



Time has come to curb gun violence

By **Portsmouth Herald Editorial Board**

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It took the deaths of 20 young children to do it, but the country is finally horrified enough to call for an end to the sale of assault weapons — and Washington is finally listening.

Few events in recent human history are more horrific than the one that unfolded last Friday at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. As surely everyone of us reading this today knows by now, 20-year-old Adam Lanza walked into the school with his .223 caliber Bushmaster AR-15 rifle, two handguns and several hundred rounds of ammunition and mowed down 20 6- and 7-year-olds. Throughout the country and in our own communities as well, we have mourned the loss of these youngsters and the six adults who were also killed at the school. We have hugged our children a little tighter at night, we have said a prayer for parents who are facing the worst nightmare imaginable — and many of us are outraged.

Yet what happened in Newtown has happened before — not on the scale, and not involving such vulnerable young victims, perhaps. But in this 21st-century American culture that glorifies violence, the recent annals of mass killings are many.

- In August, two people were killed and eight were injured by a lone gunman in front of the Empire State Building. That same month, six people were killed at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis.
- In July, a man wearing a mask walked into a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., and opened fire during a

showing of the Batman film "The Dark Knight Rises." Twelve people were killed and 58 were wounded.

- In April, a gunman killed seven and wounded three people in a rampage at a Christian college in Oakland, Calif.
- And let us not forget the 9-year-old girl who was killed when Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in Tucson, Ariz., in January 2011.

That so many of these victims were adults instead of children makes their deaths no less traumatic for the loved ones they left behind.

It is far past time for Washington to reinstate the assault weapons ban it lifted in 2004. While clearly President Barack Obama didn't see the light during his first term of office, when all of the mass killings we have mentioned occurred, he is at last ready to move. He has put Vice President Joe Biden in charge of developing a response to the Newtown shootings, including restrictions on assault weapons and the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips. He'll have the support of Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., Congresswoman-elect Carol Shea-Porter, D-N.H., Sen.-elect Angus King, I-Maine, and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, D-Maine. Sen. Susan Collins supported the ban in 2004 and anticipates she may do so again. Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., won't even bring up the subject. She clearly cares more about being a rising star in the Republican Party than about seeing a 6-year-old shot in the face.

The National Rifle Association has to be part of the solution as well. When the NRA holds its much ballyhooed press conference today, it should be to say that it will back a reinstatement of the assault weapons ban. The Second Amendment right to bear arms must be tempered with the horrible reality of what these weapons do.

The time is right to move. We're not so naive as to think an assault weapons ban will solve all the problems, but it's an important and necessary start, and it would send a strong message. As Rye Police Chief Kevin Walsh said, "There's only one reason for an automatic rifle, and that's to kill. Why would a civilian want one of those?"