” becomes irrelevant when you browbeat the entirety of the Virginia government.

Northam's state of emergency temporarily banned all weapons, including firearms, from the state Capitol's grounds. This action angered protesters, and the Virginia Citizens Defense League — the primary hosts of the rally — tried to contest the declaration in court. Fortunately, the Virginia Supreme Court upheld Northam's gun ban. If these gun rally protesters' intentions were to object peacefully to recent gun control legislation, they really don't need their guns to do so.

So, you can imagine my disheartening surprise when I woke up Monday morning to a group of men walking through

Monroe Park with their firearms. I, like many students, made sure to stay away from any and all Capitol activity. Yet, as I was on my way to a service event to honor Martin Luther King Jr., I was sickened to see what seemed like a small militia walking through our park. I heard the shocked exclamations from fellow students who were on the bus with me. The men all carried firearms, orange stickers that read “Guns Save Lives” and proud smiles. I cannot fathom how these protesters continued smiling knowing they had just terrified a bus full of college students.

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Just a mile from Monroe Park gathered nearly 22,000 people, all defending their Second Amendment rights — or so they say. While there were no weapons on the actual Capitol grounds, adjacent to it stood 16,000 protesters, many of whom were armed. The Washington Post detailed an altercation between a protester and Paul Karns, a bystander. Karns asked the teenage protester why he was carrying such a large gun, a “massive .338-caliber Lapua precision rifle” to be exact. I don't know about

you, but I didn't have a single clue what that gun looks like. And so I looked it up. I'm 5 feet, 4 inches tall. This gun could reach my shoulder. It is enormous.

A protester responded to Karns by saying: “If the military has it, then I can have it.” Oh, the arrogance. This is the deranged thinking of many protesters on Monday. The military trains its members for months on end, day in and day out. Leaders try their absolute best to ensure trainees do not misuse their firearms and cause harm to others. Thus, what would make any civilian think they deserve the same freedom when it comes to firearms as those trained by professionals?

Of course, it wouldn't be a conversation about guns if we failed to mention neo-Nazis. Despite the State of Emergency, many white supremacist organizations and militias attended the rally. The three men arrested by the FBI were found to be connected to a group called The Base. The Base is a white supremacy organization that claims “Violence is the only way” to protect the white race. This is exactly why civilians should have no right to carry massive guns. As a woman of color, my right to breathe becomes threatened by these men's right to bear arms.

Protesting is a right that should be provided to all citizens of this world. We are all entitled to speak our minds and should never be silenced by others. However, there is a large difference between protesting injustice and threatening the safety of others. Luckily, nobody was injured during this rally. As this state progresses with new legislation, conversations regarding gun control need to be had in better ways. I may not be your local gun rights advocate, but I'm sure that holding a gun to the heads of our leaders isn't what will help you keep your guns.