

Dear Representatives,

On Monday January 28<sup>th</sup> you are holding a public hearing about gun violence prevention. This is an important issue that certainly deserves all our attention and input if we are to have any chance of making a difference. But while I agree with the goals of this hearing I am worried the focus has become extremely misguided in this time of high emotions.

With freedom comes consequences and tragedy at times. But it also brings more joy to the life of the citizens of this country than anything else. We are free to drive our own automobile, even though automobile accident deaths far exceed all firearm related deaths (the majority being suicide). In fact, gun homicides and alcohol related automobile deaths are around the same numbers. We are free to eat what we want despite heart disease being one of the leading causes of death. We are free to drink alcohol even though liver disease can kill us. We have the freedom to make our own choices despite the fact that some people will abuse that right. Every freedom we enjoy has and will be abused by someone else. But we don't take those freedoms away because of that.

Your attention seems to be focused on banning certain firearms that have incorrectly been labeled as "assault weapons". These "assault weapons" consist mainly of rifles such as the AR 15 or AK. According to FBI crime statistics all rifles account for only a few hundred homicides each year. In fact knives and personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.) account for higher numbers of homicides each year than rifles.

Most of the guns you wish to ban also shoot a much smaller and less powerful cartridge than the hunting rifles that will not be banned. These guns you wish to ban do not shoot larger caliber bullets, fire at a faster rate, or cause more damage than any of the standard hunting rifles that will remain for sale. So why is everyone focused on certain firearms that have conveniently but improperly been defined as an assault weapon? It's simply because of the way they look. They are an easy visual prop to use to gain support from people who couldn't even tell you how to use a gun and would never want to. These firearms you wish to ban may look scary to the uninformed, but we will educate people that these are no different than any other firearm remaining in the market after the ban. We will make it clear to the constituents of this state that this ban was simply an effort to take the first big step into eroding our rights.

Other proposed legislation such as an ammunition tax and liability insurance will only burden law abiding sport shooters. Ammunition is expensive enough already but adding an astronomical tax will just make it impossible for sport shooters to continue the sport without going broke. We do not all shoot at the range only. Anyone who has the intent to go on one mass shooting rampage will not be concerned about the one-time tax they pay on the

ammunition nor will liability insurance matter if the weapons are illegally obtained as they most often are. Banning online ammunition sales again only hurts those of us who shoot thousands of rounds for sport. Certain types of ammunition such as for an old revolver can be impossible to find in a local store since they are no longer used in modern firearms. I can only find these rare caliber rounds online so eliminating that would render my classic revolver useless.

All of us, whether a gun owner or not, felt great pain over what happened in Newtown and never wish to see an incident like this again. Unfortunately it would seem that many of your personal preferences on guns and the second amendment have clouded your vision on the goal.

If you truly want to save lives in this state and the country our main focus should be on mental illness, especially among our children. If you look at the number of firearm deaths each year the large majority of them are self-inflicted suicides. According to the CDC the tenth leading cause of death in the US in 2010 was suicide which was just under 40,000 people. The mass shootings such as Sandy Hook were perpetrated by young men with a mental issue.

I hope you consider that by focusing on mental health we have the potential to save the lives of tens of thousands of Americans each year. If you ban a few types of weapons just because they look scary or tax ammunition sales you will not save a single life in the process.

You have the ability to do the right thing and be known as legislators who helped truly reduce deaths by large numbers while not infringing on the unalienable rights of your constituents. You can lead on this issue and show other states how we can truly make a difference. There are tens of millions of law-abiding, responsible gun owners who are counting on you to do the right thing here.

Thank you and I look forward to speaking to you in person at the hearing.

Regards,

Steven Ford