

SENSIBLE GUN LAWS ARE A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE CONCERNING THE GREATER GOOD

By Ron Sirak • @ronsirak
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One of the glorious things about the United States, part of the genius of the Constitution, is that nothing is carved in stone. The founding fathers understood that times change. In their wisdom, they installed a “delete” key in the laws of the land, they allowed for a rewrite to adjust to new realities they wisely understood they could not foresee.

Now is the time to reinterpret the Second Amendment to make it conform to the reality of today, the reality of automatic weapons capable of killing or wounding nearly 600 people in 10 minutes. This is not the age of muskets, when the Second Amendment was written. Times change, and laws must change as well. Las Vegas should be the beginning of the end of this madness.

Does it mean a compromise in certain freedoms? Yes, but is it not a fair trade to exchange the right to own a machine capable of mass death for the right to be free of the fear of being gunned down at a country music concert? Sensible gun laws are not an individual liberty issue but rather a

public health issue. It is a matter of doing what is best for the great good of the health of the people of the United States.

In the past 10 years there have been four attacks in which 26 or more people have been killed. After each, those staunch defenders of the Second Amendment have said: “Now is not the time to discuss updating gun laws.” It seems, however, that time never comes.

How many more times do we have to watch people run in terror?

How many more times do we have to watch families grieve?

How many more times do we have to watch people die?

There are two essential issues here. The first is that our history has proven that the Constitution is an ever-changing document. It’s genius is that it cannot not be easily changed – requiring reflection – but that it can be adjusted to reflect new realities.

At one point, slavery was legal in this country. At one point, women did not have the right to vote. At one point, segregated public schools were allowed. At one point, it was illegal to drink alcohol. At one point, all of those wrongs were made right. Our history is one of change.

The second point is that our history is also filled with instances in which individual rights have been redefined in order to protect the public good. Another part of the genius of the Constitution is that it both protects individual rights and recognizes that acting for the collective good of our overall society is the paramount role of government.

Having sensible gun laws does not mean taking away someone's deer hunting rifle; it does not mean confiscating a licensed handgun; it does not mean recalling every shotgun. Those weapons cannot gun down dozens in a matter of minutes.

Again, this is a public health issue. And when we have identified public health issues in the past, we have changed laws to compromise the rights of the few in order to protect the rights of the many.

When the lie propagated by the tobacco lobby for decades that cigarette smoking did not cause cancer, heart disease and other illnesses was exposed, smoking in public places was banned, warning labels were placed on packages and stiff taxes were imposed.

The right of a person to smoke was not eliminated, but rather restricted because it protected the lives of the many; it kept millions of Americans from dying.

When car safety became an issue at a time when 50,000 people a year were dying on our highways, seatbelt laws came to be. The right of a person to ride without wearing a seatbelt was eliminated for the greater good. Wearing seatbelts saves lives and it was decided to fine those who didn't use the safety device.

Some states have laws requiring helmets for motorcycle and bicycle riders. There is a federal law on drinking age. And all states have laws concerning driving under the influence of alcohol. Is it an infringement on MY rights to say I can't drive drunk? Yup. But is it not a protection of YOUR right not to be killed by my drunken driving? Absolutely. It is for the greater good.

It is illegal in some places to send a text while driving, yet it is not illegal to own a weapon that can gun down hundreds in a matter of minutes. Does that make sense?

It took decades, but lawmakers finally stood up to the tobacco industry. It took decades, but lawmakers finally stood up to the auto industry. It took decades, but lawmakers finally stood up to the alcohol industry. Why won't they stand up to the gun lobby?

Truth be told, it was lawyers and not lawmakers that effected most of the key safety changes in this country. It was legislation by litigation that gave lawmakers the spine to support taking on many industries. When the tobacco companies began losing in court, the lawmakers found the courage to do the right things.

Now is the time to talk about background checks. Now is the time to talk about the gun show exception. Now is the time to talk about outlawing devices that modify guns into automatic weapons. Now is the time to talk about not selling guns to people on the terror watch list. Now is the time to talk about large-round gun clips. And now is the time to talk about banning weapons that serve no purpose but to kill large numbers of people.

This is not a Constitutional issue; this is a public health issue. When we found out the tobacco industry was killing millions of Americans, we fixed it. When we found out the auto industry was killing thousands of Americans, we fixed it. When we found out the alcohol industry was killing thousands on our highways, we fixed it.

How many more Americans need to be gunned down before we fix it – or at least try?