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Gun Safety Measures Must Be Enacted Now

By Rep. Gary Hebl

I am deeply saddened by the tragic events that occurred in Las Vegas. We have too often heard that the latest massacre is now “the deadliest mass shooting in American History.” When tragedies like this happen I hope that as a country we will be able to come to a consensus on sensible gun reform to lower the chance that this will happen again. Every time I have been disappointed.

The pro-gun lobby and its allies won’t budge one inch. They hit back at proposed gun control measures by deflecting, saying “it’s not a gun problem, it’s a mental health issue.” The problem with that is pro-gun legislators are also the same group of people in Congress that have continued the push to gut health care. Their solution is, apparently, more guns and less mental health care.

We are going backwards.

Mental health is a serious concern when talking about gun ownership. Wisconsin already has some statutes in place that deal with this issue. Current Wisconsin law prohibits purchase or possession of a firearm if a person has been found not guilty of a felony due to mental disease or defect, or found not guilty or not responsible for a crime elsewhere that would be a felony in Wisconsin by reason of insanity or mental disease, defect or illness. So while there may be more we can do, it is obvious that Wisconsin has already taken steps to prevent mentally ill people from possessing firearms. Which means we must focus on sensible gun control measures.

Gun control supporters such as myself are not advocating draconian measures like full-scale gun confiscation or bans. Simple measures would make drastic improvements while still ensuring the Constitutional right to bear arms. Some of these measures include:

- A 48-hour waiting period after purchasing a gun
 - Until 2015, this had been law in Wisconsin for 40 years. We must reinstate it. This waiting period can be spent checking into a person’s background and can also serve as a cooling off period for crimes of passion, giving potential criminals adequate time to rethink what they had planned to do.
- Ban on large capacity ammunition magazines
 - There is no reason to have large capacity magazines. They are not necessary for hunting. Home intruders don’t generally stick around for a firefight inside a house, so high capacity magazines are not necessary for personal or home protection. But they can lead to a higher casualty count during a mass shooting.

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- Ban on bump stocks
 - This has received more attention in the wake of the Las Vegas shooting. Bump stocks allow semi-automatic rifles to shoot as quickly as fully automatic rifles (which are, thank goodness, mostly banned in the United States). If we had the common sense to prohibit fully automatic weapons, it should be a no brainer to disallow semi-automatic guns acting in the same manner as fully automatic guns.
- Close the “gun show loophole”
 - Most gun sellers are federally licensed, and are required to perform background checks before finalizing a transaction. However, private sellers, including some at gun shows - who are not in the business of selling guns but occasionally sell them- do not have to perform background checks before the sale is finalized. We must close this loophole so that we can ensure that we have a safeguard against those who should not possess dangerous weapons.
- Getting guns out of the hands of domestic abusers
 - Wisconsin does not prohibit those convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors from purchasing or possessing firearms. The majority of mass shootings (in which four or more people are killed) are related to domestic violence. We need to get these weapons out of the hands of individuals that have shown a history of violent behavior before it leads to something worse. I plan to introduce legislation soon that addresses this issue.

Gun control does not mean abolition of the Second Amendment. Gun control and the Second Amendment can live together side by side. What we need is sensible legislation, in Wisconsin and nationwide, that can help prevent gun deaths. That includes looking at gun control laws as well as mental health issues.

There will, inevitably, be someone who says “Now is not the time to discuss gun control.” But that’s not the right attitude to take. The time to talk about gun safety is *always* “right now.” We have to talk about it now so that we no longer have to keep seeing the phrase “the deadliest mass shooting in American history” again and again. We have to talk about it now so that we don’t have more families dealing with the lives of loved ones being cut short. We have to talk about it now because the people that are telling us to not talk about it are depending on us moving on to the next news story so that we *never* end up talking about it.

There are steps that can be taken without infringing Constitutional rights. If even one life can be saved by any of these reforms, we owe it to the citizens of this state and this country to consider them.

Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46th Assembly District, which includes the Cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the Village of Cottage Grove, and the Townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.

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