

Sensible, Balanced Approach Needed to Halt Gun Violence

By Senator Pete Campos

Our right to bear arms must be respected and honored, but responsible gun owners must recognize that principled compromises are necessary to ensure the public's and our personal safety, and to preserve our treasured right to own firearms.

Neither an unwavering allegiance to the Second Amendment's right to bear arms nor advocacy of impractical or intrusive restrictions on gun ownership will help stop the senseless killings and loss of life across America. We should pursue a sensible and balanced approach that addresses everything from what types of firearms can be owned and by whom to improvements in our mental health, substance abuse and education systems.

Too many of our children are being raised by "playing" increasingly lifelike video games that glorify violence, mayhem and the use of assault weapons instead of "playing" outdoors in ways that glorify friendship, spark imagination and honor our natural environment. For too many children, being violently bullied and shunned in school has replaced the relatively mild indignation of simply being picked last for a team. School discipline has "evolved" from serving detention after school to being expelled, depriving the student of a chance at an education and forcing working parents to either stop working to stay at home or leave their child at home alone.

Increasingly stressful economic pressure and decreasing availability of mental health services threatens to push more and more individuals and families to the breaking point.

At the same time, the ease with which an individual can buy an easily concealed handgun, an assault rifle and high-capacity magazines and the multitude of places it is legal to carry firearms in New Mexico potentially places all of us in increasing danger. As gun ownership rights advocates, we must recognize that there are in fact differences in the purposes between a shotgun, a bolt-action rifle and an AR-15, and that we can accept sensible and reasonable restrictions on gun and ammunition sales without abandoning the rights guaranteed by the Second Amendment.

As a society, we will not ban the sale of all firearms or restrict their sale to law-abiding citizens. We should, however, consider a range of other options, including more thorough instant background checks supported by more complete national databases; limits on the sale of high-capacity magazines; more aggressive steps to prohibit firearm sales to the mentally ill; more gun safety courses, firearm safety public awareness programs and support for high-tech safeguards that make it impossible for guns to be fired by anyone other than an owner; and firearm buy-back programs across the state and the nation. Similarly, while as a society we cannot expect government to fix all that is wrong in our families, schools and economy, we can and should devote more time, energy, money and other resources to early childhood development programs, initiatives that support families socially and financially, and school programs that not only prepare students for productive lives but also identify struggling or troubled students early and provide them with the specialized assistance they need to succeed.

The problem we face today, personified by the growing number of victims of tragic mass killings that garner national attention and by the victims of less publicized domestic violence and suicide, requires a holistic solution. All sectors of society and government must be involved — and all must be willing to compromise — if we are to successfully achieve a goal upon which we can all agree: taking and keeping weapons out of the hands of people who should not have them.