

Gun-owners group endorses DeLay - Attorney general hopeful has right idea on arms issues, association says

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Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: Northwest Edition (AR) Page: 17 Word Count: 760

A Springfield, Va.-based gun-owners group is endorsing former state Sen. Gunner DeLay, R-Fort Smith, in his bid for attorney general this year, the group's executive director said Friday.

Gun Owners of America has 300,000 members across the nation, including about 1,000 or so in Arkansas, said Larry Pratt, the group's executive director. In 2001, the group endorsed DeLay's unsuccessful bid for the Republican nomination in the 3rd Congressional District. Pratt said his group is soliciting campaign contributions for DeLay through a mailing to its Arkansas members. In endorsing DeLay, Pratt cited DeLay's plans to seek approval for legislation to stop the confiscation of guns during a crisis, such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and to adopt the "castle doctrine." A bill adopting that doctrine would create a presumption that if someone uses deadly force while defending his home or vehicle that he is occupying, then he is justified in using that force, DeLay said. In addition, such legislation would give civil immunity to anyone who uses justifiable force in defense of his person or property, he said. Pratt said the group is familiar with the record of DeLay's "leading potential opponent," Rep. Dustin McDaniel, D-Jonesboro. The other two Democratic candidates for attorney general are Saline County Prosecuting Attorney Robert Herzfeld and North Little Rock City Attorney Paul Suskie. Pratt said his group didn't interview either of those Democratic candidates. "Sometimes, people don't need interviewing," he said. Pratt said McDaniel "is a trial lawyer who has made a career out of savaging the firearms industry and gun ownership in

general."We are definitely hopeful that if he were the nominee, and he seems to be leading the primary right now, that we have somebody strong like Gunner DeLay. There will be a real difference in philosophy and approach to gun owning."McDaniel said the Gun Owners of America "is a fringe organization supporting a fringe candidate, who clearly doesn't have the facts about any part of my record." "The comments about my record as an attorney are complete fabrications," McDaniel said. "I have never filed suit against a gun manufacturer."McDaniel's father, attorney Bobby McDaniel of Jonesboro, filed suit against a gun maker in the wake of the 1998 Jonesboro shootings.The suit named Sporting Goods Properties, formerly Remington Arms Co., because it produced one of the guns used in the shootings. The company was dismissed from the suit in May 2000.The National Rifle Association president at that time criticized the suit as frivolous and compared it to trying to sue a carmaker for making a fast car, according to an NRA news release written at the time.Dustin McDaniel has said the lawsuit was filed when he was in law school. He's also said that he helped with some of the work on the suit, but that his father was the lead attorney.He said Friday that he supported federal legislation last year to limit certain lawsuits against gun manufacturers unless the gun was defective."I feel sure that Gunner knows that, and he should be honest with the people of Arkansas," McDaniel said.DeLay said he assumes that Pratt meant to refer to the Mc-Daniel and Wells law firm in Jonesboro, where Bobby and Dustin McDaniel work."[Dustin] McDaniel is barking up the wrong tree if he's getting upset at me about that," DeLay said.He said Dustin McDaniel's description of the Gun Owners of America as a fringe organization "only shows how out of touch he is with the gun owners of this state."The Gun Owners of America has worked with the National Rifle Association on every major piece of legislation concerning gun owners' rights at the state and federal level, DeLay said.Dustin McDaniel said he would stack his record on gun rights against anyone's.He said he's a gun owner, hunter and a former police officer. He said he has been a member of the National Rifle Association for several years and received its endorsement when he ran for the Legislature.A spokesman for the National Rifle Association said the group hasn't endorsed any candidate for attorney general in Arkansas.Last November, McDaniel announced he had purchased radio advertisements and billboards targeting south Arkansas and what McDaniel described as a population of conservative Democrats that could be up for grabs. Launched to coincide with hunting season, those advertisements emphasized McDaniel's pro-gun credentials.DeLay has said that McDaniel's pro-gun ads were meant to shield him from criticism regarding the lawsuit. But Mc-Daniels said that the ads had nothing to do with the suit.Herzfeld and Suskie also have trumpeted their own support for the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: Northwest Edition (AR)

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Page: 17

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