

Happy New Year Community Comment: Mike Goldsby, January 2, 2013

Happy New Year! Even though it is just symbolic, New Year gives us a chance to reflect back and to visualize ahead.

It is hard to look back without thinking of the tragedy in Connecticut at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The killings were senseless but being human, we are trying to make sense of it. The actions of one deeply disturbed young man horrified the nation. It is very clear that he needed help, including professional therapy and perhaps even involuntary psychiatric treatment.

The tragedy has also ignited the debate about guns and gun control. By definition, debate is about one side triumphing over the other. Debates are more about shouting than they are about listening.

For me, this is a personal issue. Growing up in Southern Oregon, guns were a part of our rural life. We owned them and we were taught to respect them. I own three guns; An arsenal to some people but not much to most hunters or gun collectors.

Gun ownership is a constitutional right. One intended purpose is to have an armed populace that could act as a militia. But the right to bear arms extends to individuals, who can own guns for lawful purposes, independent of belonging to a well regulated militia.

This has been further interpreted by some to mean that we own guns to protect ourselves from our own unjust government. With this interpretation, I guess marijuana cultivators are exercising their Second Amendment rights, protesting State and Federal laws that they think are unjust.

The issue is complicated but we need to talk about it. The Pew Research Center found that mass shootings do not really shift people's views on guns. Banning private gun ownership has very little widespread ~~political~~ support, according to Gallup Polls.

Gallup found much more support for increased background checks and gun registration. Banning specific weapons and ammunition comes in somewhere in the middle.

America has a high rate of gun ownership, 89 guns per 100 people, yet fewer households have guns, around 32%.

Mass murders are rare but shootings are not. The CDC estimates an average 32 thousand gun related deaths in the US each year. Over half of those are suicides. The rest include both unintentional deaths and murder.

Are there things we can do to lower this destruction yet still maintain the right to bear arms? Sure. We need to talk about trigger lock requirements, safe storage requirements, and effective background checks. Gun buy-back programs haven't proven very effective yet but may bear more consideration. I think it's time to discuss control of high-capacity clips and semi-automatic weapons. Physicians need to ask depressed or anxious patients if they own guns, just like they ask about alcohol use and tobacco use. We need to encourage people to seek counseling and we need early recognition and treatment for emotional illnesses.

Murder is not entirely preventable. People use knives, blunt objects, even their bare hands. But we need to talk about the role guns play in violence.

To a better new year.....

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment