

My name is Mike Mitri. I'm from Fairfield, and I'm 51 years old. My wife Karen and I have 3 children, ages 20, 17 and 15, that have gone through the town's public school system. I would describe myself as a fiscal conservative and a social moderate. I try to vote as I try to act – rationally, responsibly, deliberately. I support government leaders that share my core values, and core American values, as much as possible.

Still, until the Columbine High School massacre in the late 1990s I pretty much voted Republican across the slate in most elections. Of course, I had disagreements with certain positions that certain GOP candidates espoused, but almost never enough to swing my vote the other way. Until Columbine. That terrible tragedy, and the NRA's callous, spine-chilling, logic-numbing actions in its immediate aftermath, floored me. I was in disbelief, especially as I learned more about these weapons that were in our society by the millions.

Guns that not only could fire dozens of rounds per minute, but that had long magazines that held lots of bullets, and the bullets themselves, each one, could put an enormous hole in a person. How could this be so? How could the government have allowed this to happen? Who could possibly have thought it a good idea to permit massive numbers of weapons of slaughter in an open, vulnerable society?

I'm not here to quote statistics. We've all seen them a bit ad nauseam at this point. The number of guns, the number of shootings, the gross disparity when compared to every single other industrial – "civilized" – nation in the world. We are an embarrassment of murder and destruction. We tolerate the inconceivable, again and again. We soon after look away when a shooting tragedy occurs, praying that our town isn't next, while the NRA fortifies its positions and jerks hard on the leashes of the elected officials that they control. We have laws on the books that permit easy and widespread access to instruments of slaughter - they fire fast, they fire long, and they destroy what they hit. It is, in a word, crazy. No, statistics only tell the cold truth of the story. I'm writing to tell you all the truth closer to home - and that is that I feel failed. That despite my best efforts as a parent and as a person, I cannot keep my children or my neighbor's children safe. It harkens back to a couple of decades ago when it finally became apparent and indisputable that cigarettes were killing us in great numbers, killing not just the smokers but those around them as well. The government found its conscience and supported the stigmatization of the useless and dangerous smoking industry. It pushed back hard against the great tobacco lobby, and this country, as well as its citizens, is all the better for it. The parallels could not be more clear. The lessons learned then are that much easier to apply now.

The upshot is this. I will never again vote for a political candidate, GOP or otherwise, that is in any way aligned with or supported by the NRA until real action is taken to remove these killing machines from society. The legislation presently before you is a reasonable first step - limiting sales, shortening magazines, fortifying background checks, punishing violators, etc. It is not possible to pose a rational objection to it. But in the end I don't want these weapons in society, period. Ban not just their sale and their high-capacity clips and their head-exploding bullets - ban their very presence. They serve no purpose, and they have no place, in a society that truly values life. There are still plenty of weapons available for hunting and self-defense, plenty of means by which to satisfy the protections of the Second Amendment. And then, after these weapons are banned, severely punish offenders. And banish the criminals that use such weapons to commit crimes. Restore sanity, please, and at least allow us to once again find modest comfort in the relative safety of a more rational society. There will still be millions of guns out there, and we will still have by far the most murderous and violent nation in the free world. But maybe, just maybe, the gruesome killing sprees will come to an end. A government that truly values life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness makes these difficult decisions when it must. The time to act is now.

New Town. New State. New Country. Now. Our very future is at stake.

My name is Mike Mitri. I vote. And there are lots and lots of guys like me.