

The Honorable Sandy Adams
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Before I begin I would like to state that my thoughts and prayers go out to the families, first responders, and the community of Newtown. As someone who is trained in Critical Incident Stress Management, I recognize that instead of feel good legislation, this community needs our support and our prayers.

I am here as a mother, sheriff's deputy and former legislator. This issue is not political to me, it's personal.

I spent over 17 years as a law enforcement officer in Orange County Florida. During which time, I had the unfortunate experience of looking down the barrel of a rifle with the assailant's finger on the trigger knowing if that trigger were pulled, I would not be here today. I have also experienced the fear that grasps you when the laser sight from a 9mm Desert Eagle puts a dot on you.

And, after my husband died in the line of duty in 1989, I was trained in Critical Incident Stress Management. I tell you this so that you know that my comments here today are not based on any political motivation but on my personal beliefs and experiences.

Ten years ago, I ran for office because as a law enforcement officer, I watched as elected officials would pass legislation without any regard for the implementation and enforcement of such laws. Once in office, I tried to ensure that the laws already on the books were enforced.

You see, it is not a lack of laws that is the problem; it is the lack of enforcement of existing laws.

One such glaring example would be our own Justice Department's failure to enforce--and yes, even violate--our laws by allowing drug cartels and other criminals to purchase firearms through the flawed Fast and Furious program.

Criminals by their very definition do not obey the law. Instead of creating feel good legislation that does nothing to stop the criminal behavior, and takes away a law-abiding citizens ability to defend themselves, why not address the issue how to insure the current laws on our books are enforced? Why not look to the states to see what, if anything, they have successfully done to address this issue?

In 2006, as a member of the Florida House of Representatives, I sponsored House Bill 151, which required the state to compile and maintain an automated database of persons prohibited from purchasing a firearm based on court records of adjudications of mental defectiveness or commitments to mental institutions. The bill also required clerks of court to submit such records to law enforcement and authorized law enforcement to

disclose the collected data to federal governmental agencies and other states for use exclusively in determining the lawfulness of a firearm sale or transfer.

Two years later, the companion bill expanded the use of the mental health database so that law enforcement could also check residents applying for concealed carry permits and firearm licenses. This bill, SB 1616, also expanded the definition of "adjudicated mentally defective" to include those involuntarily committed to outpatient mental health treatment centers.

Both of these bills are excellent examples of laws that improve public safety by keeping firearms out of the hands of the mentally ill without endangering the freedoms of law-abiding gun owners.

We are at a turning point now. You have an opportunity to do what is right, and that may not be the easiest route. It is not time for feel good legislation so you can say you did something; it is time for a true discussion about the culture of violence and how to prevent violent crime.

I believe the combination of violent video games to violent movies, the desensitizing of death, blood and gore in their every day lives is only making the culture more violent. Taking guns from law-abiding citizens while leaving them defenseless against violent criminals, who by their very definition do not abide by the law is not the answer and it is definitely not the right thing to do.

I recently sat in disbelief, amazement and horror as I listened to politicians make suggestions and statements to possible victims of violent crimes such as grab a ballpoint pen and stab your assailant, shoot a shotgun off your balcony or tell your assailant you have a disease. So, let's look at these recommendations.

First, as a law enforcement officer I have been trained that reaction versus action is always slower. The criminal already knows what he or she is going to do and the victim/law enforcement officer has to react. So with that in mind, law enforcement officers are trained that we need to keep a 21-foot distance from an armed attacker with a knife or other weapon. So using a ballpoint pen against an attacker who is armed with a weapon may be something you can try as a last resort, but it would not be my first choice.

Another suggestion was for someone to shoot a double-barrel shotgun off your balcony. In training and self-defense classes, gun owners are that you never fire a gun unless you know where the bullet is going. Shooting indiscriminately over a balcony could injure an innocent person and/or alert your attackers to your location and cause them to open fire on you while you are in plain sight on the balcony, fumbling to reload.

Again, my training tells me this is not a great idea. Take cover, call for help and prepare yourself to do what is necessary to protect yourself and your children if need be just like the mother did recently.

I think we all have heard about this young mother in Georgia who heard someone breaking into her home, called for help, fled upstairs with her two young sons and hid giving the “burglar” full reign downstairs to take whatever valuables he could. But, instead this criminal sought out this young mother and her two sons—coming through three locked doors to get to where they were hiding. But the criminal did not know that this mother was prepared to do what she had to do to protect herself and her children.

Because when that criminal came through the final locked door, the mother opened fire with a pistol until the assailant retreated.

Now, I would like you to think about another scenario. What would have happened to this young mother and her children if she had not been armed and willing to defend them? What if there had been more than one attacker? Is it your position that she should not have been able to defend herself and her children?

These incidents play out all across America every day and, in a lot of cases, the outcome isn’t as good. Law enforcement agencies response times are getting longer forcing law-abiding citizens across this nation to rely only on themselves for protection because law enforcement is too far away. Why would you want to leave law-abiding citizens unable to protect themselves and their families?

Violent crime is getting more violent, and law-abiding people must be allowed to have the tools necessary to defend themselves.

And, when it comes to the suggestion that a rapist can be stopped by simply telling him you have a disease—let us remember that rape isn’t merely a sexual act, it is a criminal act and the attacker is not usually prone to rational thinking. Again, think back to Ted Bundy, with his deranged mind, do you honestly think he would have cared if his victims told him they were STD-positive?

Instead of taking a look at the violent video games that are conditioning our youth with eye/hand coordination and desensitizing them to death and bloody scenes, some think by taking guns away from law-abiding citizens and giving them “helpful tips” like the ones above will somehow stop the cycle. But until we truly take a look at the drivers of this violent behavior and address them responsibly, the only thing this legislation will do is leave law-abiding citizens open to more attacks by violent, deranged criminals.

I think back to a training session years ago where we were informed that a 14-year-old opened fire with a .22 caliber pistol on a school prayer group in Paducah, KY killing three and injuring five more.

According to my memory of the Sheriff’s office training that day, the youth obtained his proficiency with firearms by playing video games and was eventually allowed to plead guilty due to mental illness. And he obtained the firearm he used by stealing it.

But here is something that always stuck with me about the shooting in Paducah, to know that someone not trained with firearms could fire eight shots rapidly and hit all eight of his moving targets—a level of accuracy many law enforcement officers cannot match—all because he played violent video games.

Theft, violent video games, violent books and mental illness were all discussed during the shooter's trial.

Unfortunately, we have a culture that glorifies violence. As you search for what, if anything, you as members of Congress can do to address this issue, I would like to ask you to take a close look at the research of Lt. Col. Dave Grossman—an Army Ranger and psychology professor who made a comprehensive study of what societal factors promulgate violent crime. His work on digging down to the root of the problem—understanding what motivates people to kill—is an invaluable resource.

Now let's discuss this proposal, S. 150.

Again, as someone with a law enforcement background, I naturally consider whether a legislative proposal made under the banner of public safety would truly contribute to that worthy objective.

Concerning the proposal to ban a wide variety of semi-automatic rifles, shotguns and handguns, and ammunition magazines that hold 11 or more rounds, I think it's an easy question to answer.

First, we know that the firearms that would be banned by this legislation were used in only a small percentage of violent crimes before the federal "assault weapon" ban was imposed in 1994. When Congress approved the 1994 ban, it required that a study of the ban's effectiveness be conducted. That study found that "the banned weapons and magazines were never involved in more than a modest fraction of all gun murders."

The study also said that it was "unable to detect any reduction to date in two types of gun murders that are thought to be closely associated with assault weapons, those with multiple victims in a single incident and those producing multiple bullet wounds per victim."

Several years later, a follow-up study found that "assault weapons and large capacity magazines were used in only a minority of gun crimes prior to the 1994 federal ban, and assault weapons were used in a particularly small percentage of gun crimes." It also concluded that "assailants fire less than four shots on average, a number well within the 10-round magazine limit imposed by the . . . ban."

Much has been said about pistol magazines that hold more than 10 rounds, but another follow-up study found that "gunshot injury incidents involving pistols were less likely to produce a death than those involving revolvers" and that "the average number of wounds for pistol victims was actually lower than that for revolver victims."

Second, the nation's murder rate, which began declining three years before the ban was imposed in 1994, has continued to decrease since the ban expired in 2004. Murder rates fell to a 48-year low in 2011, by some accounts nearly the lowest point in U.S. history, and it dropped another two-percent in the first half of 2012, according to a preliminary report by the FBI.

This decrease is important to consider in the context of the gun control debate, because it has taken place as the numbers of privately-owned firearms and magazines that gun control supporters want to ban have risen to all-time highs. Ironically, the types of rifles, shotguns, handguns, and ammunition magazines that gun control supporters want banned are the very ones that Americans have been acquiring in the greatest numbers, especially during periods when politicians who have wanted to ban guns for decades have renewed their calls for banning guns.

Furthermore, in 2008, the Supreme Court struck down the District of Columbia's handgun ban, partly based on the fact that handguns are commonly owned by law-abiding people for self-defense. Not only are magazines that hold more than 10 rounds standard equipment for many handguns, firearms that gun control supporters call "assault weapons" and similar magazines that are standard for those firearms are very commonly owned as well.

Third, we can conclude that the new proposed gun and magazine ban would not contribute to public safety because criminals and madmen who are determined to cause the greatest amount of harm, and to do so with firearms, could do just as much harm with firearms and magazines that would not be banned.

Consider the horrible crimes at Virginia Tech University in 2007 and at Columbine High School in 1999. In Virginia Tech, the madman used two handguns, one that used 15-round magazines and one that used 10-round magazines, the latter of which would be legal under the currently proposed ban. The madman fired and emptied 17 magazines. The official report on the crime concluded that a 10-round magazine limit would not have made much difference in the outcome.

At Columbine, the killer who fired the most ammunition did so with a firearm equipped with only 10-round magazines.

Furthermore, it would do well to remember that the 10-round magazine limit of 1994 led to the introduction of handguns that were designed to comply with the ban, but which—again, ironically—were the type of firearm that gun control supporters had most wanted banned since the 1960s. I'm referring to ultra-compact handguns, in this case those just barely large enough to hold 10 rounds of ammunition, as dictated by the 1994 ban.

There is one other important thing that I must consider where the proposed ban is concerned, beyond the question of such a ban's potential to reduce crime.

As a law enforcement professional, I swore an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Florida. Both documents guarantee the right of the people to keep and bear arms for defensive purposes.

Some people question whether Americans “need” a semi-automatic rifle like the AR-15, or a handgun equipped with a 15- or 17-round magazine, to defend them. I believe that no one knows better what a person “needs” than the person herself or himself. It comes as no surprise to me, that the firearms and magazines that gun control supporters want to ban are the very ones that millions of Americans believe are best for the defensive needs.

It’s just a matter of common sense why a person who carries a handgun for self-defense away from home, or who keeps a handgun or a rifle beside his or her bed at night, would want a magazine that holds well more than 10 rounds.

Law enforcement officers face the very same criminals that other Americans do, but law enforcement officers have many circumstantial advantages that other Americans do not enjoy. Law enforcement officers carry multiple magazines on their duty belts, and they are not limited to 10 rounds. Many have rifles or shotguns in their patrol cars. They have radios that they can use to call for back up in an emergency. And they often have advance warning that they are about to encounter a felon.

Other Americans, if attacked by the same kinds of criminals, are often taken by surprise, and they are carrying only the one magazine that is in their firearm. I don’t know anyone who has had to use a firearm for self-defense who has said, after the fact, that they wished that they had not been carrying more than 10 rounds of ammunition.

As an American and as a former law enforcement professional, I oppose the gun-and-magazine-ban legislation that has been proposed. It would infringe on the right of Americans to keep and bear the arms of their choice for defensive and other legitimate purposes, and it would not prevent crimes.

In addition to infringing on the rights of law-abiding gun owners, study after study has shown that the proposed assault weapons ban would have little, if any, impact on violent crime. As I mentioned above, now is not the time for feel-good legislation that gives the appearance of a solution, it is time for real solutions that address the culture of violence that glorifies murder and mayhem, and sound policies that deal with how to prevent the mentally ill from obtaining firearms.