

Speakers

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Justin Robinson, Masthead member from Arizona

Jonathan Spoon: Masthead member from North Carolina

Transcript

Jon Spoon: I am in kind of a semi-rural and definitely a hunting part of the country, and so I think that's kind of formed my perspectives on this issue, but, I am-

Matt Peterson: Are you a hunter yourself?

Jon Spoon: No, I am not a hunter, I have lots of friends who are. I have a lot of respect for a lot of the hunters here, because they're some of the people who are some of the most invested in, kind of ecologically guarding the precious areas that we have. Just being good stewards of the earth. A lot of the hunters are those guys. So it's a neat perspective and I guess I've grown up around guns and recognize that that's been a part of the process for where I live.

Matt Peterson: Justin, tell us about your background with firearms.

Justin Robinson: I didn't really get familiar with firearms, until I was in the military. And that, I will confess, has probably created a bias of sorts for me, where I think of firearms more as a form of expensive, dangerous furniture.

I just don't find firearms themselves inherently dangerous. In the same way that maybe somebody who doesn't have the same training does. And that's filtered both the way I look at things and probably the way I respond to people. And maybe that's not even terrible. But specifically the things that do threaten me about firearms I would ascribe to careless use.

Jon Spoon: That was one of the really interesting parts of the discussion, when I read your suggestions, was, in some way penalizing negligent use. I don't know if we have that in any concrete way. If people are going to jail for not locking up guns, when accidents happen, or for shooting them, when they don't know where the bullets are going to end up and doing things like that. And I wonder if that is an area that we can really make some progresses, is trying to codify and penalize certain actions, that are just endangering people unnecessarily.

Justin Robinson: I think the horse has kind of left the barn on the 'getting the 300 million guns off the ground' aspect of this whole thing. In an ideal world, if those guns weren't there, then they wouldn't get fired. We love to argue that thing that we can't get, because it is either technically correct, or it feels right, or whatever.

The thing I think that we can change the argument to, for someone who's really anti-gun control from a confiscation perspective, you can tell someone in their

own words to put their money where their mouth is. So, if the argument is against having weapons confiscated, is that I should be allowed to engage in responsible use of firearm, because I'm not the criminal, I'm not the person that's mishandling it, I'm not this, I'm not that. Well, every other dangerous fun you can have in the United States is regulated the way that I am suggesting with negligent use, or failure to store it properly or whatever.

And that argument can be brought to the table on gun control to say, "Okay, if responsible use, as you say, is the problem, how come I can't force people to act responsibly with firearms? What's the problem?"

Jon Spoon: Guns are specifically designed for killing. I mean, pools are designed for having fun in, and there is a certain amount of danger that we're willing to take on to enjoy them, but staring down the barrel of a gun is not one of those. At least for, I think, most people. I wanna just go to a grocery store, concert, or something, or church even now.

Justin Robinson: I absolutely agree with that. Firearms are, in fact, meant to cause damage or to end life, whether we're talking about hunting, or we're talking about harming somebody. One of the things that I was taught in the military, was, and it's the same thing that the NRA would teach you with civilian firearm use, is that you don't ever point a weapon at something you don't intend to destroy. That's actually the wording of the statement: 'Don't point a firearm at anything, you don't intend to destroy'. So in that statement it's actually quite obvious-

Jon Spoon: Many don't have the discipline and the training that you've had. I mean-

Justin Robinson: Well-

Jon Spoon: I don't think you can expect that in a mass populace.

Justin Robinson: You can't expect that in a mass populace, that's correct. Here's what I'm gonna say. When is it appropriate to use a firearm?

It seems like the majority of Americans would agree, that it's okay to use a firearm to end a threat caused by a plausible lethal threat against yourself. So the reason we would be okay with a police officer shooting a criminal for instance, is he suspects there's going to be life, limb, or eyesight damaged, if he doesn't threaten lethal force against the person in question.

So if we accept that as there is at least one good reason to use a firearm, and then we also add along the lines of, and you have to be responsibly trained in the use of that firearm, in order to use it properly, I would agree with all of that.

The only place where I fall off the wagon that you are on, is the suggestion that a civilian cannot be trained in that way. What I would suggest right now, is that we lack the will to compel anyone to engage in the sort of training that we should.

Weirdly and perversely, a civilian actually has more time, and maybe even in many cases, has more resources [than a member of the military]. If an AR-15 costs about \$1,500 to start and then you're adding all the bells and whistles, you can't tell me that that guy can't afford range time. You can't tell me that that guy doesn't actually have the time to get more training, than a modern day soldier currently gets, to be certified with that firearm.

And in the end, that training, in turn, generates an attitude. And that attitude is that, firearms are dangerous. Firearms are for killing people. But there are some very specific, rare and tragic moments, where only a firearm will do.

Jon Spoon: How do you feel about civilians owning assault rifles?

Justin Robinson: The technical reality is, that the bullet is the thing that does the bad thing. And as long as the bullet gets fired out of a barrel that is a certain length, it will have the same destructive properties, as if you fire it out an AR-15.

The reason I don't care about assault rifles, may be partially biased, because a lot of my military career I was just surrounded by them. I learned to think of them as not threatening.

Jon Spoon: I think that's a much different perspective than most people are coming from.

Justin Robinson: And I understand, because in the real world, to come back to the civilian world, the kind of guy who fetishizes the AR-15, is maybe not a military guy, he's just tactical Tim, and he really likes the idea of being a military guy.

Jon Spoon: Or a guy who got kicked out of the military and didn't get reported into a system for data collection. But, that's something else...

Matt Thompson: Listening to both, I need to step in for a moment, if I might. ...

Justin, you offered Jon a strategy for talking to gun rights activists to say, 'Okay, if someone confronts you with that argument, that individualist, personal, I have the training, and I have the comfort, I should be allowed to have a gun in an environment where guns can exist.' And you said, 'Then you should be comfortable,' what I heard you say was, Jon can say back to that gun rights advocate, 'Great, you should then feel comfortable, with everyone who has, does not have that training, submitting to some limitation on their access to guns.'

Justin Robinson: Yes, I am willing to go with that. I am also willing to acknowledge that your extremist position with the NRA thinking that registration and training is a step on the slippery slope to fascist confiscation. Well, that's insane. The thing I always tell some of my conservative friends, who are a little further down that road, if there's a gun registry, and let's just go ahead and accept the somewhat ridiculous notion that individual firearm ownership prevents tyranny, when

people come to confiscate your firearms, the two things important to note are, first of all, the historical precedent of Nazi Germany confiscating firearms has already happened. So that context is there, whenever somebody comes to confiscate your firearms.

And the second thing is, when someone comes to take your firearm, as part of some, sinister globalist conspiracy, I will point out, that at that point, you will be armed. So, I don't understand, why registration is such a big deal, in terms of being the beginning of this slippery slope.

Jon Spoon: That's why I—

Justin Robinson: It's actually kind of ridiculous. And most people, who are on the gun rights side of the firearms argument, are willing to acknowledge that that talking point is insane. But, in the end, nobody engages them personally. Normally, the liberal argument engages the NRA. Which is a non-starter, because as far as this topic is concerned, they're extremists, and what are you going to do?

Jon Spoon: That's why one of my initial questions was about your viewpoint on punishments for negligent use. And that would be people losing their right to use guns, which would be confiscation. But it wouldn't be the SWAT team kicking your door in to take your arsenal. It would be 'You screwed up, you used it in a stupid way, and now you don't get to have that anymore.' And that's how we found out about it.

Justin Robinson: You know, I'm OK with that.

Someone actually posted an article about tracking firearms when they're used in crimes. And the reason that database doesn't exist, is the NRA's position that somebody is coming to confiscate your firearms, which, that's neither here nor there, but it complicates the issue, I admit.

Jon Spoon: Why would they register within a system of federally mandated system, if they're that worried about people coming to take their guns, they're not gonna volunteer a manifest of everything they have?

Justin Robinson: My thought process is, that I'm pretty sure most people aren't. When I lived in Illinois, there were firearm users, they just had to have a FOID Card. Firearm Operator Identification. They'll register for that, you know, just fine, which is basically a big red light, that says 'Hey, I'm a firearms owner'. People do that.

So it's about creating a system and selling it properly. But if you're wanting to get to a moment, where you finally have some of the 300 million firearms that, let's face it, nobody needs, off the street, then the way to do it, and then to get the other thing you want, which is people who are afraid of confiscation to get on board with the idea of registration, what you say to them is, 'Hey, if a firearm has a title, and one thing or another happens in a crime, and it's a legitimately

owned firearm, then that gets back to the owner and there's criminal liability for that.'

But moreover, when firearms are just randomly found, they can't be confiscated if they're being legally owned at the moment that they're found. So, hey, you got, I don't wanna go too far into specific cases, because I don't wanna sound like I'm advocating-

Matt Thompson: Let me interject here with a question for Jon. I'm curious, Jon, for you, is there a position that Justin holds at this point in the conversation, about gun rights or gun control, that you remain skeptical of. That if you could have your druthers and you could push a button, you would move Justin off that position.

Jon Spoon: Yeah, I mean, that assault rifles have any place in civil society. We haven't touched on smart weapons, I don't know if we're not gonna have time to get into that kinda stuff, but have a trade-in, where you get the new kinda like James Bond gun, where you trade in your old AR-15 and give them back for a few years and then from there go about removing them, when people misuse them, and take them out of society and I ... I think confiscation is too scary a word, and I guess as a concept.

Matt Thompson: And Jon, to follow up on that... I think in this conversation, you've each been sort of starting from your own premises. And you each have a destination in mind, and that's a good, clear definition of what's your destination is, Jon.

But knowing that the assault rifle, that that sticking point is not a meaningful one, or as not as much of a meaningful one for Justin, that a classification point, it just sets off a flag in his mind. It says, 'This person isn't all that familiar with my world, and the type of weapons that I'm interested in.' And so therefore that point is less convincing for him as a starting point for the conversation.

I think that Justin, one of the things that Justin has done, is kind of offer you some wedge issues in this debate. And I'm curious, Okay, if assault rifles maybe aren't the starting point with someone like Justin, is there an ending point there, that would be more satisfying for you?

Jon Spoon: I just look at graphs of where we are and where everyone else in the developed world is, with regard to number of guns, gun possession, number of gun deaths, everything like this, and I just feel like we are in such a disproportionately bad place, that maybe the type of incrementalism, that is what is available through these types of conversations isn't the best process.

It is 25% of the population they are the gun owners, and it's only 3% of them, who own like 42% of the guns. People with personal arsenal rights and the rights of gun companies are secondary to people dying in this country for me. And that's where I am.

Matt Thompson: At the same time, I've heard from Justin a surprising concession. He is our gun rights advocate for the purpose of this conversation, and also our gun rights advocate Trojan Horse, in that he's volunteered on a few occasions, to kind of make a gun control argument from the vantage point of a gun rights advocate.

One big, surprising concession that I've heard from Justin, is the notion of universal titling for gun ownership. That every gun should be connected to its owner. I think that there are a lot of advocates for gun rights, for whom that would be hugely a bridge too far.

Jon Spoon: Probably. The question is, what percentage though? You know? If we're having an honest argument about 'Can you get a vote passed?' I bet you're much closer to that, than you are to straight up, making things illegal, or making something forbidden by class. But anyway, continue your thought. I'm sorry Matt.

Matt Thompson: I only mention that, because... There is a certain type of politician who is just really savvy at the art of deploying a wedge issue. A wedge issue being an issue, that can forge a crack in what seems like an impenetrable base of support. And can then break off a meaningful percentage of that support.

I hear Justin approaching the matter of gun rights with a few wedge issues. And Jon, I hear you thinking of these wedge issues as being unsatisfyingly incremental. But from the vantage point of where we stand, they seem like fairly large concessions. Or they feel like fairly large wedges. If you could have a contingent, maybe a slight majority of gun owners advocating on your side for universal titling and universal licensing of gun owners, that's a boatload of more regulation than we currently have in this arena.

Justin Robinson: The fight back I would provide to the reasonable concern that people have that 'Hey, this is not enough' is, I would say, that zero is always less than enough. And more than zero may not be as good as enough, but it's better than zero.

I think a gun owner is definitely more okay with the idea of the risk of violence that firearms do in fact provide. They really are a dangerous thing. The thing that maybe we don't say out loud enough, gun enthusiasts, or owners, or people who are just comfortable with firearms, is that they're dangerous. And it's a thing that we will acknowledge among ourselves, which is why, when you're a part of range culture of any kind and if you're going out in competitive shooting or whatever, learning that etiquette with your firearm is more important than almost anything else.

And why don't you hear gun rights advocates bringing that to the table in a conversation? The reason you don't is that they're afraid, that if they make a concession, the conversation is gonna go straight to 100% confiscation.

One last bit on assault rifles. My problem with assault rifles is not the assault rifle. Ultimately it's because my understanding of firearms is, that what makes

an assault rifle dangerous as compared to other weapons, is that it is semi-automatic, it's a rifle and it fires rifle ammunition. It fires rifle ammunition with almost no recoil.

So when you argue, that an assault rifle is a weapon of destruction, I would tell you, that a semi-automatic pistol, a Glock 19, is a weapon of destruction, for the same reason. Which is, it fires as fast as you can squeeze the trigger.

And that by bringing the assault rifle to the front, a person who is familiar with firearms, who knows that the thing that makes the assault rifle the most dangerous, is that you can fire it really fast. They know that other weapons do that, too. So it's very easy to transform that conversation into 'Well, if you're gonna outlaw this, then when are you gonna outlaw pistols?' You know?

Jon Spoon: It still seem to be the gun of choice for mass-shooters.

Justin Robinson: The reason assault rifles are used now, is more because they're at hand.

Matt Peterson: I think we should probably move this toward the conclusion. I'm curious, Jon, where has this process left you, do you feel any better equipped to have a conversation about this? Do you feel like you understand where Justin's coming from better? Has it moved where you started from at all?

Jon Spoon: Yes, I mean it's very interesting to have this kind of thoughtful foil with really informed ideas. I do think that, because I understood that this was an informal conversation with four people, that I am voicing a lot of desperation and exasperation with something that I see as just really troubling societally.

I am not going about it in the way, that if I was on Capitol Hill and was wearing a suit, that I would be smiling and shaking hands and working towards whatever change we can make in the right direction. I really do appreciate that Justin is here and is willing to do that and willing to counter my arguments, that are based in my personal perception of the issues. So I appreciate the process, and it has been really meaningful for me, and I hope that it was cool for everybody involved.

Matt Peterson: So, Justin then let me throw this same question back at you. What moved you the most out of what you heard?

Justin Robinson: I would say, that the consensus is pretty clear. What was interesting, most interesting to me, was when somebody offered something that was actually, it was an attempt to move the bar, and so what I give Jon a lot of credit for, is that he actually brought up smart weapons.

People think of that as kind of being a secondary issue. But when you're having a discussion that's covering such a huge chunk of the American experience, we can't leave out these other things as point of discussion.