

KeizerOpinion

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Do nothing or do something

We, as a nation, have made a choice on mass gun shootings. We will do nothing. We will send thoughts and prayers. We shake our heads in disbelief. We ask ourselves how this can happen again and again.

The massacre of 20 children in Connecticut, the killing of 14 people in California, the murder of 49 people in Florida and the hundreds of other shooting deaths by gun should bring about changes in gun laws—they haven't.

Support of second amendment rights has overpowered any common sense legislation that is backed by a vast majority of Americans. Suggested legislation regarding background checks, waiting periods and assault weapons ban.

The latest skirmish is over whether people on the government's no-fly list should be prohibited from purchasing a gun of any kind. Some don't want to violate the rights of those who have not been convicted of a crime, only suspected of having terrorist sympathies. As one U.S. Senator said, if a person is known to have actual terror plans, they would be under arrest; you can't buy a weapon when you are sitting in jail.

The 1994 assault weapons ban was a victory for gun control advocates, however the ban expired in 2004 and has never been reinstated. Intense lobbying efforts assured that a ban on assault weapons would never see the light of day.

Enthusiasts say that semi-automatic assault weapons are needed for self-defense, hunting and sport. It takes verbal gymnastics to rationalize the need for the average citizen to get

editorial

their hands on such weapons. There are plenty of other guns that can be used for self-defense, hunting and sport.

Support for gun rights is so strong that even a ban on assault weapons is cited as the first step on a path

to the elimination of all personally-owned guns. That's the boogie man that is conjured up every time any reform is called for. Except for a very small sliver of some parts of society, no one is advocating that the government burst into houses and confiscate people's weapons. That will not happen, even the most disinterested person would say that banning gun ownership by the public is wrong.

Debate over second amendment rights will go on. If it is a right to own and carry a gun—which is a personal choice—then other rights need to be fought for and maintained as well. The right to bear arms should not be more important than the right to free speech, freedom of religion or freedom to control our own bodies.

Whether one is a strict Constitutionalist or one believes the Constitution is fluid and must be interpreted to our times, the rights it accords to the people never go away. Those who cite rights in one area of the people's lives must also support the rights in other areas.

This country can have any gun control laws or any law that maintains personal freedoms it wants. It will take millions of dedicated people across the nation to have as big a voice in the gun debate. They have to mobilize by donating money to and voting for like-minded candidates. Or they can choose to do nothing.

—LAZ

Security and rights of the USA

Per the news media, Americans supporting the ISIS agenda are not attacking their fellow Americans on a daily basis although their murdering interests and actions have reached a fairly threatening, "Who's next?" not thereby knowing which innocent lives will be taken during the next club night out, while seeing a movie, by going to a mall, or simply by sitting with work friends to celebrate a Christian holiday. While this writer hesitates to encourage rights infringements, it is not high time for doing more about those among us who show alarming signs of killer-to-be behaviors?

For just one among the killers, take the case of Omar Mateen, formerly of St. Lucie County, Florida. His comments on the Fort Hood shooter were so worrisome that his boss, the local sheriff, transferred him from his post at a courthouse. Yet long before, even back when he was a pre-teen, his behavior was marked by constant outbursts and classroom insubordinations where he could not conform to any school rules. Between 1992 and 1999, he had a record of 31 discipline problems for general school disruptions and specific incidents of physically attacking other students.

Documents show that as early as third grade, he was verbally abusive and aggressive during which times he used violence and obscenities. In fourth grade he was known to physically harm other students, talk out in class, and scream at fellow students and teachers. He was moved from school to school but never shamed up to demonstrate anything even remotely resembling socially acceptable behaviors. In his marriages, he beat his first wife enough to end in divorce and frightened his second enough not to alert the authorities when she knew about his plans at Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

In 2013, at age 26, Mateen worked as a private security guard for G4S

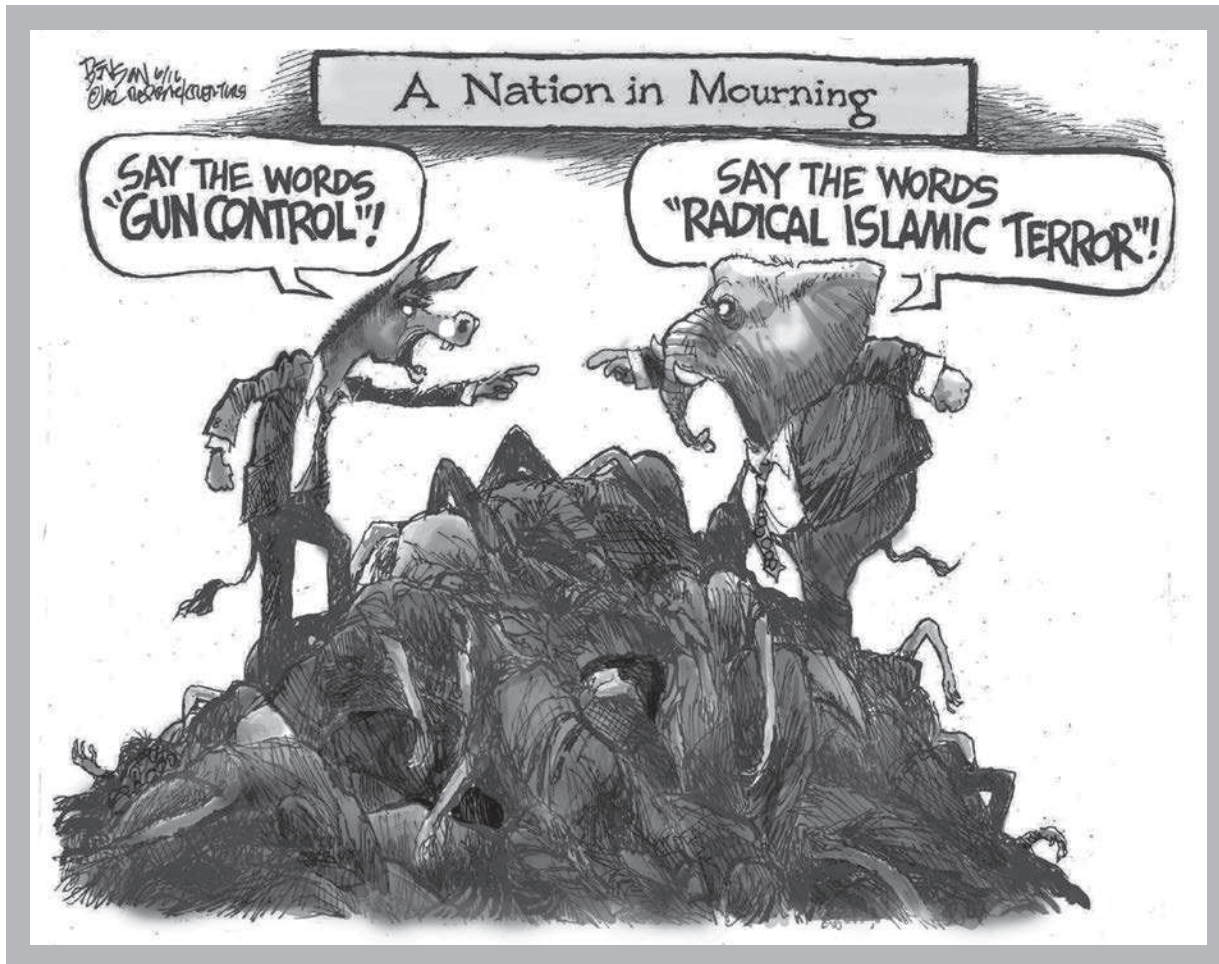
Secure Solutions USA, Inc. at St. Lucie County Courthouse in Fort Pierce. He's remembered there for his inflammatory comments, including a statement that Fort Hood, Texas shooter Nidal Hasan was justified in killing 13 people while injuring 30 more. Further, Mateen constantly made derogatory remarks about women and Jews enough that the FBI was notified about his statements. As seemingly too often takes place nowadays, the FBI would not conclude he was a terrorist risk.

Current events suggest strongly that it's time that people like Mateen and others, who demonstrate time after time, as he did, that they are highly likely to murder their fellow Americans, must be dealt with by enforcing measures that place them, temporarily or permanently, under confining circumstances until they're able to demonstrate behaviors of responsible conduct. Would such interventions cost money? Yes, of course, probably a lot.

However, while we continue to spend billions of American dollars in pointlessly unsuccessful warring in the Middle East, while our nation continues to send our fellow Americans to long prison terms for smoking marijuana and other misdemeanors, and while we are willing to give athletes and their coaches billions of dollars to play games that offer "entertainment" to those who want to see blood and injury without an ounce of redeeming social value to a nation in trouble, then we should demonstrate some intelligence, using investment interventions into the lives of Americans hell-bound on kill missions. Realistically speaking, by hook or crook, mad and bad people can get any kind of gun in this country so we must find preventive strategies and employ them to effective results.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)

gene h. mcintyre



Fighters don't always use fists

By ERIC A. HOWALD

Keizerite Thomas Lucas sat in the second-to-last row of more than 700 graduates participating in the Chemeketa Community College commencement ceremony Tuesday, June 14.

He had a long wait, but I'd used my press pass to get on the floor of the Pavilion at the Oregon State Fairgrounds where the event was held. Thomas saw me taking pictures of him prior to taking his seat and flashed me a double thumbs-up along with a big grin. I found a chair about 30 feet away from his spot and we passed time trading yawns, funny faces and countdowns of how many rows were left before his turn to walk across the stage.

All I could think about was how Thomas shouldn't be there, but Thomas was defying odds long before we met a little more than a year ago.

Shortly before his 19th birthday, Thomas was in Arkansas riding his bike home from one of his two jobs when he was struck by a car, then dragged behind it when the bike chain wrapped around his arm and the undercarriage of the vehicle.

He woke up six weeks later in a nursing home. His mental capacity had been reduced to about that of a 7-year-old because of a traumatic brain injury.

Thomas was working two jobs at the time of the accident because he was paying for training at a local pro wrestling school, he had big dreams of a career in the squared circle. And, just like that, the dream vanished.

He had to relearn most of the things that the fully-abled take for

moments of lucidity

granted, but he progressed quickly. By the time he moved back to his dad's home in Oregon four years ago, he'd already earned

a pair of educational certificates, but he'd never finished high school.

Around February 2015, counselors at Oregon's Vocational Rehabilitation Services connected him with the



Thomas Lucas

Mid-Valley Literacy Center where I had been tutoring GED students for a less than a year.

From the get-go, Thomas was an eager learner. He was unafraid to join in discussions, readily asked questions and helped me discover that I could push the students in the class harder than I had up until that point. However, the foundation of our bond was pro wrestling.

I was a toddler when I first started attending pro wrestling events, and

knowing a bit about his passion for the sport meant we were rarely at a loss for things to talk about.

In September of last year, Thomas enrolled in GED classes at Chemeketa where he had a more intensive program, and access to special testing facilities that met his needs.

He would drop by MVLC occasionally, and then he would come by my office to let me know how he was doing. Two months ago, the text messages started rolling in. He was passing the GED tests on the first attempt in every subject, leading up to his graduation last week.

When Thomas started taking GED classes at MVLC, the administrators of the program were telling students and tutors it would likely take a year-and-a-half to two years to complete the program and pass all the tests. Thomas, who is still dealing with the impacts of his brain injury, did it in a year and two months. Even before graduation, Thomas was already planning his next steps – a degree in social work or education.

My heart swells thinking about it. It took the assistance and support of a lot of people in two states to get Thomas to this point in his life, but Thomas is the one who deserves the lion's share of the credit. He had many opportunities to stay down on the mat or tap out but, like any good pro wrestler, he keeps shaking his fists and rising back to his feet.

For me, it's an honor and a privilege to be part of the crowd – because he's putting on the show of a lifetime.

(Eric A. Howald is the managing editor at the *Keizertimes*.)

Is the gun lobby finally cornered?

By E.J. DIONNE JR.

A political crisis is usually preceded by an intellectual and moral crisis. Dominant ideas that once seemed to hang together lose their hold when they are exposed as contradictory and incoherent.

Similarly, moral claims made on behalf of a worldview can, gradually or suddenly, come to be seen as empty. Demoralization comes before defeat.

This is what happened in the Soviet Union. A corrupt and dictatorial system fell for many reasons, but its demise became inevitable when even those with an interest in mouthing the old slogans and defending the old ideology came to realize that almost everyone around them thought they were extolling bunk.

But a crisis can also develop around particular issues in democratic countries. This is what's happening now to those who maintain an absolutist position in opposing all new measures to limit the use of firearms.

The contradictions of the gun lobby's worldview are not new, but it has taken a terrorist hate crime at an Orlando nightclub to force even the most slavish congressional followers of the National Rifle Association to rethink whether they can continue to resist every effort, however modest, to prevent violence.

Those of us who have long favored what we typically call "common-sense gun laws"—including background checks, an assault weapons ban and restrictions on the ability of terrorism suspects and the mentally unstable to buy guns—have always seen the absolutists' position as nonsensical. This is why we consider our ideas "common-sense." Judging by most of the polls, a majority of the country agrees with

other views

us.

The truth is we already accept the need to subject the right to bear arms to reasonable restrictions.

Otherwise, we would repeal laws regulating the ownership of machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. (Imagine the bumper sticker: "If RPGs are outlawed, only outlaws will have RPGs.")

Those on our side of this debate cannot understand how earlier horrors, particularly the mass murder of children at Sandy Hook, did not change the hearts and minds of our opponents. Surely something is terribly wrong with laws that make such mass killings routine in the United States in a way they are nowhere else in the democratic world. But even very moderate legislation was defeated.

What makes Orlando different is the clash the attack revealed between two powerful impulses of contemporary conservatism: the reflexive hostility to gun restrictions and the incessant assertion that we must do what it takes to protect the United States from terrorism. If you believe the second, you really can't believe the first. This has always been true, but the murder of 49 people by a terrorist made the incongruity so stark that Donald Trump was moved to suggest he would talk to the NRA about ways to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists.

One can be skeptical about whether Trump will go beyond the NRA's ineffectual solutions to the problem. But Trump's verbal shift was a telltale sign of an intellectual system that is

crumbling.

And the demoralization of one side in a debate is often accompanied by new energy on the other. This is why the Senate filibuster last week to force votes on gun restrictions led by Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., was so important.

There was power to Murphy's witness itself, coming as it did from a politician whose constituents include the families who suffered grievously at Sandy Hook. And his rejection of business as usual showed that the long accumulation of massacres has broken the patience of those demanding action. It was a signal that advocates of sane gun laws have moved off the defensive.

Since the NRA-inspired backlash against the gun laws passed in the 1990s, Democrats have been paralyzed by the fear that taking a strong stand on guns would be electorally hazardous. The rallying to Murphy and also Hillary Clinton's aggressive use of the gun issue in her presidential campaign suggest that the toll taken by mass shootings is changing this political calculus.

After Orlando, it's the gun-sanity rejectionists who are feeling the pressure.

It takes time for new political realities to take hold. The gun lobby still has many obedient followers in Congress. The Republican Party is still dominated by those who will do whatever the NRA tells them to do.

Nonetheless, even the most fervently held dogma is not immune to reality and logic. The collapse of the opposition to reasonable steps toward making us a safer country may not happen all at once. But it is in sight. (Washington Post Writers Group)

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