

Let's Get Real on Gun Control

Posted on Dec 26, Posted by [Bob Kiefert, Green Bay Progressive](#) Category [Our View](#)



GREEN BAY - In the wake of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the President and other responsible leaders have again raised the issue of gun control as a possible answer to reducing gun violence in America. The most common solutions discussed are a return to the assault weapons ban repealed in 2004 and closing the loophole that allows the purchase of guns at local gun shows without the normal background check.

But the gun lobby has trotted out the usual diversion tactics to muddy the waters. It is a common tactic in public debate.

Shouldn't we put a cop in every school or theater, or arm teachers, or publish the names of all gun owners, or require mandatory psychiatric care for any relative we think is a little bit weird, they say. While we're at it, let's round up all the semi-automatic pistols and violent video games. Why not cancel all the cop shows on TV? The beat goes on. Another media circus.

And in the end, they hope, we will all just throw up our hands, again, and say the problem is too big to solve so we should just do nothing.

Cory Booker had the best point on Meet the Press last Sunday. We are not even arguing about the real problem.

There are good reasons besides hunting for law abiding citizens to buy guns. Personal safety is one of them. I would even argue that more progressives and liberals should get guns. If something happens, like a month long power outage, we wouldn't want the conservatives to be the only people in the neighborhood armed.

But that's not the problem, nor is the general state of psychiatric care in the country. We are not going to stop all gun violence with a single law. But we can make things a little better.

Experience shows that, if you want to pull off a mass shooting at a school or theater, you want to arm yourself with a military style long gun with a high capacity banana clip like the AR-15. It's been the weapon of choice in several of the recent shootings. And a return to the assault weapons ban can make it just a little more difficult for these shooters to get them.

And, as Cory Booker said, evidence in his city shows that law abiding citizens don't commit crimes with guns. In fact, he said that of all the gun crimes committed in Newark in one recent year, only one was committed by someone who had gotten the gun by going through the normal background check at a registered gun dealer. The problem is the secondary market where nearly 40 per cent of the guns in this country change hands.

If you buy a gun at a gun store with a background check, you have to swear that you have not committed a felony lately, or been dishonorably discharged from the military, or been treated for mental illness, or are addicted to drugs, or need to be restrained from committing domestic abuse.

These are common sense questions to keep the guns out of the hands of potentially dangerous people. Why shouldn't everyone who wants to buy a gun be required to answer them? Why keep the secondary market loophole open that allows people to buy a gun without a background check? What's all this nonsense about taking the guns out of the hands of law abiding citizens?

We are not going to stop all future gun violence at schools like Sandy Hook. We are not going to end all wars and make the world safe for democracy. We are not going to all love one another. Those delusions ended in the sixties.

But we can do something to make the shootings a little less easy for the shooters, and that is a start. The first step is to keep the discussion on the real issues.

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