

In the month that has passed since the tragic shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, the topic of gun violence in America has come up again for public discussion. This has happened before in the wake of tragedies like the mass shootings at Columbine, Aurora, and Virginia Tech. Typically, the outcome amounts to little more than emotional statements about how "something must be done" until the next news cycle serves up another topic to distract the public and our politicians from this critical problem, and the topic falls off our collective radar. Until the next shooting, of course. And the next, and the next after that. This time, however, it is different. It must be different. If not, we disgrace the memory and all-too-brief lives of those 20 innocent children and the 6 selfless adults who died at Sandy Hook Elementary. We also make a disturbing statement to all of our children, and to the world as a whole, that we value guns and the rights of a vocal minority of gun owners over the lives of our own citizens. This cannot be allowed to happen, and as an elected representative of all the people, it is contingent upon you and all who govern with you to ensure that profound steps be taken to stop this uniquely American problem.

I do not pretend that this is a simple problem, nor do I dismiss that it goes beyond guns themselves and encompasses how we address the needs of the mentally ill, but there is one simple reality that cannot be argued: military-grade automatic weapons like assault rifles, high-capacity magazines that can continuously fire up to 30 rounds, and ammunition designed to inflict the maximum possible damage have no place in the hands of private citizens. They must be banned from production and sale, and a comprehensive national plan for the retrieval of these weapons, magazines, and ammunition from their current owners must be undertaken. "Grandfathering" ownership of these weapons is unacceptable and dangerous. I urge you to publicly and vocally support this policy. As a father of three young children, this is my central public policy focus right now. I will be watching its progress closely, as well as watching for action, or lack thereof, by those in office.

The gun lobby and gun supporters have already been actively campaigning against this renewed discussion of guns and gun violence. Our politicians on all levels have historically bowed to this powerful and monied interest group every time. But there was a time when the same was true of the tobacco industry...when no one would tackle the reality that this product was killing people because of intimidation and influence by the tobacco lobby. It took years, but that changed. Are cigarettes off the market? No, but they are regulated and taxed to limit their availability. Where people can and cannot smoke has been severely limited. People have been educated and made aware of their true dangers, changing public perception and resulting in a new generation that is far less attracted to them. And the tobacco lobby, once so influential and powerful, is toothless. We have done this already with cigarettes, with drunk driving, with automobile safety regulations. It worked. And we must do it again.

I do not expect or even advocate that we impose universal gun control for all citizens and all types of guns. It's unrealistic, and although I believe the second amendment's intent was not for every citizen to have many guns as they wanted, I concede that many believe that a gun is a part of their rights to self defense, or their pursuits as hunters. But no citizen needs an assault rifle to protect from a home burglary, no hunter needs a high-capacity magazine to take down a deer, and there is absolutely no use for maximum-damage ammunition except to kill other people with ruthless efficiency.

I urge you to act on behalf of me and the great number of like-minded citizens on this subject. The youngest of my three children is months away from entering kindergarten. It's bad enough that parents have the challenge of a failing school system to contend with. Do we now need to wonder, once the school bus pulls away each day, if our children will return to us alive and unharmed? It is time for a fundamental cultural shift in this country. We once accepted slavery, and many were vehemently

opposed to its abolition. It was a difficult change, but we changed. We once thought segregation based on race and discrimination against women were acceptable, and we learned to do better and become a better society. We, as a people, must and absolutely can learn and grow beyond the accepted norms. We need our elected officials to be a part of that change. Reactionary and false cries of government tyranny by gun lobbyists cannot be allowed to drown out the voices of reason, and cowardice and inaction on the part of our elected officials cannot be tolerated as a response to that kind of propaganda.

Legislation and policy efforts are under way now both locally and nationally, and this is not the time to accept unacceptable compromises for political self-interest. Do not allow the grandfathering of existing assault weapon permits. End their sale and implement a plan to retrieve them from private owners. Demand a ban on high-capacity magazines and armor-piercing and other high-damage ammunition. Insist on a universal background checks, and a national registry of gun owners, and make this apply to private sales, gun shows, and every other means of gun sales in this country. As your constituent, I need to know where you stand on this issue, and what actions you intend to take.

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