

# The Modesto Bee Community Columns

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## **Steve Taylor: It's a mad, mad, mad Madison Society**

By Steve Taylor

I'm sure I wasn't the only one in that room that secretly wished somebody would try to rob us. No guns were visible the second Monday in March in a meeting room in Riverbank, but every one of the 20-odd men inside wore loose shirts or jackets on a warm evening and all four women were carrying suspiciously large purses.

This was the Madison Society, Modesto Chapter, a group committed to defending the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and the mood was grumpy, thanks to some recent regulation rumors around a .223 ammo ban. This same group harangued then sheriff candidate (and incumbent) Adam Christianson exactly five years ago to sign a pledge that read, "self-protection shall always constitute good cause for the issuance of a permit to carry a concealed weapon."

Christianson flicked the selector switch to full auto since then, spraying concealed weapons permits around the county by the thousands.

So with more shootin' irons in the hidden holsters of Stan County citizens at any time since the 1850s, what are we gun nuts so upset about?

The Madison Society is a nonprofit organization with over 150 chapters across the county, but only the Modesto, Turlock and San Diego chapters are affiliated with each other, according to Vice President John Horton, who represents all three. Taking its name from President James Madison, who drafted the first 10 amendments to the Constitution (aka, The Bill of Rights), the society sees "only one solution to this growing problem (of firearms laws) in America: to aggressively seek out court challenges to anti-gun legislation no matter where it occurs (at the city, county and state level)."

So they sue.

The first 30 minutes of the meeting, with Horton presiding, quickly established President Obama as a Muslim, Israel about to transform their Syrian neighbors "to glass" and the rest of the world going to hell in a handbasket. That tired phase could be heard at the conclusion of virtually every point of the group discussion, much like our urban brothers tack "Feel me?" onto the end of every spoken thought.

Blame it all on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which announced in early February that it intends to ban commonplace ball ammunition for the AR-15 assault rifle, an iconic weapon the society members see as sacred.

There's nobody to sue yet; as Horton explained, "this is just a plan, not a law, so there's no damage, no relief to seek." Horton could double for Uncle Jesse, from the ol' "Dukes of Hazzard" TV series in the early '80s, suspenders and all. So when he fires advanced legal knowledge, you feel the kick.

When asked if they'd support *any* gun laws, Horton said, "I'd support legislation that got rid of all the gun laws."

Even laws that restrict the insane or crooks from getting guns?

"You wouldn't outlaw a crazy guy shouting about the government on the curb, would you? The Second Amendment is just like the First," Horton replied.

This vocal, proudly packing group might seem like fertile ground for a rogue militia or insurrection to start, but the leadership is strangely rule-governed. Horton braced me outside about a certain ugly rifle of mine we talked about earlier, his brow furrowed with concern saying, "If you didn't register it, you might be a felon."

I gave an exaggerated shrug to impress the group, but they all edged away from me, the rebel law-breaker.

The Modesto Chapter has joined, and is raising cash to support, the case of *Enos v. Holder*, which began in San Joaquin County. A misdemeanor domestic violence conviction in California gets your guns taken away for 10 years. But under federal law, they never come back. Enos is trying to bring federal law in line with the more lenient (yes, *lenient*) California law that was passed a year before the more restrictive federal law was enacted (1994).

But do we want wife beaters armed?

"A quick glance at *Enos* seems like we're helping wife beaters, but ... most of the cases are simple disagreements between a man and his wife. She wants to talk and he wants to leave. She backs up to the door and he moves her out of the way," Horton explained in oddly specific details. "That's assault if she presses charges."

With over 50 licensed firearms dealers and only 23 McDonald's in Stanislaus County, it's hard to say our Second Amendment rights are under fire. But I'm glad the Madison Society is standing at post. Staying angry will keep them warm on the watch.

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