

Pennington distances self from militia

He vows never to go to another meeting of militia, whose members supported him last fall

By JOHN K. WILEY
The Associated Press

SPOKANE — Some politician who carried the votes of right-wing, pro-gun groups during the November election are distancing themselves now.

State Rep. John Pennington, R-Battle Ground, repudiated his ties with the U.S. Militia Association after its Cowlitz County leader was quoted as saying the government "asked for" the Oklahoma City bombing that killed more than 100 people April 19.

"I disassociate myself from them," Pennington told the Longview Daily News on Wednesday. "I'm never going to another one of their meetings."

Pennington said Friday he is not a member of the militia, whose members supported him last fall because of his pro-gun views.

He said he was aware that Cowlitz County Republican precinct chairman Art Vinson was

head of the militia group formed last fall.

"I didn't seek them out, they approached me," Pennington said. "My Second Amendment stance had long been established in this community. One or two of them doorbelled for me."

Vinson actively campaigned for Pennington, who ousted Democratic incumbent Jim Springer last fall. The precinct chairman also endorsed Pennington and other candidates on his community-access television program.

But Pennington severed the connection after Vinson's remark.

He said he attended one of the militia group's meetings "to find out what they were about ... where they stood on the Second Amendment. They're very respected in the community."

Gun control issue

Gun control became a major issue in November's elections.

Former House Speaker Tom Foley took to a rifle range to establish his credentials as a Second Amendment supporter and National Rifle Association member in his unsuccessful bid for re-election.

"They're getting more involved in politics," Okanogan County Sher-



Rep. John Pennington, R-Battle Ground, right, speaking recently on the House floor, is disassociating himself from a Cowlitz County militia group. He was not a member, he said.

iff Jim Weed said of right-wing groups. "And there are politicians who owe their jobs to them."

Weed said gun control was the key issue in his election bid.

"I run a \$3.5 million business out of nine separate county budgets. But in all the candidate forums and media interviews, there was not one question about that," Weed said.

"But at every single forum, people asked, 'where do you stand on gun control and will you seize our

guns if the federal government comes in and says that you should do it?'"

In conservative Idaho, top state politicians who earlier spoke at U.S. Militia Association meetings denied after the Oklahoma bombing they actively supported the group.

Remarks by Idaho U.S. Rep. Helen Chenoweth are featured on an hour-long videotape sold by the Militia of Montana.

Typically, militia types have lit-

tle use for politicians, whom they see as failing to preserve the Constitution and participating in a conspiracy to deliver the country to its enemies.

Samuel Sherwood, who heads the Blackfoot, Idaho-based U.S. Militia Association, advised members: "Go up and look legislators in the face because, some day, you may be forced to blow it off."

Sherwood initially stood by the remark, but later denied making it.



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