

Our beleaguered Second Amendment

The recent massacre of innocent children in Newtown, Connecticut got me to thinking about the Second Amendment to the Constitution and the controversy that swirls around it. It is probably fair to say that this amendment is the most contentious among the 27 in that great document, though there have been instances where acts of violence have occurred after citizens have exercised their First Amendment rights, among others.

“The right to keep and bear arms” means different things to different people, but the innocent victims of crimes committed with guns haven’t the luxury of parsing that amendment. They are the tragic reminder that the criminal and the mentally disturbed in our society have both the means and the opportunity to break the sacred covenant of peaceful coexistence that the framers of the Constitution wanted for us.

Each generation of Americans wrestles with the evil that is inherent in human beings, trying to understand what motivates people to take another person’s life, especially the lives of children. For all our introspection, however, it hasn’t brought us much clarity. Maybe the only conclusion we can draw is that evil exists and mental illness exists, and when these factors come together we’re all in peril, especially when any weapon can be obtained by these people.

So, knowing we cannot eliminate evil or are seemingly powerless to seriously treat the disturbed in our society we cast about, trying to do something, anything that will give us some consolation and maybe close the circle of grief. This time we’re focusing on a new ‘gun bill’ that will shortly be introduced by California Senator Diane Feinstein that will focus on limiting the *tools* that the perpetrators use to commit their heinous crimes.

It would seem obvious, that by eliminating the spread of high-powered multiple-round capable semi-automatic weapons that we will stop crimes committed with those weapons, and while I commend Senator Feinstein or any person who is passionate about saving lives, I do not believe that her bill will work. There are just too many of that particular type of weapon in circulation already (millions to be exact). Her bill would probably stop the further spread of those weapons, but it will do absolutely nothing to cure the mental illness that plagues far too many Americans who would use them or any weapon to wreak havoc on the rest of us.

We must be realistic about our gun laws. With over 300 million weapons currently in the hands of Americans (most law-abiding) we must do a better job in the screening process and on other fronts. Here are a few areas we might focus on first knowing that the confiscation of guns is illegal or impossible to affect.

Suggestion #1: Tighten up the licensing process as it refers to background checks. Each state must have a foolproof means of eliminating persons with mental illness, illegal aliens, underage buyers or felons from getting a license to purchase a firearm, period.

Suggestion #2: Make Federal Firearm License holders (dealers) the first line of defense in insuring gun safety by requiring that first-time gun purchasers who qualify to buy a gun take a short on-site gun safety course and then have the Federal Government pay the dealers to administer it.

Suggestion #3: Allow purchasers of gun safes, gun locks and those who choose to de-commission firearms to get a federal income tax deduction (their choice to take it or not) for purchasing or de-commissioning them.

Suggestion #4: Require background checks of gun purchases at bona fide gun shows. If the seller is not a FFL holder then the seller and purchaser must go to a seller at the show who does have one to do the background check for them (a token reimbursement for that service should be given the FFL holder by the prospective seller and purchaser).

Suggestion #5: Encourage all states to issue certificates of reciprocity to other states for concealed carry permit holders.

Suggestion #6: Bring outlying states like Illinois and New York and the District of Colombia into compliance with other states' regulations for gun ownership. It is simply not right to disadvantage law-abiding citizens in those states in favor of the criminals.

Suggestion #7: Encourage all schools to hire professional armed security guards or police officers to guard their students or allow specific school personnel to carry a concealed weapon (the criteria for this would be up to the individual school district). Strengthen other security procedures as well such as CCTV.

Suggestion #8: Offer a yearly free firearm safety course to those persons already in possession of a firearm. Proceeds for these costs would come from the individual states' budgets, perhaps from the fees charged concealed carry permit holders or with voluntary financial support from gun manufacturers and gun dealers.

Suggestion #9: Develop a Federal public awareness program about firearms and firearm safety.

Suggestion #10: Encourage gun-owner groups like the NRA to support the above-mentioned suggestions.

Finally, our mental healthcare professionals must be given more resources to help identify, early on and on a continuing basis, those among us whose mental or emotional state puts them and the rest of us at risk should they gain access to a firearm. Gun safety and responsible gun use is just as important to our communities as the regulation and safe operation of a motor vehicle and should be treated with the same level of seriousness.

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