

The Gun Doctor: Preventing Gun Violence

By Wolfgang Rotbart

With the terrible tragedies of the mass killings lately, it is proper that we consider ways to minimize such tragedies in the future, as there is no realistic way to ever prevent them entirely.

I think I can speak for most responsible gun owners and firearms opponents when I say that effective prevention of firearms related violence is a high priority. The “effective” part is where we tend to part ways with the anti-gun proponents.

With that in mind, I would like to examine some possible solutions and non-solutions. I proceed from four main tenets: 1) All law-abiding, peaceful citizens have an inalienable right to effective self-defense, even if they do not wish to exercise it. 2) Owning a firearm is an individual constitutionally guaranteed right which the Supreme Court upheld several years ago. It is not merely a privilege. There is a profound difference. 3) Any laws limiting this right in the name of public safety must either have a proven record of effectiveness or at least promise a reasonable expectation of doing so. 4) Logic and facts should trump emotions when it comes to law-making.

Using that as a basis for discussion, it is often said that one definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results. A good example of this is the president’s call for an “assault weapons” and high capacity magazine ban. This has been tried before and was a complete failure by any quantifiable measure except perhaps emotional. I’m speaking of the Clinton-era “assault weapons” and high-capacity magazine ban from 1994 through 2004. The fact of the matter is that the violent crime rate was trending downward when the ban went into effect, continued downward during the ban, and continued down after the ban was allowed to expire in 2004. The net effect of the ban was no effect. This is entirely supported by the government’s own crime statistics.

I put the words “assault rifles/weapons” in quotes because actual assault rifles are full-auto, that is machine guns, and the pending legislation does not cover these already highly-regulated firearms. There is no difference between the “assault rifles” being considered for drastic legislation and other rifles except for their looks and the fact that they are actually considered underpowered. In many states, the game laws do not allow the use of an AR style rifle in the standard .223/5.56 caliber for deer

hunting, as it is not considered powerful enough to humanely dispatch a deer. The 7.62x39 caliber used in the AK series rifles is not considered much more powerful. However, even the lowly .22 LR cartridge is lethal.

There are several reasons for the ineffectiveness of the “assault rifles” ban that were valid in 1994 and are still valid today. First, there are hundreds of thousands of these weapons in this country and the ban will not affect them unless the government moves to take them by force and I fear that would lead to virtual civil war.

I attended gun shows during the Clinton gun ban era and there were plenty of fully legal “assault rifles” and high capacity magazines available. The only difference was that were just more expensive. Secondly, rifles are used in a relatively small percentage of crimes and “assault rifles” are used in only a small percentage of these cases. So, even if it were possible to eliminate every one of these weapons, and that is not possible in reality, the crime rate would fall only a percent of a small percent. Handguns are used in the overwhelming majority of crimes for obvious reasons. Again, I am relying on government statistics for these statements. The “assault weapons” ban is a solution in search of a problem.

As for high-capacity magazines, I can certainly understand the emotional reaction to these, but don’t see that banning them will produce any significant results. There are millions of these magazines extant in this country alone. Also, the fact of the matter is that even with minimal practice a person can change out magazines in a couple of seconds. The worst massacre on record, the one at Virginia Tech some years back, was accomplished with ten-round magazines which would still be legal under the proposed legislation. Regardless, it doesn’t matter what the magazine capacity is if no one is willing or capable of effective defense. And there is no effective defense against an armed suicidal lunatic in the midst of a murderous attack except with another firearm. There is a reason the police are armed.

I whole-heartedly agree with the president’s proposal to prosecute those who try to obtain a firearm illegally. This was one of the great failures of the first gun ban. Many thousands of applicants

were found to be disbarred from owning a firearm, yet only a very small handful of them were ever prosecuted.

There needs to be severe consequences when a felon attempts to buy or possess a firearm. Some years ago, Richmond, Virginia was seeing a terrific spike in gun-related violence. Their solution was not a gun ban, but implementation of a law known as the “Exile Program.” A felon in possession or even vicinity of a firearm faced 5 years or more incarceration – no exceptions, no time off for good behavior, and no plea-bargains. Hardened criminals were known to break down in tears when they learned they would be prosecuted under this program. The crime rate dropped quickly and dramatically.

As for the closing of the gun show loophole, that does not exist in Oregon, as all sales at a gun show must go through a background check. As for the rest of the country, most of the gun owners I have spoken with generally agree that keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals is worth the inconvenience and expense of a background check. However, I’m not sure how effective this would be as criminals obtain the great majority of their guns through burglary or other illegal means.

The right of privacy of people adjudicated or suspected with good reason to be mentally unstable in a violent way must be balanced with the public’s safety and not allowed to own firearms. In several of the mass murder cases, the perpetrator was known to be violently unstable, but confidentiality laws kept them from being so identified if a background check was run.

To summarize, the following is what I believe to be a realistic approach to minimizing mass murder tragedies:

1. Identify those who are criminally insane or at high risk of becoming so and bar them from firearm possession. Also, insure that criminals are identified as such if they attempt purchase a firearm. I have personally seen the failure of the background check system in this area.
2. Vigorously prosecute and incarcerate for long prison terms criminals who use or attempt to purchase firearms. This has always been shown to decrease gun-related crime.
3. Allow peaceful, law-abiding citizens to carry firearms as a deterrent

to crime. Violent crime has invariably decreased when right to carry laws have been implemented. There are frequently dire predictions of general increased lawlessness and “Wild West” shoot-outs before right to carry laws are implemented. However, these scenarios have never happened in actuality. The opposite is the norm.

4. Expose the fallacy of the tragically misnamed “Gun Free Zones.” Far from preventing gun violence, it has been shown repeatedly that these zones actually increase the risk of attack as the gunmen actually seek out places where people are much less likely to be armed. I would challenge anyone to give an example of a gun-free zone ever dissuading a committed attacker. Unfortunately, I can give many, many examples of where it did not.

5. I would ask the media to voluntarily withhold the name, photos, and any personally identifiable information in the case of mass murderers just as they generally do in the case of minors and sexual assault cases. Most of these mass killers crave only one thing – their “15 minutes of fame.” Since they tend to be utter failures in every facet of their lives, the only way they can ever hope to accomplish this is through some hideous act that will paste their name and face across every newscast and newspaper. The fact that they will be dead or in prison for life is inconsequential to them. Most of them commit suicide at the end of their rampage or meekly submit to arrest as they feel their mission has been accomplished. Realizing that they will forever remain unknown might help serve as a deterrent and at least does no harm.

Follow-up information to topics in this and other articles can be found on the “Resources” page on The Gun Doctor home page (www.wolfgangthegundocor.com).

I welcome ideas for topics for these articles. Please email them to: Wolfgang@WolfgangTheGunDoctor.com or call me at 503-429-7342 10:00 – 5:00 M – F.

Wolfgang Rotbart is an AGI-certified Master Gunsmith and a NRA-certified Basic Pistol Course Instructor. He works as a gunsmith and as an Oregon Concealed Handgun Safety Course Instructor. You may visit The Gun Doctor website for more information at: <http://www.wolfgangthegundocor.com/>

Vernonia Veterinary Clinic
Small and Large Animals



Now Open
Mon, Wed & Saturday
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Call for Appointments
(503) 429-1612
Or 24 hr. Emergency Number (503) 397-6470
700 Weed Ave. Vernonia, OR

NEED BODY WORK?



TIME TO CALL MEYER'S AUTO BODY

Meyer's Auto Body 493 Bridge Street, Vernonia. 503-429-0248

291 a street
call KIM



Happy Grooming Dog Salon
429-0576

LOVABLE service at a reasonable price

- BATHING
- HAIRCUTS
- NAIL CLIPPING
- NAIL POLISHING
- SPECIALTY SHAMPOOS