

Holstering a Career: Wayne LaPierre Resigns from the National Rifle Association (NRA) of America Executive

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Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The now departed chief executive of the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) should know. Wayne LaPierre's time had come to resemble a dictatorship in a hurry, pinching the silver and stomping on the dissenters on its way out. Allegations were already being made at the NRA's annual meeting in Indianapolis in 2019, many barbed with the question as to where money from donors was actually going.

There were, for instance, LaPierre's said suit purchases from the Zegna store in Beverly Hills between 2004 and 2017 amounting to a head shaking \$274,695.03, for which Ackerman McQueen, the NRA's former PR firm, [was billed for](#). The NRA also reimbursed LaPierre for gifts sent to the organisation's vendors, donors and special recipients, far exceeding federal tax limits.

The NRA's 2019 tax filing disclosed that the body's executives (former and current) had received somewhere up to \$1.4 million in violation of non-profit regulations. The 2020 tax filing revealed a continuing trend. That year, LaPierre [received](#) 1.7 million in compensation, including a \$455,000 bonus.

Things have been messy at the world's most famous gun lobby charity for some time. The New York Attorney General Letitia James has busied herself with pursuing LaPierre and various top-placed individuals in the organisation on grounds of corruption. A [lawsuit](#)

[stretching back](#) to August 2020 seeking the NRA's dissolution asserts that millions of dollars funded a whole slew of personal benefits, including private jet travel, exorbitantly priced meals and family trips to the Bahamas. In doing so, it alleged that the NRA's funds were mismanaged, a number of state and federal laws breached, including the body's own bylaws and policies, and some \$64 million lost over the course of three years.

With mulish determination, the NRA fought back, attempting, [without success](#), to dismiss the complaint or change the court venue from Manhattan to more convivial surroundings in Albany. Daringly, it even tried to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in a federal bankruptcy court in Texas, hoping to reconstitute the body in that state. In May 2021, the court [dismissed the claims](#), finding "that the NRA did not file the bankruptcy petition in good faith."

In March 2022, LaPierre and the NRA Corporate Secretary and General Counsel John Frazer, ran the second act in trying to dismiss the lawsuit. Inventively, arguments about constitutionality and jurisdiction were advanced. Justice Joel Cohen of the New York County State Supreme Court was unimpressed, though accepted the NRA's arguments against its dissolution by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). But in June 2022, Justice Cohen [rejected claims](#) by the organisation that "the Attorney General's investigation was unconstitutionally retaliatory or selective." The AG's investigation had been instigated following "reports of serious misconduct and it uncovered additional evidence that, at a bare minimum, undermines any suggestion that was a mere pretext to penalize the NRA for its constitutionally protected activities."

Two further assaults on the AG's case were mounted, one in September 2022, which found that James [could appoint an independent monitor](#) to oversee the NRA's accounts as part of the lawsuit, and a last ditch effort in January this year, which was swatted by the New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Division, First Department. The trial date of January 8 was secure.

A few days before the trial's opening, a \$100,000 settlement between the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and Joshua Powell, the body's former Executive Director of Operations and Chief of Staff, [left James crowing](#). "Joshua Powell's admission of wrongdoing and Wayne LaPierre's resignation confirm what we have alleged for years: the NRA and its senior leaders are financially corrupt."

In the opening stages of the civil trial, Monica Connell, New York's Assistant Attorney-General, [explained](#) to a six-member jury that, "The NRA allowed Wayne LaPierre and his group of insiders ... to operate the NRA as 'Wayne's World' for decades." (Connell could have surely done better than refer to the Mike Myers-Dana Carvey comedy dating from 1992.)

Connell went on to describe tyrant overlords turned kleptomaniacs. "This case is about corruption in a charity. It's about breaches of trust, it's about power. People taking their hard-earned money and donate it to charities they believe in. It doesn't matter what the cause is. They should be able to trust that the hard-earned money they donate is going to advance the mission of that charity."

Where, when, for the NRA? For decades, it has fetishised, moralised, and upheld the purest virtues of carrying heavy weaponry in civilian life. To be sovereign is to be armed; any laws

regulating the use of weapons best reserved for the military is an affront to the Second Amendment's constitutional decency and the rugged principles of Frontier Man and Woman. Massacres at nightclubs, schools and universities were simply the product of ill minds, not the ease with which one could get a weapon. Better still, give everyone a weapon. Even now, the departing LaPierre [declares](#) that "the NRA's mission, programming, and fight for freedom have never been more secure."

That said, financial probity and a good nose for accounts matter. To that end, there is something richly fitting, if ironic, that economics and a concern about the use of finances should be the telling factor in the fall of numbers in the NRA. Gun-control lobbies and regulators may scream themselves hoarse about stalled reforms, but they could have hardly hoped for better news than that [reported](#) by Stephen Gutowski in February last year.

At the time, LaPierre told attendees of the NRA's most recent board meeting that the organisation had shrunk to 4.3 million numbers. Such a membership still seems impressive, till you realise that the fall in numbers approximates to about one million subscribers since the tide of corruption began battering the organisation. Between 2021 and 2022, [revenue fell](#) by almost \$24 million, or 11 percent. But expenses ballooned by 5.5 percent, or \$11.5 million.

The carefully chosen, if typically anodyne words in a presentation prepared for the group's finance committee in January 2023 [noted](#) that "Membership/Contribution performance has continued to experience softness through 2022." James, through her office, is ensuring the experience is also going to be a hard one.

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