



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 2, 2013

Arkansas Senator Pryor's Troubles Continue to Mount

[In a veiled threat](#) directed at Democratic Senator Mark Pryor of Arkansas (shown), Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in his role as co-founder of the anti-gun group [Mayors Against Illegal Guns](#) (MAIG), said last Thursday that any lawmakers who are "going with the NRA" are "going against the lives of our children." When asked directly if that meant that his group was going to target Pryor, the senior senator from Arkansas, Bloomberg sidestepped a direct answer:



What I have said is that we are going to support those people who want to stop the killing.... And I think you and I both have an obligation to do that.

The way you do that is to make sure that the elected officials understand that you're gonna vote for somebody else.

And we're going to do everything we can to make sure that somebody else gets elected who wants to see that we stop this carnage.

Pryor was one of four Democrats who voted against the background check bill that Bloomberg and his group supported. The others were Max Baucus of Montana, Mark Begich of Alaska, and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota. During a meeting of top-level people in Bloomberg's MAIG, those four [were targeted for retribution](#); however, Heitkamp has just been elected to a six-year term, Begich's seat was considered safe regardless, and Baucus had just announced his intention to retire. That left Pryor as the lone remaining target.

Several strategies were considered at that meeting, according to sources who remained anonymous, including targeting Democrat African Americans in Arkansas with ads complaining that Pryor was opposing the president's "agenda." Other targets considered in MAIG's campaign to punish Pryor were suburban women and other moderates. "Money would not be an object" in that campaign, according to those sources.

The last time MAIG tried to move the political needle through heavy insertions of cash into local political areas was when the outcome over the background checks bill was still in doubt. MAIG poured \$12 million into advertising targeted toward recalcitrant Democrats in an attempt to have them vote for the bill. [At the time](#) Pryor thumbed his nose at Bloomberg and his group, tweeting: "I've gotten a lot of questions about NYC Mayor gun ad. My response? I don't take gun advice from the Mayor of NYC. I listen to Arkansans."

[According to a poll published in March](#), it may be too late. Conservative political action group [Club for Growth](#), following its massive television blitz in January, hired Basswood Research to see how effective



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its message was in exposing Pryor's voting record as a big-spending liberal in lockstep with President Obama. Its announcement was almost ecstatic:

In two months, Senator Pryor has gone from a +28 Favorable/Unfavorable spread among poll respondents to even, a precipitous 28 point drop.

In addition, the number of Arkansans who now view Mark Pryor as a "liberal" has nearly doubled, going from 26% in a January survey to 47% now, a strong plurality of respondents.

Even though the midterm elections are 18 months away, attention is being paid to [freshman Congressman Tom Cotton](#) as a possible candidate to run against Pryor. Attacks by Bloomberg and his MAIG could serve to weaken further Pryor's political creds resulting in, as liberal columnist Max Brantley of the *Arkansas Times* put it, "electing someone who is even worse on guns and just about everything else, most likely the Club for Growth's emissary to Arkansas, Tom Cotton."

Cotton is a clean cut young man (he'll turn 36 this month) with a moderate voting record (considering that he has a law degree from Harvard). He served with the 101st Airborne Division as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and in Operation Enduring Freedom as an operations officer. Instead of returning to the practice of law, he decided to work on his family's cattle farm.

The *Washington Post* [called Cotton a "conservative darling"](#) despite his [middle-of-the-road voting record](#) and his recent support of the dangerous Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA). [On gun issues](#), the NRA rates Cotton at 92 percent while the stricter Gun Owners of America puts him at 83 percent.

[When the next Freedom Index is published in June](#), Cotton's record is likely to match those of the other members of the Arkansas House delegation, with Representatives Rick Crawford, Tim Griffin, and Steve Womack each logging in with ratings of just 65 out of 100. Nevertheless, it will likely show an improvement over the record of the man Cotton replaced, Democrat Mike Ross (FI 44).

At the moment, even though Cotton refuses to comment publicly on any decision he might have made about running against Pryor, Basswood Research, the same firm that showed Pryor's ratings dropping, announced that Cotton leads Pryor in a race for the Senate in 2014, 43 percent to 35 percent.

If Bloomberg and his Mayors Against Illegal Guns move ahead with their planned punishment of Pryor by attacking his vote against background checks, such a tactic may just backfire, giving impetus to Cotton (or another like him) to replace him next November. And even if Bloomberg and his group don't punish Pryor, the voting record of Arkansas members of Congress is very likely going to improve. At present, Pryor's Freedom Index sits at just 17 out of 100.

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