

COVER



STORY

WELCOME TO MICHAEL BLOOMBERG'S GANGSTA'S PARADISE

(AKA VERMONT)

Former NYC Mayor **Michael Bloomberg** and his cronies get caught in their latest lie, this time trying to convince residents of the safest state in the nation that they really live in an American crime hotbed.

Even if you don't live in Vermont, you need to read this story. It's a cautionary tale that reveals much of what is to come from former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's anti-Second Amendment group, Everytown for Gun Safety.

Everytown recently engineered a "sting operation" in Vermont—a state that is statistically among the safest in the nation and does not require a license for someone to carry a handgun—in order to try to push state legislators into passing a number of different gun control laws, including so-called "universal" background checks.

"If anything, Vermont should serve as the model for the rest of the country's gun laws," said Darin Goens, the NRA state liaison for Vermont. "Remember, as the country started passing concealed carry laws in the 1980s, Vermont was cited as an anomaly, and a successful one at that. While most states didn't have concealed carry, Vermont not only recognized this right, but you didn't need a permit to exercise it.

"For years, things have gone very well in the Green Mountain State, as it consistently ranks as one of the safest states in the country."

In fact, Federal Bureau of Investigation data indicates that Vermont has among the lowest violent crime rates in the nation. Its violent crime rate is 69 percent below average, and 79 percent below California's—a state that already has so-called "universal" background checks.

Those statistics, plus Everytown's dishonesty, caused the data from the group's undercover operation to quickly crumble, as such lies tend to do.

Of course, lies and half-truths aren't new for Everytown. Politifact.com has

twice reported that Everytown's claim about the number of school shootings is "mostly false," and Factcheck.org has accused Everytown of "spinning statistics on school shootings." Everytown is also directly connected to the group that read off Tamerlan Tsarnaev's name—yes, one of the Boston Marathon bombers—at an event for "victims of gun violence" in Concord, N.H.

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While we don't know why Everytown chose Vermont as its next target, one thing is clear—they just might have picked the wrong state. Vermont residents are fiercely independent thinkers, not easily swayed by anti-gun propaganda, despite restrictive laws in neighboring New York.

And this time Everytown has learned an important lesson—sometimes facts actually matter. That's especially true when the facts are so easy to find, and when you are dealing with a state whose residents strongly cherish their freedom.

Here's what we know happened earlier this year. Everytown began by placing fake gun advertisements from fictitious private sellers on various websites. They actually grabbed some ads from gun dealers in Vermont, cropped off the names of the dealers and posted those ads as if they were from private sellers.

Everytown reported that they kept track of who responded to their fake ads, and even allegedly hired someone to perform background checks on the responders to see if they were forbidden from buying guns due to a felony conviction or other legal reason.

Everytown then published their "statistics." In a report titled "Hiding in Plain Sight," Everytown said 169 potential buyers responded, and that seven of them were prohibited by law from possessing firearms. By extrapolating this data, Everytown claimed: "Gun sales transacted on just three websites put an estimated 126 guns into the hands of felons and domestic abusers in Vermont—and likely many more—in this year alone."

Of course, that is a blatant lie. They didn't find even one actual example of a

gun being sold privately to a person who can't lawfully possess a firearm. Their evidence was simply an assumption based on what theoretically *might* occur.

But none of that mattered to Everytown. Clearly the group's goal was to insinuate that private gun sales are arming criminals. They hoped this would give them lots of anti-gun media attention just as the state's legislative session was beginning. They wanted to use this possible momentum to compel Vermont's politicians to pass a "universal" background check law that would be the beginning of the end to



BLOOMBERG'S GANGSTA'S PARADISE

Vermont's history of leaving Second Amendment rights unfettered.

But then Everytown's "study" imploded.

Bobby Richards, owner and operator of Crossfire Arms in Mount Holly, Vt., happened to come across a photo on social media of a gun he was advertising for sale. He began looking around and found that six of his guns were "for sale" with ads he didn't place, and that he was being described as an unlicensed seller.

This wasn't only a lie; it would be illegal for him to do so. If he tried to sell a gun without first clearing a potential buyer through the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), then the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) would pull his license to sell guns—and would likely prosecute him. Much more than just his reputation was on the line.

Richards sent a letter to Everytown to cease and desist from using his photos and information. He also went public. Richards, who advertises firearms for sale on Armslist.com and on his website xfirearms.com, wanted to make it clear that as a licensed dealer he requires every potential buyer to fill out the BATFE Form 4473 and to undergo a screening via NICS.

News of this broke first on social media, then on blogs and finally in national media outlets. Everytown realized they'd been caught again and quickly issued a report saying they wrongly identified 48 ads as being from unlicensed dealers. Everytown's retraction read: "A previous version of this report incorrectly stated that we identified 1,106 ads posted by unlicensed Vermont sellers offering firearms for sale. We inadvertently included 48 ads posted by licensed dealers in Vermont in this total. This version of the report reflects data based on the updated total of 1,058 gun ads posted by unlicensed sellers."

Richards has hired experienced Second Amendment attorney Rachel M. Baird of Rachel M. Baird & Associate to represent his company. Baird told us in an exclusive early February interview

that she will soon be filing a lawsuit against Everytown for defamation.

"They used Crossfire's logo," Baird said. "That's defamation. My client relies on his good reputation to do business."

Baird sees this lawsuit as an opportunity to learn more about Everytown—a group that is funded by Bloomberg but whose operations are largely secretive.

"I'm looking forward to getting Everytown into discovery and deposing their leadership," she said. "We have a lot of questions and, as far as I can tell, no one has ever been able to get them to answer how they operate."

For his part, Richards believes that Everytown's lies put his business at grave risk. And he refuses to stand idly by and let those lies hurt his business.

"I'm outraged," he said. "My business is fairly new. I just received my FFL in 2013. If I don't fight this publicly, it could harm my business."

The "sting operation" seems to have been planned to coincide with the introduction of anti-gun legislation in Vermont—legislation strongly promoted by the anti-gun group Gun Sense Vermont. In January, Senate President Pro Tem John Campbell introduced Senate Bill 31, a bill that would require all firearm transfers to clear a NICS check, including those made between family members.

Claiming to be a grassroots organization started by and run by Vermonters, Gun Sense Vermont nevertheless is quick to jump on Bloomberg's Everytown bandwagon. Gun Sense promotes Everytown's bogus "study" right on the home page of its website, while likely knowing that the study was greatly flawed, and that it didn't prove even one sale of a firearm to a prohibited person.

"Gun Sense Vermont showed up on the scene suddenly and recently with money to burn," said NRA's Goens. "Early in 2014, they started a mailing campaign, sending postcards to state lawmakers demanding that the Vermont legislature enact more gun laws.

"Keep in mind, there was no real impetus for the restrictions. There were no gang problems and no street crime issues that are typical in the inner city—no rash of armed robberies, or any of the other typical culprits. In fact, the group gives very little justification for why these bills are necessary, causing Second Amendment supporters to tag their campaign with the old cliché, 'a solution in search of a problem.' They have also submitted petitions with signatures, albeit with most signees coming from other states as far away as California and Hawaii."

Gun Sense Vermont also claims that 77 percent of Vermont residents favor the background check legislation, but offers no proof of that so-called "fact."

"Anti-gun groups have made a habit of coming up with their own polls and skewed studies that do not stand up to scrutiny," Goens said. "At times, their strategy appears to be 'repeat a phrase long enough, and it becomes fact.' Their assertion that 90 percent of the public supports background checks is a good example. When they asked this question, did they also inform the respondent that all dealer transactions have been required to clear a NICS check since 1992? Of course they didn't. And when challenged on their numbers, the figures have changed to a number in the 70-percent range.

"At the very least, their head-scratching polling methodology should cause a lot of skepticism."

For their part, Vermont gun owners are showing up in force to oppose this latest attack on the Second Amendment. In January, the Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, the NRA state association, held its annual legislative mixer in the Capitol cafeteria with about 500 in attendance.

"The supporters were easy to identify because they all wore an article of hunter orange," Goens said. "Organizers said there would have been even more people show up, but much of the Northeast was shut down that day with a strong Nor'easter."

The weekend before that, thousands of Vermonters attended the Yankee Sportsmen's Classic in Burlington, and the issue of "universal" background

checks was a hot issue, with several local television stations covering the story.

Later, on Feb. 11, hundreds of gun owners opposed to the measure gathered at the Capitol to testify against the legislation in a committee hearing. Observers said it was the biggest crowd to descend on the Statehouse since 2000, when Vermont debated and ultimately passed a civil unions law.

Vermont's governor, Democrat Peter Shumlin, hasn't embraced the background check scheme, either. Firearms ownership in the state is a given for many across

What's more, the background check legislation, like that pushed in other states, goes far beyond what supporters of the measure would have you believe.

"This 'universal' background check bill is deeply flawed," said NRA's Goens. "First, there is no such thing as a 'universal' background check because criminals do not submit to background checks. This bill will do nothing but place more burdens and expenses on honest, law-abiding gun owners when the focus should be on enforcing current laws and locking up the bad guys.

the state is a major source of crime guns in neighboring Massachusetts. Yet BATFE data shows that when guns in Massachusetts are traced from crime scenes back to their state of origin, Vermont actually comes in behind states from California to Georgia to Maine. The facts simply don't indicate that Vermont's freedom is giving criminals a popular place to purchase guns.

What they do show is that "crime guns" are usually stolen from law-abiding gun owners or bought by straw purchasers (those who can pass a background check who illegally buy a gun for someone who can't). It is also already illegal for anyone to knowingly sell a gun to someone the person knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, is prohibited from possessing a firearm.

Note that the background check measure isn't the only gun issue that will be in front of the legislature this session, according to Goens. Last spring, the city of Burlington passed a set of gun ordinances despite the state having a firearms pre-emption law that prohibits municipalities from enacting their own patchwork of laws. Those ordinances must be approved by the legislature and signed by the governor to take effect.

Everytown's attempt to push California-style gun control laws on other states is nothing new. But doing so in a state like Vermont, with extremely low violent crime and very independent-minded residents, is a new tactic. That's likely why Everytown tried to prop up the legislation with a bogus "sting" operation to create false data and a false narrative.

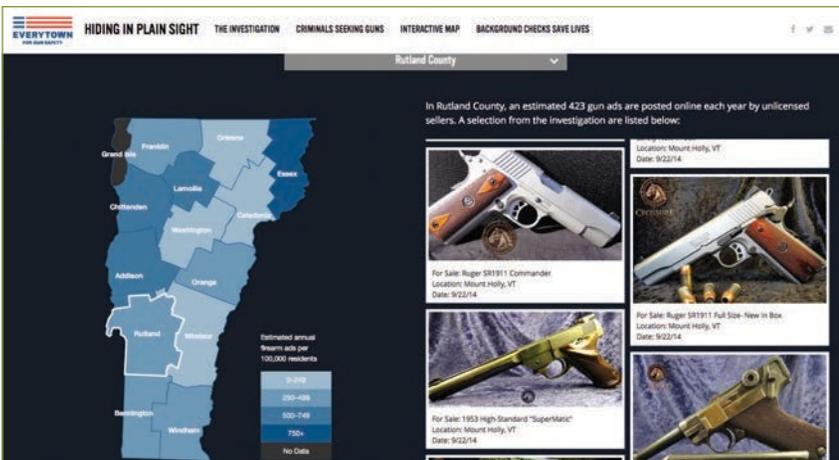
"Yes, Bloomberg and his minions are going to throw unprecedented amounts of money, especially for Vermont, at this issue," Goens said. "But this is a small state with a strong hunting heritage, and gun owners who are proud of who they are and what their track record has been. Calls are already streaming into the Capitol.

"Make no mistake: This is going to be a tough fight, and a lot is at stake. This is more than just Vermont. The national gun control cabal is looking to notch a victory they can dangle in other states and in the Congress." **TF**

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PHOTO COURTESY OF BOBBY RICHARDS



Crossfire Arms' Bobby Richards (top) is filing suit against Bloomberg's Everytown for copying his ads and defaming his business practices (bottom).

party lines and ideologies. Freedom and independence are widely shared values.

In fact, Shumlin has even said Vermont doesn't need to pass laws that mirror federal gun laws.

"If you're willing to break federal laws, you're likely to be willing to break state laws," Shumlin said, demonstrating that common sense also prevails in the Green Mountain State.

"Can you imagine a widow who wants to sell guns from her husband's collection to his longtime buddies at the gun club having to require each and every one to submit to a background check? States that have gone down that path, like neighboring New York and New Jersey, charge \$100 per NICS transaction."

Proponents of the private sales ban would have Vermonters believe that