



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 28, 2011

Gun Rights Group Outbids Austin Guns4Groceries

"Keep Austin Weird," the city motto of the Texas state capital, got a boost Saturday when the city's second annual, no-questions-asked, "Guns4Groceries" campaign attracted a gun rights group which outbid the city for guns in order to put them back into residents' hands.

[Last June](#), the city sponsored its first buyback program as a partnership between the Austin Police Department (APD), the Greater Austin Crime Commission, and the Jastrow Family Foundation — collecting nearly 350 guns. Many of the firearms turned in at both years' events were either broken, inoperable, or obsolete.



By 11 a.m. on Saturday, this year's campaign had bagged 400 guns, and police expected to give away \$40,000 worth of gift cards. After officials check for any stolen weapons among the donations and return them to their owners, most of the guns will be destroyed, though some are tagged for police training use. [Police offered](#) \$100 for handguns and rifles, \$200 for so-called assault weapons, and \$10 for air guns, BB guns, or replicas (yes, even fake guns netted their owners some grocery money), with a limit of two per owner. Dealers were not eligible.

Nearby the event at the Oak Meadow Baptist Church, however, were members of Texans for Accountable Government (TAG), a grassroots organization offering \$110 in cash for handguns and rifles and \$220 for sporting rifles. (The church's pastor said the group wouldn't be allowed on church property during the event.) And instead of disposing of the guns, TAG members will [give them to citizens who want to arm themselves](#). Spokesman John Bush explained:

We don't appreciate these gun grabbing efforts. Firearms in the hands of law abiding citizens makes communities safer. We think that the economically disadvantaged [are] the most susceptible to crime. Those are the people that should arm themselves.

The group's efforts are legal. It won't donate guns to people with criminal records or others who cannot legally buy weapons.

But Austin NAACP President Nelson Linder voiced his support for the APD's program, which he claimed gets guns out of troubled neighborhoods: "This is not the wild wild west. This is 2011 and many people have been killed unfortunately with weapons or [are] irresponsible." He didn't comment on how getting broken or inoperable guns off the street helped troubled neighborhoods.

John Bush countered:

I'd like the NAACP [to] take a lesson from the civil rights movement. From the Black Panther party. They knew that the police officers were not protecting their rights. In fact, they were violating their rights, so they armed themselves."

Before the event, Bush reported that his group had secured \$2,000 to buy back guns.



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The APD issued this statement: "The Austin Police Department supports the right of any group to express their political beliefs or views in a lawful manner."

Andrew Clements, 31, who helped organize TAG's program, showed up with a rifle strapped across his back. "An event like this is a feel-good event. It's the equivalent of turning in your beer to reduce DWI," he declared. Citing the importance of people's Second Amendment rights, however, he added, "any form of disarmament to us is wrong."

APD Chief Art Acevedo claims the Guns4Groceries program is only for people who wish to get rid of unwanted guns in their homes:

If folks don't want to have weapons in their homes, this is an opportunity for them to dispose of their weapons in a safe way. I would hope that [Texans for Accountable Government] would support people exercising their constitutional rights.

[According to its website, Texans for Accountable Government:](#)

is a political action committee ... formed with the ambition of [reining] in the intrusive and expanding reach of government which threatens to invade every facet of our lives. Our ambition is to put the reins of government back into the hands of individual American citizens; allowing us to once again run our own lives. TAG focuses on issues at the local, county, and state level. We believe in the principle of subsidiary; that power should be vested in the nearest locality. Our local representatives are much more accountable to us than are those over a thousand miles away in the District of Columbia. We are dedicated to safeguarding individual liberty, protecting personal privacy and property rights, election integrity, safe water, and electing representatives, not bureaucrats, to office!

TAG has also been instrumental in [Austin's battle against the installation of body scanners](#) and TSA pat-downs at its airport. The City Council's Airport Advisory Commission voted unanimously on Dec. 14 to oppose full-body scanners, and the pressure is on to persuade the council to adopt the recommendation. Other groups in the city are following suit. So far, the Texas capital remains the only city in the country that may soon succeed in outlawing the scanners.

Now Austin is also the scene of putting guns into the hands of citizens instead of taking them away.

Photo: Austin lobbyist Michelle Wittenburg, right, takes aim on a shooting range during a class near Wimberely, Texas, for people seeking a concealed handgun license: AP Images



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