

# Bennington Banner

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## Firearm advocate plans rallies

BY JIM THERRIEN  
*Bennington Banner*

**BENNINGTON** — A display of patriotism during gun rights rally advocate Kevin Hoyt's planned "Patriots Day" rally on April 27 at the Four Corners intersection could pay off with a voucher to purchase a firearm.

Hoyt, the principal organizer of two downtown Bennington rallies last year after enactment of new Vermont gun control legislation, said he also plans an 11-town event Aug. 17 that likewise will feature the awarding of vouchers to purchase firearms.

The former Republican candidate for a House seat from the Bennington 2-1 district, added that he "absolutely" is planning another run for the Legislature in 2020.

### Rallies

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The pending rallies, Hoyt said, are not solely to demonstrate against the 24-hour gun purchase waiting period that is close to passage this session, but are "an opportunity to protest a lot of things people are not happy about, things people are fed up with ... The average person feels stifled."

Hoyt listed tax increases, changes in the education system, high crime rates and the opioid crisis as among issues creating mounting frustration.

"These are all common sense issues," he said, and he believes liberals as well as conservative gun rights supporters might attend.

The event, Hoyt said, will primarily be "a peaceful, pro-firearm assembly, rally and protest and demonstration against policies that create higher crime rates, 'gun control' and any 'infringement' on our firearm freedoms."

The two rallies also are a chance to get "our political message to legislators," he said, and to provide "a show of numbers and to use our voices as citizens to say enough and we will not comply with any further breach of our rights and freedoms."

### FUND RAISING

Hoyt said the April 27 rally will take place from noon to 4 p.m. at the Four Corners, where two anti-gun control events were held in April and August 2018.

The August rally and voter registration event also featured raffle drawings for two firearms, both of which were later purchased after background checks through a local arms dealer.

This year, Hoyt said the number of guns to be given away will depend on the amount of money raised through GoFundMe campaigns he has launched through his .... As of Friday, he said about \$400 had been raised and his outside goal is to raise \$10,000.

In Bennington and the 10 other communities where Hoyt said he will raise fund-



Kevin Hoyt, left, stands at the Bennington Four Corners during a gun rights rally in April 2018. He is planning similar rallies here this month and statewide in August.

BANNER FILE PHOTO

ing, the number of guns to be given away will depend on how much is raised in each community — with 90 percent going to purchase firearms and the remainder for GoFundMe fees or to his nonprofit The Future of Hunting youth programs.

Hoyt said he and others are planning a Green Mountain Freedom Day Aug. 17 in Bennington, Rutland, Middlebury, Burlington, St. Albans, Newport, St. Johnsbury, Montpelier, White River Junction, Springfield, and Brattleboro.

The gun vouchers will be awarded, he said, based on a person's demonstration of patriotism. What that constitutes will be determined based on a person's wardrobe, military or service uniform, "signage, flags or enthusiasm," Hoyt said.

The judging, he said, will be done by a team from his Future of Hunting Conservation program and by randomly chosen participants at each rally location.

Hoyt is a local hunting sports cable TV show host, hunting guide and video producer.

In April 2018, shortly after Gov. Phil Scott signed a bill that tightened the state's gun control laws, a rally drew more than 300 demonstrators to the Four Corners in Bennington, while other rallies were held in several other Vermont communities.

Hoyt scheduled a second

rally in August 2018, which he expected would draw about 1,000 participants, but the totals were under 100 for most of the four-hour event.

At that rally and voter registration drive, vouchers for the purchase at a local gun store of an AR-15 Del-Ton carbine and an AR-10 Diamondback 308 were given to registered voters from the area who attended, with the names of winners drawn through a raffle process.

Prior to the second event, questions were raised about the legality of the gun giveaway process, but after a review by the Attorney General's office and by local police found no violations.

Security concerns also were raised because of the expected size of the crowd, and police presence in the downtown was beefed up during the event. But no significant incidents were reported with the lower than expected attendance.

Town Manager Stuart Hurd said Friday that Hoyt is familiar with the legal requirements for an event and apparently has the necessary permits for the April 27 rally.

Hoyt, the only Republican seeking one of two Bennington 2-1 House seats, lost in the November election to incumbent Rep. Timothy Corcoran II, D-Bennington, and Democrat Chris Bates. Next year, Hoyt said he is considering a run for the state Senate rather than the House.