

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

SAMANTHA STINNETT
Circulation Manager

SARAH SILVER
Advertising Sales Manager

GUEST COLUMN

New gun legislation falls far short

In the wake of the Buffalo, Uvalde and many other mass shootings, Congress labored mightily — and produced a mouse.

The new gun legislation is a milquetoast measure that will do little to reverse a dramatic, two-decade increase in mass shootings.

It is just an attempt to mollify the public, the vast majority of which is hollering for more serious gun reform. The legislation is a political safety valve, an illusion for Republicans to appear to fight gun violence while maintaining peace with the gun lobby.



ANDRE STEPANKOWSKY

President Joe Biden signed the bill into law in late June. He and other gun control advocates grudgingly went along with it, saying something was better than nothing.

Well, maybe. The law does allow juvenile records to be considered in background checks for 18- to 21-year-old gun buyers. It encourages — but does not require — states to adopt “red flag” laws enabling judges to temporarily confiscate guns from people deemed dangerous. It closes the “boyfriend loophole” by expanding current law that bars domestic abusers from buying guns. It cracks down on “straw purchasers” — people who buy guns for those who would not qualify. And it authorizes a paltry \$300 million over five years for school safety.

But voters should not be fooled. This law falls far short.

It continues to allow 18- to 21-year olds to buy and possess semiautomatic weapons — despite the youth of recent mass shooters. There’s irony in this: They can’t buy a beer, yet they can buy guns that can kill or wound dozens of people in a minute. They can buy highly lethal weapons despite the medically proven fact that the part of their brains responsible for logical skills like planning and controlling impulses still is developing, making them more likely to engage in risky behaviors.

Note here that 74% of Americans support raising the minimum legal age to buy any gun to 21 years old, according to a Quinnipiac University Poll released early June.

The new legislation also does not restrict magazine capacity. Nor does it require universal background checks, as



A memorial to the victims of the Uvalde, Texas, mass shooting.

Associated Press

many gun safety advocates had sought.

Washington state — thankfully — already has adopted many of these more restrictive measures. But in Congress, GOP negotiators refused to go along with them, saying they infringe on the Second Amendment right of law-abiding citizens to bear arms.

What’s happening here is that a near-absolutist interpretation of the Second Amendment is preventing government from protecting the lives and safety of its citizens.

No right is absolute. Even the conservative U.S. Supreme Court noted in its famous 2008 Heller decision that some level of gun control is allowed. Unfortunately, the high court’s conservative majority is making our society more dangerous — as it did in June in striking down New York’s restrictions on carrying concealed firearms in public.

I support responsible gun ownership. But the court and Congress have surrendered to the radical gun culture, which makes arguments like that espoused recently by southwest Washington congressional candidate Joe Kent. Opposition to gun control “is 100% about keeping the government in check. The government is supposed to have a healthy fear of its citizens, and that’s why the Second Amendment exists,” he said.

Really? So we should arm citizens with machine guns, mortar launchers and other weapons of war so any nut case with a perceived grievance can wage combat against the government and terrorize its people?

The framers of our Constitution drafted at least partially in response to the Shays’ Rebellion of 1786-87. They were terrified of mob violence. Those who adhere to “originalist” legal theory — using the perceived meaning of the founders to interpret the Constitution — should remember this.

When America adopted our Constitution 233 years ago, a good rifleman could at best fire three rounds a minute. Semiautomatics can do that in seconds. Times and technology change, and the Constitution was not meant to be a straitjacket. It’s mythical to think otherwise.

The National Rifle Association and its devotees perpetuate many other myths in opposition to gun control.

One is that treating mentally ill people — who are far more likely to die from gun violence than to perpetrate it — will reduce shootings.

And two of the biggest myths: That restrictions like the 1994 assault weapons ban — which expired in 2004 — don’t stop gun violence and that guns make us safer.

This is a complex issue. Nevertheless,

statistics show that the number of mass shootings dropped during that 10-year ban on assault weapons, and they have continued to dramatically increase after it expired.

American civilians own far more firearms per capita than any other nation — about 120 per 100 people — but our gun death rate is much higher than most other nations, particularly developed nations.

Recent polls find that about half of the nation — you can include me — believes that sales of AR-15 rifles and similar semiautomatic weapons should be banned. One could argue that handguns — which accounted for about 60% of 13,620 U.S. murders and manslaughter cases in 2020, according to the FBI — are a bigger problem than rifles, including semiautomatics. But tell that to the grieving families and friends of mass murder victims in Buffalo and Uvalde and too many other American cities.

Who really needs such weapons outside of the military or law enforcement?

Politically, a ban is not going to happen, especially with the Supreme Court so tilted against gun control. But if we’re really going to reduce gun violence, the bill signed into law in June should just be a starting point.

Andre Stepankowsky is the retired city editor of *The Daily News of Longview, Washington*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Finally

After owning a home here for 30-plus years, I have finally been confirmed as a Scandinavian immigrant. I was sitting on a bench in the beautiful Astoria Nordic Heritage Park over the weekend, watching tourists snap photos and heard a yell ... “Hey! Look at this!”

One family had a little girl about 5 years old, and a little boy about 4 years old, who were busy looking to find the six trolls. “I found six!” shouted the little girl. “Seven!” shouted the little boy. I looked over and he was pointing a finger at me.

What a hoot! I am 81 years of age, with not an ounce of Scandinavian blood, but I can finally say, yes, I am a true Astorian, and a troll, at that.

What a gift the Nordic park is to all of us.
LARRY ALLEN
Astoria

More books

We loved the great letter on July 5 by Laurie Caplan!

As a handicapped person, my wife browses the shelves for me, and checks the title to see if the subject may interest me. I read four or five books a week. We have always visited our local libraries!

Bad news if I am shut out of a great story source, just so our mayor can make it a place for the homeless to doze.

We need more books, and a reason to call it a library! We don’t all read our toys (phones).

DICK DARBY
Astoria

A fish by any other name

In your otherwise impeccably reasoned editorial about California’s reclassification of bumblebees as fish (*The Astorian*, July 7), you overlooked an opportunity to point out just how slippery those aquatic critters can be.



While most of us can still distinguish between, say, a smallmouth bass and a small, airborne pollinator, a certain semantic confusion persists. For some of us, a fish is a ghoti — the way you would spell the animal if you sounded out the “f” as in “tough”; the “i” as in “women”; and the “sh” as in “notion.” This linguistic ambiguity has caused misunderstandings among FisherPoets and other literary anglers.

The good thing is, you don’t have to have a special license to reel in ghoti. Unless, perhaps, you’re in California.

MIKE FRANCIS
Astoria

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to *The Astorian*. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer’s name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.