

Stop the insanity: Ban guns

Gerald Ensley, Tallahassee Democrat 11:42 a.m. EST November 23, 2014



(Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat)

It's the guns, stupid.

The shootings Thursday at the Florida State University library. The shootings Saturday in a northwest Tallahassee neighborhood. The shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. The shooting of Arizona U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. The shootings at Virginia Tech. The 10,000 senseless shooting deaths that happen every year in this country.

Take away guns and they don't happen.

How is it that the supposed greatest nation on earth refuses to stop the unholy availability of guns?

I'm not talking about gun control. I'm not talking about waiting periods and background checks.

I'm talking about flat-out banning the possession of handguns and assault rifles by individual citizens. I'm talking about repealing or amending the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Second Amendment has been misinterpreted. It says guns are permitted to a "well-regulated militia." That means trained citizen soldiers called into action for emergencies — because in colonial times every able-bodied man was required to be a member of the militia. It does not mean everyone with \$50 and a driver's license is entitled to own a gun.

That's what former Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger said in 1990, when he called claims of Second Amendment protection of individual gun ownership, "a fraud on the American public." Earlier this year, retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens called the Second Amendment one of the six great flaws with the U.S. Constitution. He called for it to be amended to say gun possession was only for state militias, not individuals.

Every legal opinion for 200 years denied individual gun ownership was a right — until the steady lobbying of the National Rifle Association created a climate that allowed a conservative U.S. Supreme Court in 2008 to strike down a handgun ban in the District of Columbia, and fuel the sense of entitlement of gun owners.

Gun supporters say, "It's not guns that cause gun violence, it's mentally ill people with guns; fix the mentally ill." Even if those same people did not oppose government spending on the mentally ill — which they have for decades — there is no predicting when mental illness will express itself in violence.

All of those who knew FSU library shooter Myron May called him the "last person" from whom they would have expected violence. They all knew he was mentally troubled. But they said he didn't even like guns.

You can't prevent mental illness. You can prevent humans from having easy access to tools they can use to harm other people.

Talk about mental illness: The United States is insane about guns. We lead the world in gun ownership, with almost one per capita. That's twice the percentage of the next closest country.

The United States doesn't lead the world in gun violence. Just the civilized world.

According to a United Nations survey, the United States annually averages 3 firearm homicides per 100,000 population. Fourteen countries topped that figure — but they were almost exclusively Third World countries.

Among the 24 most affluent nations of the world, the U.S. is the far and away leader in gun homicides. None of the other 23 affluent nations has a rate above 1 firearm death per 100,000 population.

Gun freaks insist we need to arm more people. They glibly say shooting sprees happen in "gun free zones," like schools and universities, where gunmen could be stopped if everyone had a gun. That theory is absurd.

Police and military train for years to use a gun competently in stressful situations — and even they don't always respond correctly. Think Ferguson, Mo. Think Charlotte, N.C. Think New York City in 2012 where two cops shot nine bystanders as they wildly tried to shoot a man who had gunned down a co-worker.

The idea of 500 students in a college library or a dozen teachers in an elementary school pulling out guns to shoot a gunman is ludicrous. They would wind up shooting each other.

Gun freaks say if you take away their guns only outlaws will have guns. That's a chance worth taking. Because if we ban guns, eventually the tide will turn. It might take 10 years or 20 years. Hell, it might take 50 years. But if we make it illegal to own a handgun, eventually there will be no handguns.

The same gun freaks believe in banning drugs. They believe in banning abortions. They recognize society bans certain things for the good of society. We should ban guns for the good of society.

People have romanticized guns. The Founding Fathers. The Old West. Self-defense — and never mind the average American has only a one in 250 chance of being the victim of a violent crime. It's all a delusion. Guns kill. They kill people from a distance. They kill strangers and children who have no relationship with the gunman.

Let the hunters keep their rifles and shotguns; those weapons are ineffective tools in a mass shooting. But we need to ban handguns and assault rifles for all but police and military.

This is an uphill battle. Despite daily front-page stories of shooting sprees and killings, Americans don't want to give up their guns. Over the past 10 years, the percentage of Americans who support stricter guns laws has dropped from 60 percent to 47 percent. In a recent survey, 73 percent of Americans oppose banning handguns.

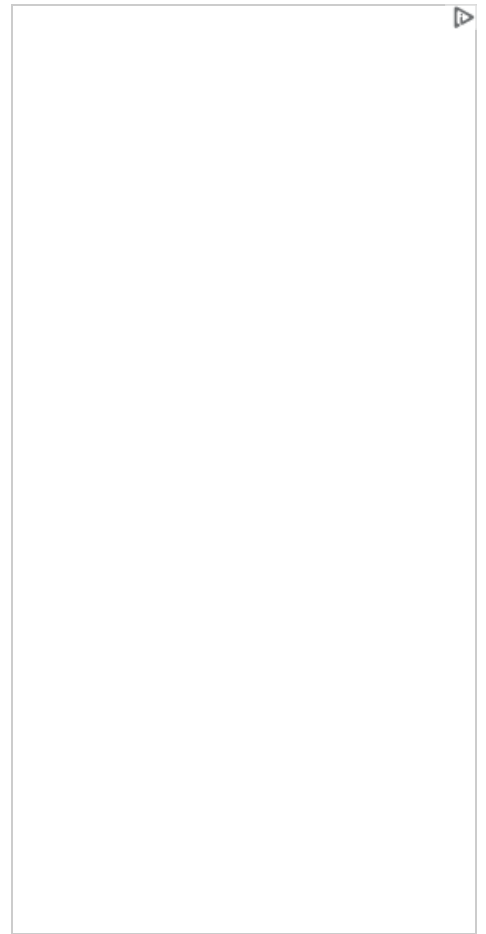
But those of us who think widespread handgun ownership is insane need to keep speaking up. We need to teach our children handguns are wrong. We need to support any measure that limits their availability — and work to repeal the Second Amendment. We need to keep marching forward until someday this nation becomes civilized enough to ban guns.

One of the frequent refrains of gun freaks about President Obama is "He's coming for our guns." Obama never said such a thing. But I will:

We're coming for your guns. And someday, we'll take them.

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