The Original Intent of the Second Amendment

There is a constitutional right to keep and bear arms. There are very few topics as open-and-shut as the meaning of the Second Amendment.

Literally all evidence from the founding fathers shows that there was a consensus as to what the original intent and the original meaning of the Second Amendment was. The Second Amendment was written to keep the power in the hands of the people.

Its intent was to ensure that every person was able to take up arms and join other people to fight off tyrants, invaders, or unjustified insurrections. Its meaning was that the government couldn’t infringe on the right of the people to keep and bear arms — no gun bans or restrictions on the people at large.

Here’s the text of the Second Amendment:

“A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”
Before we look over what the implications of the Second Amendment are, let’s look at some quotations from the founding fathers themselves about gun control and the constitution’s protection of the right to keep and bear arms.

The States Request an Amendment on Owning Firearms

When the constitution was written, there was quite a bit of backlash from people who wanted the constitution to include certain strong limitations on the new government. They wanted explicit protections of the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom against unwarranted searches and seizures, and, of course — the right to keep and bear arms.

The request to protect the right to keep and bear arms was almost universal and requested in plain English. There’s no way to confuse the meanings of the requests. Let’s look at the texts of some of the actual requests and proposals.

New Hampshire’s convention requested the following addition to the Constitution:

“Congress shall never disarm any Citizen unless such as are or have been in Actual Rebellion.”

They weren’t alone. Antifederalists in Pennsylvania’s wanted an amendment to, requesting the following be agreed upon:

“That the people have a right to bear arms for the defence of themselves and their own state, or the United States, or for the purpose of killing game; and no law shall be passed for disarming the people or any of them, unless for crimes committed, or real danger of public injury from individuals…”

Three different states, New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia, each required similar proposals and their requests included these exact words: “That the people have a right to keep and bear arms”.

That the founding fathers wanted the right to keep and bear arms protected was obvious. They believed that the militia was the only real defense against liberty. They didn’t trust standing armies or their government — they wanted a country that really was just “the people” with the power, in the end.

Founding Father Quotes on Gun Control

The views of the founding fathers wasn’t minced either. They believed that the right to keep and bear arms was an important right — that the right of the people to be able to repel invasions and topple tyrants was a fundamental natural right.

An ancestor of mine, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and uncle to Robert E Lee, it was Richard Henry Lee who wrote the following in The Pennsylvania Gazette in 1788:
“To preserve liberty, it is essential that the whole body of the people always possess arms and be taught alike, especially when young, how to use them.”

The American hero Patrick Henry, the man who spoke fire for the cause of liberty, said in the constitutional debates:

“The great object is that every man be armed.”

Even Alexander Hamilton, the “liberal” of the day, wrote in The Federalist Papers at 184-188 that:

“The best we can help for concerning the people at large is that they be properly armed.”

The great philosopher statesman Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to William Smith in 1787:

“What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance. Let them take arms.”

Their values were clear. They wanted an armed populace because they knew an armed populace was a free populace. This is why they passed the Second Amendment with the text of, “the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” But that’s not all. Let’s look at further proof — let’s look at what they specifically said about the Second Amendment, and not just the idea of gun ownership.

Founding Father Quotes on the Second Amendment

The founding fathers debated the constitution ferociously — including the Bill of Rights and the Second Amendment. The following is what they said specifically about the Second Amendment at the time it was written.

Statesman Zachariah Johnson, at the Virginia convention in 1788, explained in no uncertain terms what the Second Amendment protects:

“The people are not to be disarmed of their weapons. They are left in full possession of them.”
In an article on the Bill of Rights in 1789, the **Philadelphia Federal Gazette** published the following discussing the Second Amendment:

> “… the people are confirmed by the next article in their right to keep and bear their private arms.”

Later that same year, the Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer published the following, quoting **Sam Adams** on the Second Amendment:

> “And that the said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to infringe the just liberty of the Press, or the rights of Conscience; or to prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms…”

**James Madison**, who is known as the “Father of the Constitution” wrote the following in the Federalist Papers, No. 46:

> “[The Constitution preserves] the advantage of being armed which Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation…[where] the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.”

Of course, some people believe that the Second Amendment only protects the “militia” when it comes to gun ownership. This just begs the question: who are the militia? The Second Amendment itself is clear: “the people” is the group who have their rights protected. The militia are the people, of course.

But don’t take my word for it. After all, we’re after the original intent and now the original meaning of the Second Amendment. Let’s see what the founders said about the “militia” and who it is comprised of.

**Founding Father Quotes on the Definition of “Militia”**

John Adams wrote in “A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States” that the right to keep and bear arms was an individual right, but that military action had to be sanctioned by the laws, of course — not just any “revolution” would be legal, of course. He explains explicitly:

> To suppose arms in the hands of citizens, to be used at individual discretion, except in private self-defense, or by partial orders of towns, countries or districts of a state, is to demolish every constitution, and lay the laws prostrate, so that liberty can be enjoyed by no man; it is a dissolution of the government. The fundamental law of the militia is, that it be created, directed and commanded by the laws, and ever for the support of the laws.”
This is a limit on the militia — not a limit on gun ownership itself. In other words, you have the right
to own firearms, but not to just shot anyone you want or start a coup because you’re restless. This
is just common sense, and even the most radical pro-gun thinkers would agree with such a limit.
Your right to shoot guns ends where the property of others begins — that’s just how it works.

But some try to stretch this “limit” into meaning that the government can outlaw guns. Besides the
obvious point that this goes against “the right of the people to keep and bear arms” on a blatant
level, it also is unfounded — because militia rights are peoples’ rights. That’s because the militia is,
in fact, the people.

That’s why the political economist Tenche Coxe — someone who was originally a loyalist during
the revolution — even proclaimed the following in The Pennsylvania Gazette in 1788, while the
debate was raging:

“Who are the militia? Are they not ourselves? Is it feared, then, that we shall turn our arms each man against
his own bosom. Congress have no power to disarm the militia. Their swords, and every other terrible
implement of the soldier, are the birthright of an American…[T]he unlimited power of the sword is not in the
hands of either the federal or state governments, but, where I trust in God it will ever remain, in the hands of
the people.”

And then even more bluntly, George Mason, yet another founding statesman, defined the militia
during the Virginia convention to ratify the constitution in 1788:

“I ask, sir, what is the militia? It is the whole people, except for a few public officials.”

The evidence is devastating. Any historical “expert” who believes the original intent and meaning of
the constitution didn’t protect an individual right to keep and bear arms is likely lying — either
subconsciously to himself or consciously to your face.

After all, the Second Amendment plainly states, “the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall
not be infringed. To an honest man, the debate should be over.