

Gun Violence Task Force:

I am not for criminals, or those that are unstable, owning guns. I think there could be some debate as to how to check for mental illness and fix any inaccuracies in the background check process, but I am not for any more laws keeping law abiding, tax paying voters from being able to own what they want in order to defend themselves and their families. I am not a fan of the current assault weapons ban we have in Connecticut. I would like to address the defense of my stance from a standpoint of facts, criminal case study, and the practicality of self-defense.

This is a serious matter that needs serious thought, debate and dissection of facts to make a difference. That being said, this whole process is being rushed along with no regard to the investigation of what happened in Newtown. It only came out recently that Mrs. Lanza kept her closet where the guns were stored open, giving her son the access he needed. Regardless of what part that may play in this matter, facts are still being uncovered. Lets not jump to conclusions and enact legislation before we have all the facts, because facts are what this should be based on.

The idea that gun laws will do anything to fix the problem is incredibly far reaching. For example, look at the reaction to the new NY law, where police are also subject to the new restriction on magazine capacity. Newspapers are now reporting that officials are working on changing that part of the law so the police won't be out-gunned by criminals. That is very telling. That means they understand that criminals don't obey laws and will still find and use large capacity magazines. So, the police can have them...the criminals will certainly have them, but the real first responders (the victims) can't.

Another example of the ineffectiveness of bureaucracy can be seen during the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban period, which lasted from 1994-2004. During this time both the Bank of America Shootout and Columbine shootings occurred. The BOA shootout was executed with illegal automatic weapons, which had been outlawed since the 1934 National Firearms Act. The criminal ignored the laws. Columbine was executed with a 1994 Assault Weapons Ban compliant gun. The 10 rounds magazines, legal to own, did not stop the tragedy or limit it's scope. This shows no matter what the laws, criminals intent on hurting others will find a way to do so.

An important question we must ask ourselves is where we should focus our efforts in order to reduce crime. A very interesting statistic that does not get any exposure is that the violent crime rate (as reported by the FBI crime report) is now half of what it was in 1990, and the CT Summary Statistics follows the national model. In 2011, 10 people were killed by some manner of unarmed fighting as opposed to 1 person killed with a rifle. The witch-hunt against rifles is demonizing the tool used and does not focus on the real perpetrator, the user of the tool.

Yet another concerning issue is while the public has begun to take sides in the gun debate, most people remain ignorant of the facts involved with the basic operation of a gun, let alone the "assault weapon" in question. They blindly accept the explanation from a member of congress with the same ignorance. Before deciding what actions should be taken, here are some facts that everyone should understand about the five cosmetic features of a rifle that are considered deadly by those proposing a ban:

- Some think that a flash-hider on a rifle makes the user invisible, allowing them to elude capture while using the gun in a malicious way. In reality, when a flash hider is used the flash can still be seen by others, its only purpose is to prevent the flash from obstructing the users vision.
- A collapsible stock, one of the featured under review for potential restrictions, helps people of a smaller stature, such as women, able to properly shoulder the weapon.
- The pistol grip is for comfortably holding the weapon. The same concept is used on spray bottles.
- A removable magazine allows more than quick arming of a gun, it also allows responsible owners to easily disarm their weapon. This also means the pieces can be stored separately for safety, and the user can more safely disarm a weapon when it is not in use. As for their capacity, limiting the number of bullets held therein will do nothing to deter an assailant as we saw in Columbine. He just brought more magazines.
- The bayonet lug is a piece of metal would that could have a blade attached to it. Focusing on this is ridiculous, as the idea of adding a cutting implement seems to be of more concern than the projectile weapon to which it is attached. Others claim that people could attach a grenade launcher to the bayonet lug, which is also preposterous since grenades are illegal for all US civilians to own.
- A barrel shroud is also mentioned from time to time. Those uninitiated may just take it on faith that this item is bad and allow that to be on the list as well. Barrels get dangerously hot when the gun is shot, and these shrouds shield the users supporting hand from being burned. It's there for safety.

Legislators and talking heads on the news also use inflammatory terms like "military style", "hi-powered rifle", and "assault rifle/weapon".

- "Military style" means that a weapon looks like a military version. The civilian AR-15 is different in that it's not a select fire, or automatic fire weapon. It is semi-automatic. This is how most, if not all, pistols work. Pull the trigger once, one bullet comes out. All other similarities to military weapons are cosmetic, not mechanical.
- "Hi-powered" actually is accurate, although the term is used to incite a negative reaction. A rifle is meant for close, all the way to long distance. So, the bullet needs to be high powered to make that journey. Pistol rounds are underpowered by comparison as they need only go from short to medium distances.
- "Assault rifle" is a term coined by the media in the past twenty years and focuses on the illegal use of rifles. Considering that it's main civilian use is in defense, it's more aptly named a "defense rifle/weapon". The use of the rifle (assault vs. defense) has no bearing on the operation/mechanics of the rifle. It's just a rifle.

Finally, there are those who question why civilians need rifles. Those who ask this question are typically not people concerned with self-defense, let alone the second amendment. For responsible, well trained rifle owners, the fact that these weapons are frightening is a positive thing. A home invader should be very afraid of this rifle, or any gun. The fact that they are powerful and comfortable to use is positive, because during a stressful situation where someone is forced to use it, they will be effective. We don't know when evil acts will happen or the number of attackers there may be. We don't know if they will try to overpower us with physical strength or with a firearm. We don't know how desperate they will be, for what reason they come, or what substances they'll be abusing. What we do know is that by default, victims are the first on the scene. They are the first responders. It is impossible for police to be able to immediately respond to an emergency call. In the case of the Sandy Hook tragedy, CNN reported that from the first emergency call received by dispatch, it took police 20 minutes to respond. In an emergency situation, 20 minutes is a long time to wait for help without any resource, when seconds are what counts. Responsible gun owners should retain the ability to defend themselves and their families during this time, with a rifle if they chose, instead of being forced to be victims.

Thank you for listening to my concerns.

Tad Sterling – Norwalk CT