http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/las-vegas-shooting2-2017-s5.jpg



Sen. Smith talks about legislation to expand the background check requirement for all firearm purchases as a way to fight against gun violence.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - I can't imagine the horror victims go through when face to face with an active shooter while in a place of worship, school, shopping center or night club. How do families cope with the news of a loved one being murdered by a domestic terrorist, coworker or significant other? Or the news of a loved one who took their own life?

A few weeks ago, in a neighboring town, a young man shot and killed his mother, brother and nephew before driving to the home of a young woman he may have planned to abduct. He shot the parents of this young woman before killing her and himself. The family didn't know the shooter before this happened, but his own family may have been aware he was dangerous.

Would a background check have saved those victims? We can't be certain. Would a temporary law enforcement firearm removal order, also called a "red flag law," stop this horribly tragic event? We'll never know.

As a gun owner, I firmly believe in an individual's right to own a firearm. I also believe gun violence prevention is long overdue. Countless lives have died in vain from our state and our nation's inaction on gun violence.

Sadly, policymakers seem frozen with indecision when it comes to gun safety. We are trapped in a cycle of unexpected tragedies like El Paso, Dayton or Lake Hallie followed by the expected “thoughts and prayers” and then inaction by leaders to do anything to stop the cycle from happening again.

A Marquette Law School poll conducted in March of 2018 showed 81% of people favored background checks, with only 18% opposed. In the same poll, 56% of Wisconsinites supported assault-style weapon bans and 40% opposed the ban. More recently, a NPR poll conducted in February this year showed 65% of Americans believed a high-capacity magazine ban would reduce gun violence.

Polls consistently show people from all walks of life and political views favoring universal background checks. Wisconsin is ready for commonsense gun violence reforms, so why aren’t Republican lawmakers?

Pro-gun lobbying groups like the NRA use the 2nd Amendment as the reason for inaction. They use it to tie the hands of Republicans who might be willing to do something about gun violence.

Our Constitution has stood the test of time while our country has evolved. Take action now to stop the cycle of gun violence with commonsense reforms, and let the Constitution do its job. If the NRA wants to explain why simple background checks are wrong, or why they believe the founders thought it was necessary to have high-capacity magazines and assault-style weapons when drafting the 2nd Amendment then let them try.

For decades, gun rights have been a wedge issue. It’s near the top of the list among single-issue voters. With that being the case, it isn’t any wonder why politicians do nothing. After all, when we are divided, those in power keep power.



But, not everyone is so easy to predict on this issue.

Last week the Task Force on Suicide Prevention held a hearing in Eau Claire. It lasted over 7 hours, most of it being agency reports. The public who attended, and stuck around long enough, got their chance to testify.

A gun shop owner from Dane County came to tell us about the Gun Safe program he started with other shop owners. It allows anyone in a mental health crisis to temporarily store his or her weapons in a gun shop safe until the crisis passes.

A Republican lawmaker mistakenly thought the gun shop owner would be opposed to a Red Flag Law. The shop owner surprised the lawmaker by saying he was in favor of a properly worded law to help responsible gun owners make the right choice in a crisis. It was refreshing to hear such a thoughtful response. It reminded me that we should never make assumptions of where people may stand on any issue.

We can own guns responsibly and still demand action for gun violence. We've gone too long without commonsense solutions to fight against gun violence. The time to act was long ago, but the opportunity to act still exists.