

You can oppose the NRA and win. Time to defuse the myth if we want to end mass killings. (Guest viewpoint)

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An activist group protests an NRA press conference with a likeness of NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre Jr. (Paul Morigi / AP Images)

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By Robert Weiner and Ben Lasky

We are now five years past since Dec. 14, 2012, the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, 90 minutes down Rt. 91 from Springfield, when 20 first graders and six adults were killed in a matter of minutes. More national commentators than you can count were certain that was the event -- the killing of children -- that would generate real action to restore the assault weapon ban and institute background checks, yet it did not.

The Navy Yard shooting in Washington, DC in 2013 killed 12. Fort Hood in 2014 (13 victims). Charleston's Emanuel AME Church in 2015 -- nine dead. Orlando's Pulse Nightclub in 2016 -- 50 dead. A Las Vegas outdoor concert 2017 -- 59 dead, shot from an upstairs window. Some of these (Fort Hood and Charleston) were with handguns, but the big numbers murders were from assault weapons. In the daily White House briefing on Dec. 14, Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee-Sanders said, "Whether or not there's a regulation that could be put in place or not that could have prevented those things, frankly I'm not aware of what that would be." Huckabee-Sanders went on to say that the Trump Administration looks for every opportunity to save American lives -- except for the ones that apply to what's happening around assault weapons and background checks.

We hear each time a call for thoughts and prayer for the victims, and now is not the time to discuss legislation. Why not?

If a White House really wants to prevent massacres like more Sandy Hook, they can draft a bill for Congress that does away with the gun show loophole, which allows private gun sellers to sell guns to anyone they want without performing a background check, and restore the assault weapons ban that was put in place under Bill Clinton but with an incomprehensible 2004 sunset rule.

The reason nothing has happened is the myth that no one can win elections by attacking the NRA and making guns a central campaign issue. Chad Pergram of Fox News wrote on Oct. 4 this year, "Democrats really haven't had a successful House or Senate candidate who ran predominantly on a gun control platform since former Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) prevailed in a 1996 House contest." That is not a true statement. Cong. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.) ran and won in 2012 by pushing against a pro-NRA incumbent, won again in 2014 and 2016, and remains in office, by specifically calling for reforms and opposing the NRA. A Virginia delegate just won by opposing the NRA. We asked Fox to run a correction but they have yet to do so. Knowing the impossibility of victory is an untrue myth could persuade others to try.

A 2015 Quinnipiac poll showed that 87 percent of Republicans and 84 percent of gun owners support tougher background checks, and majorities support other sensible reforms, yet NRA leadership will not budge an inch on anything having to do with gun reform.

Congressional Republicans discussed banning bump stocks (a homemade assault weapon conversion technique) following the shooting in Las Vegas. Those talks have all but vanished. Instead, on Dec. 6, the House expanded conceal-carry gun rights by 33 votes allowing hidden guns almost everywhere. That should make us feel safe.

If the NRA will not allow Congress to act on something the majority of its members and the American people agree on, then the majority of its members should leave the NRA and start their own group. This new group can make a rule that the top gun manufacturers can't buy the group the way they have the NRA.

Mass shootings occur so frequently in the US that they only make headlines when the death toll is high enough. It is well past time for rational gun owners to either take the NRA back or start a new organization. It's also time for Congress to stop laying in fear of the NRA when they can in fact be opposed successfully. If that doesn't happen, the US will continually be marking these anniversaries into eternity.

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