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GUN VIOLENCE: SCRAP ALL THE “FEEL-GOOD” SOLUTIONS!

By Stephen L. Bakke
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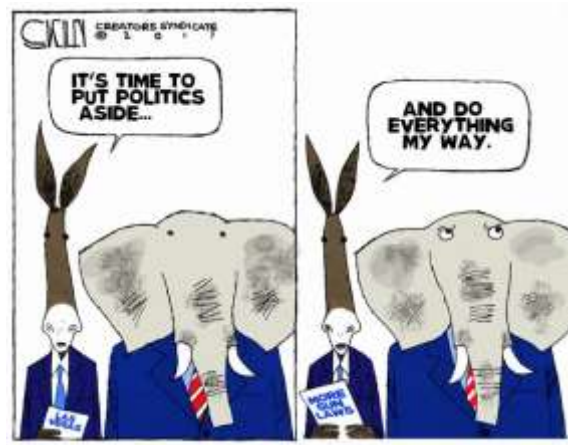


There is too much violence in America – gun violence in particular. The mass murders in Las Vegas brought the gun control debate to renewed prominence. There are between 12,000 and 13,000 gun deaths from homicide and accidents each year in the U.S. That's tragic! How can we reduce those numbers?

I'm neither a gun enthusiast and passionate second amendment supporter, nor a frantic gun control crusader. I own no firearms. This commentary reflects some of my preparation for listening to and evaluating the inevitable debate in Congress.

This discussion must start with the Constitution's Second Amendment which reads: *"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."* Here are some of my recent notes and observations:

- Embedded in all of what the Founders said and wrote about the right to bear arms, there seems to be a presumption of order and competence, achieved through rules, regulations, and limited controls – i.e. gun control of some kind isn't contrary to the Founders' intentions.
- The Founders were reacting primarily to the threat of British tyranny and its intention to disarm the American Colonies. They were also sensitive to the need for general self-defense.
- Modern societies have NOT eliminated the threat of tyranny. In fact, while tyranny by force is still a reality, the situation has been complicated by other types of oppression including intimidation, manipulation, demagoguery and misinformation.
- Considering the radical goals expressed by some gun control zealots, "paranoia" and over-reaction by gun enthusiasts isn't surprising.



- The Second Amendment is one of those “unalienable” rights which were “endowed by our creator.” Any attempt to eliminate that right would cause a tragic Constitutional war.
- We have a penchant for reacting only with emotion to horrific events like the Las Vegas massacre. This can lead to impetuous decisions and ultimately foolish legislation. We just wring our hands and say “something’s better than nothing!” Then we jump into the middle of a new policy without much thought.

Here are some considerations that would provide balance to the debate:

- Legislators should be aware that per capita deaths by firearms is about 30% lower in recent years compared to the period 1970 through 1995. And according to the American Enterprise Institute, from 1994 through 2014, gun ownership increased by 50%, and homicides decreased by 50%. Similarly, according to Pew Research, from 2004 to 2015, violent crime decreased by 50%. Those facts are probably a surprise to many.
- Gun controls exist and legislators should first take inventory of what they are. Then let’s have a deliberate evaluation of their relative effectiveness in terms of how they actually prevent deaths. If cause and effect can’t be determined or predicted, there probably isn’t any such relationship.
- Legislators should be careful with partial facts, and must remember, “cause and effect” relationships are sometimes impossibly evasive and the truth can be unexpected. Attack this problem with wisdom, not emotion. If availability of guns is claimed to be the problem, demand all the evidence? How much of the problem is mental illness? Is it an economic issue and/or a cultural issue? Are technical and safety training elements of a solution? And so on.
- All should remember that a perfect solution doesn’t exist.



We must not jump to emotional, knee-jerk, feel good attempts at solutions. We don’t need an emotional sedative. We need results. Let’s move in the direction of true public safety. Otherwise scrap those feel good proposals and move on to other ideas. We must not sacrifice valuable time and resources implementing ineffective policies.