

Taking a stand; making a point

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A good thing happened Jan. 24. Caving to pressure from hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts, the huge, long-running Eastern Sports and Outdoor Show (ESOS) folded their tent and cancelled their show in Harrisburg, PA.

So what? What does that have to do with someone here in Cedar City? A lot. As I have said before, I am not concerned about banning assault weapons because the whole thing is not about guns. It is about control, it is about taking away of rights-yours and mine. Guns just happen to be the vehicle to which it is tied. The outdoor/hunting/sporting industry let it be known, that would not happen. They were willing to take the financial impact of taking a stand and saying, "Hell no! Not on our watch." They did so in a way that works far better than 1,000,000 words in print and lip service. They did so by hitting the pocket book.

See, here is what happened and how it shook down. The ESOS has been running for a long time. It runs for 10 days, scheduled to open Feb. 2. However, the giant exhibition halls stayed dark. Back on Jan. 17, they decided to ban assault rifles and large magazines from display at the show, some of the items Sen. Feinstein has on her laundry list legislation. A company named Reed, from Great Britain manages this show and some others. I guess they did not think anyone would mind or maybe even notice.

Then, the cagada hit the oscillator. One after another by the dozens, then hundreds, huge companies such as Cabela's, Ruger, Ford Trucks, John Deere, Dicks Sporting Goods, Jack Daniels, Mossberg, Savage Arms, Winchester and other outfits large and small refused to come...just pulled out. Said, "Nope, if you are going to refuse us our second amendment rights, we just won't show. The last list I saw numbered over 300 exhibitors that had backed out.

Then the seminar speakers, the big names from television almost to a lot did the same. Even Uncle Ted said no to a speaking engagement. Think about the economic impact that made on that show. By Jan. 23, hundreds of exhibitors and speakers had pulled out. It is comparable to all of the Super Bowl commercials cancelling and then, most of the players refusing to show up. Those folks stood up for all of our second amendment rights and put their money on the line to

do so.

This show for some is the biggest of the year. To withdraw is a huge hit to their income. For many of the exhibitors, missing this show would hit their annual bank account by as much as one-half. They did not miss a beat. Even companies with no ties or interest in guns pulled out. For some outfitters, it was the only show they worked all year. They might book 90% of their clients there and there was a waiting list for booth space.

Not now.

I worked the show for many years. For me, it was a big payday. I have not gone in some time. Had I been booked, I would have joined the boycott immediately even though it had nothing to do with the archery industry and basically, nothing to do with me. That would have meant a loss to me of \$6,500 and expenses. I had to grin as I saw one archery company after another, large and small, join the boycott and say, "No, not on our watch."

Then came the wash of demands by ticket buyers for refunds and entire busloads cancelled their trips. You see, ESOS draws as many as 500,000 attendees a year. They just let it be known, they were not going to come to a show that was being boycotted so heavily. Let that number rattle around in your head for a few minutes.

A half million spenders. The last figure I saw came from someone with the government in Harrisburg. They claimed it would amount to nearly \$80-million direct and in trickle down money. That is serious money. But not to Reed. They are a huge business and ESOS is small potatoes to them.

Therefore, Reed canceled the show. They said they would refund all money spent on tickets in advance and probably the exhibitor fees. However, I am not sure that will get them out of trouble with the American outdoor industry and Americans in general.

Reed also produces the mega-giant, Shooting-Hunting Outdoor Trade Show-SHOT Show. Although Harrisburg is a relatively small show for Reed, the SHOT Show in Las Vegas is not.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation owns it. Think of it as the Detroit Auto Show except for shooting, hunting and outdoor equipment. It is gagalopicle big. As you might guess, they were not too pleased with Reed's decision to ban "black" guns. To lose that show would be a hit in the old Euros for Reed. NSSF said they were taking a wait and see approach.

Now, I do not know how much national media attention this will garner. Probably, outside of outdoor writers and outdoor programming, it will get very little. It is too far on the wrong side of mainstream media. It did make national television news on Jan. 24. One sentence was about it and that was incorrect. In addition, the mayor of Harrisburg made one of the most ridiculous statements I have ever heard. She blamed the NRA. Likely, it will get her unelected in the next election.

However, this one event may provide our government officials with a scary look at just what Americans will do when their second amendment rights are tampered with by anybody. Oddly, it came on the same day Sen. Feinstein offered her ridiculous proposed gun control bill.

In addition to the millions of tax dollars, it cost the state of PA and the city of Harrisburg, the HRI folks in and around that city took a huge hit. Hotels that sold out for 10-12 days were empty. Eating joints and the folks who supply them had plenty of room. We are talking about a tremendous amount of revenue that just did not happen. It went away because as an industry, we said no. We will take the financial hit for what we believe in and so you will you. That is exactly how citizens make a difference. They attack the pocket book. No amount of marching and rhetoric will have the impact of dollars lost.

I don't know but I suspect the ESOS is for sale. I cannot imagine Reed trying to smooth things out. They insulted too many of the wrong people. However, a show that size will come back. I believe under new management, good old U.S. of A. management. In addition, it will once again be one of the major shows for the outdoor industry.

And...they will have guns on display...lots of guns.

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