

Another View -- David Sherman: Going after 'assault weapons' won't stop mass shootings

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In the wake of the incident at Newtown, Conn., the thundering herd from the left, joined by those who are unfamiliar with firearms, screams for more gun restrictions. The problem with that is the old maxim that if guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns. It is not only true; it has been proven by the fact that communities that have virtually banned guns have the highest crime rates. If you were a thief or a burglar, where would you go? The simple fact is that gun laws are only followed by law-abiding gun owners, who are not the problem.

The answer for the anti-gun activists is to go after the hardware, specifically, the AR-15 "assault rifle." The fact is that at close range, a semi-automatic 12-gauge shotgun would have been far more lethal in Newtown. Yet I must admit that so-called assault weapons seem to be the choice of crazed kids. Why? Why was Adam Lanza dressed in military-style battle dress? Why were Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold dressed in goth-style, long overcoats at Columbine?

The obvious answer is role-playing video games and movies that show battle-dressed, assault-weapon carrying killers. These kids spend hours a day viciously murdering people with no remorse in their video worlds. Most understand the consequences and can separate fantasy from reality, but clearly some can't. They have an irresistible urge to act out these videos for real. They must become that battle-dressed, assault-weapon carrying murderer.

In the '50s and early '60s, gun violence was, for the most part, for good. John Wayne defended America against its enemies and citizens against bad cowboys. Today, TV and movies visualize a world of violence that reaches all societies and neighborhoods. The news is no better. The worst part is that this has become the new "normal." We know it's happened before, and we know it will happen

again. Law enforcement officials were concerned about "copycat" crimes after Newtown. That horrendous act actually appeals to a fringe element of our society.

To disarm this fringe element and other criminals, many want to ban certain types of firearms. Statistics prove that banning so-called "assault weapons" is a useless demonstration. According to the FBI, U.S. murders in 2010 by rifles (which include the AR-15) were 358. Handguns are clearly the weapon of choice for murders, as they were used in 6,009 murders. Knives were responsible for 1,704 murders, almost five times as many as rifles, and hands, fists and feet were the weapons of choice in 745 murders, more than double the number for rifles!

Already, federal law requires those purchasing any firearm to undergo a check with NICS - the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. Anyone who has committed a felony becomes ineligible for a legally owned firearm. The obvious gap is those who have never committed a crime, but are mentally unstable. If you really want to solve the problem, consider the following steps:

- . Require mental health specialists to report those patients they believe should be ineligible to the FBI for inclusion in its database. I know that would be a difficult law to enact, but the criteria could be worked out and the method developed.
- . Require that anyone committing a crime with a firearm faces a mandatory prison sentence.
- . Make anyone found with an illegal firearm shown through a ballistics check to have been involved in a crime liable for that crime. That would reduce the sales of illegal weapons on the street.
- . Impose serious regulations on the violence level of video games and who is legally able to play them. Include real

consequences for those selling these games to minors.

Although I own and on occasion carry firearms, I am not a "gun nut." If I could afford it, I'd be a collector of historical

firearms, but my firearms will only be used for sport shooting and, if necessary, to defend myself or others from violent criminals. Don't disarm the honest citizens. Don't disarm me. Go after the criminals and mentally insane.

David Sherman is retired and living in New Boston.