

"A shotgun approach to curbing violent crimes"

Numerous bills were introduced in the Delaware State legislature recently that would limit the sale of certain types of firearms, limit the capacity of magazines and limit how a firearm can be kept and stored. The bills have the presumed intent of reducing the number of violent crimes and deaths that occur due to firearms. Laudable intentions but are any of the measures truly the best method to solving the problem?

Effective solutions come about from fully understanding what the core problem is and then when the problem statement can be effectively defined, solutions can be developed. Unfortunately, this is often not the case when it comes to legislation – pressure from constituents to do “something”, more times than not, leads our elected officials to do just that - “something” - even though it may not be effective and may have unintended outcomes.

So first, we must ask, what problem is it that we want to solve? Reducing the murder rate? Decrease the number of mass shootings? Reduce the number of robberies? I think we can all agree that we want to do these things – the question is how?

The murder rate in the United States has declined by nearly 63% since 1993 at the same time, firearm ownership has increased by just over 64%. States like, New Hampshire, Vermont, Idaho have some of the most lenient firearms laws in the nation but have some of the lowest violent crime rates. Additionally, **50% of firearm related murders occur in less than 2% of the counties in the United States.** This would lead me to believe that the issue is less about the firearm and more about the environment.

Areas with gangs, extreme poverty levels and high concentrations of other crimes are where most violent crimes are committed. These are all difficult issues to contend with and require substantive reform, concentrated effort, economic development and cultural change – it is often much easier to put more restrictions on firearms and appear to be “doing something” than it is to bring broad systematic, sustainable change to a neighborhood.

Over 71% of felony gun charges are dropped in Delaware. Those who have used a gun in a crime and are most likely to have violent tendencies, are never prosecuted on gun charges. On the same note, **those who have legally obtained a firearm and have a concealed carry permit are 13 times less likely than the population to commit a crime.** Are we adding legislation that will hinder those that are least likely to commit crime instead of those that have already done so?

Conservative counts estimate that firearms are used for self defense over 83,000 times per year. The FBI counts 67,000 reported cases per year and broader studies have the number approaching 2 million times per year – most of which go unreported. **Firearms stolen from a family member account for less than 1.6% of those used in a crime and existing legislation already makes knowingly allowing a restricted person access to a firearm a crime.** Though most would agree that firearms need to be kept secure and that gun owners have an obligation to practice safe and secure habits, will adding legislation have the desired impact of reducing crime and violence?

Tragically, mass shootings have risen disproportionately over the past few decades. Even during the “assault weapons ban” from 1994 through 2004, the figure increased and states like California with some of the strictest firearms laws in the country continue to experience these horrific events. With the deadliest school shootings occurring with pistols with 10 round magazines. Gun control has not seemed to work at all here. Is it possible that there are other factors at play? 60% of the mass shooters were previously diagnosed with mental health issues. **One factor that is not often discussed, is the potential correlation between increasing number of prescriptions for drugs with known psychological side effects and the number of mass shootings.** Drugs like Adderall, Ritalin, Prozac are being prescribed at nearly four times the rate that they were 20 years ago. The increase in prescriptions almost directly aligns with the increase in mass shootings. Though correlation does not inherently indicate causation, it is a potential cause that should be investigated thoroughly. Again, this is not an easy thing to do and it is much simpler to add another restriction on gun ownership and appear to be doing “something”.

What I ask, is that if we are serious about making things better, we need to dig deeper and look not just at what is happening but at why? Is it really about the firearm? If it is, then let’s attack the issue but most signs would indicate that it is not. We need to expand our thought process to look at – deep socioeconomic issues, issues that are extremely difficult to solve but will have a lasting positive impact. Adding another band-aid to issues that require restorative surgery won’t fix anything.

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