THE NEED FOR MORE EFFECTIVE GUN SAFETY MEASURES

The tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, is just the latest in a series of mass shootings in a country that makes it too easy to buy guns, carry guns and use guns. Federal law and most state laws allow the purchase and amassing of semiautomatic weapons with the most meager of limitations, and some state laws encourage the carrying of firearms in heavily populated environments and encourage their use whenever an individual feels threatened. Surely the idea that we should have a proliferation of firearms to protect ourselves is rendered an absurdity when elementary school children are gunned down. That carnage was inevitable, as are many more to come if measures are not taken to curb the ease with which unstable individuals can purchase and collect all the arms and ammunition they desire.

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, firearms are used to kill over thirty thousand people in the United States every year, including more than one thousand annually in New York State. More needs to be done to protect our citizens from senseless violence by supporting broad gun control measures. The federal government should follow the leadership of Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Cuomo and pass legislation that will make a difference. Recent efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement regarding gun control measures are encouraging, but should not fall short of what is actually needed to bring about effective change.

The lack of effective federal gun control measures puts New York City, along with the rest of the nation, in jeopardy. There is much that can be done to regulate firearms, consistent with the Second Amendment, to make it harder for potential mass murderers to produce such carnage. The lapsed federal assault weapon ban and the lack of federally required

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2 New York’s recently passed SAFE Act legislation address loopholes in New York State’s gun laws, including most importantly: closing the private seller/gun show loophole by requiring universal background checks for all gun sales, making eligibility requirements for firearm licenses more stringent, enacting procedures to remove firearms from people who have been adjudicated incompetent or who have been determined to be dangerous by mental health professionals, prohibiting highly dangerous weapons by expanding the definition of illegal “assault weapon,” and creating new Penal Law offenses and increasing penalties for some current firearm offenses.
comprehensive background checks, particularly the private sale loophole that allows guns to be purchased without any background check, are the most pressing problems. We also need tighter limitations on the secondary market for firearms, on “straw purchases” by eligible people for individuals not legally eligible to obtain firearms, and on high-capacity ammunition magazines.

Of particular relevance to New York City, the illegal flow of guns between states needs to be staunched.

There is federal legislation pending in the House of Representatives that presents an opposing point of view and is particularly dangerous: The Respecting States' Rights and Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act (H.R. 578) would override the laws of every state, including New York, by forcing each state to accept concealed handgun carry permits from every other state, even if the permit holder would not be allowed to carry or even possess a handgun in the state where he or she is traveling. Currently, New York does not recognize any out of state concealed firearm permits. The bill would undercut New York’s strong licensing framework by requiring acceptance of a lowest common denominator approach to licenses. For example, anyone denied a license in New York could circumvent the law and obtain a license from another state with more lax standards and carry that gun into New York. Some states have flawed permit schemes that do not track current permit holders or revocations and allow convicted felons to slip through the cracks and carry concealed, loaded weapons. New York would be forced to allow those individuals to carry guns in New York. Simply put, the bill would be a nightmare for New York law enforcement, forcing them to apply the laws of every other state and making it difficult to verify permits because there is no national database to verify concealed carry permits and permits in many states are easily forged. For these reasons, we oppose H.R. 578.

We applaud the members of Congress who are working towards reforming the laws that govern gun ownership and usage in this country and we understand the hurdles they face. We encourage them to think broadly and to act boldly. Only then will we be able to say that, as a country, we have tried our best to prevent another tragedy.

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