

# Commentary: Time for gun owners to lead

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I own more than 20 rifles, shotguns and pistols. We gun owners have insisted on our Second Amendment rights, and we have insisted those rights be virtually absolute. We have rejected common-sense restrictions on those rights. Tragically, 20 children at Sandy Hook Elementary School paid the price for our unrestricted right to own guns. Now their families grieve for the little ones they love, and we mourn the lives that might have been.

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It's time that we face reality—that our insistence on making those rights absolute makes it easier for disturbed individuals to carry out mass murders. I believe it is time those of us who own guns face some common-sense reality and lead in calling for the enactment of effective gun laws that meet the constitutionality test. Gun owners need to lead the effort to stop these horrible tragedies.

Hunting has been an important part of my family for generations. I have killed deer with my grandfather's .30 Remington built in 1912 and my father's .300 Savage manufactured in 1932. Most of my guns are antiques, which I value greatly, that belonged to my father or grandfather. I want to leave my guns to my sons, but I believe we must first change the gun culture in our country for me to do so.

The Second Amendment to the U. S. Constitution reads: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

I believe in the Second Amendment and my right to own a gun. But every right is accompanied by obligations and responsibilities. We need a serious discussion about the kinds of guns the average citizen should be able to own legally, and what kind of reasonable restrictions should be placed on their sale and use.

I do not believe any of the following regulations would violate the Second Amendment.

Should it be as easy to buy a gun as it is today? I do not think so.

Several years ago, to reward myself for winning a fantasy baseball league, I went to a local store and bought a .270 deer rifle. After paying, I immediately walked out with the rifle.

It shouldn't be that easy. Unlike a loaf of bread or gallon of milk, a firearm is a lethal weapon. No one should be able to just walk right out with a firearm they've bought at a gun show or store.

I propose, at a minimum, three requirements:

A reasonable waiting period

Serious background checks

Automatic registration of the gun in a national database



We must work harder to keep guns out of the hands of convicted criminals, as well as mentally incompetent and disturbed individuals. If law-abiding citizens have to go through additional red tape to own a firearm, then so be it. It's too late to save those 20 children at Sandy Hook, but their deaths will have meaning if we can save others from suffering similar tragedies.

- Let's have a reasonable discussion about the number of bullets any firearm can hold without requiring reloading. When I go deer hunting, I usually load three or four bullets. If I need more than that, I probably shouldn't be hunting in the first place. No individual needs to own an assault weapon or any weapon with a clip that will hold more than five to 10 rounds of ammunition. No one needs an assault weapon for civilian purposes.

The bottom line? Sale of assault weapons to civilians—and any such use—should be prohibited.

- To purchase and own a firearm, an individual should be required to obtain a license and proper training in safe use of the firearm. We require training and licensing to drive a vehicle, sell real estate or sell insurance. This is because of the potential impact of these activities on other people. So why should we permit an untrained individual to own and use a firearm, which has the potential of causing great harm to others?

- No one can guarantee the effect of any of these regulations, because gun violence certainly involves many issues besides gun laws, such as mental health, parental responsibility and the impact of television, movies and video games in desensitizing individuals to the tragic results of violence. But it is time for a healthy, open and candid discussion about all of these issues, including gun regulations. Those of us who own and love to use guns need to take part in that discussion with open and caring minds and hearts.

- The arguments I hear from other gun owners opposing any regulation of the type and use of firearms do not make sense to me anymore in light of the circumstances of modern America. I do not accept the argument that allowing one regulation opens the door to all guns being taken away. We live in a world in which many things are properly regulated.

- For example, I am a homebuilder and accept, without question, that the homes I build are inspected and held to a reasonable standard of quality. However, regulation of my homebuilding does not prevent me from continuing to build homes; it simply means that I must build them to a standard of quality that any purchaser should expect in a new home. By the same token, to have the right to own a firearm, we gun owners should welcome proper and sensible regulation and required training.

And I have no more patience for the expression, “Guns don’t kill people, only people kill people.” If we’re honest, we’ll admit that guns make it easier to kill people, and the type of gun used makes it easier to kill more people at once—and harder for the victims to defend themselves.

Nat Tracy, my Bible professor at Howard Payne University, defined freedom as “glad obedience to authority.” That definition applies in many areas of life. To drive safely, I need to follow reasonable laws designed to make driving safe. To make music, I need to follow rules of melody and harmony. If I want to own and use a firearm, my freedom to do so can and should be defined by our laws in a reasonable and safe manner.

Gun owners should welcome this healthy discussion regarding proper regulation and provide leadership to make it happen.

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