

A rational discussion on guns

Written by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr.
Thursday, 10 January 2013 08:24 -



The president is committed to reforming our gun laws; a working group headed by Vice President Joe Biden is considering a broad agenda. The proposals mentioned, not formally announced yet, already are being strafed by politicians in both parties. Before everyone goes to the barricades, it would be worth trying to have a rational discussion.

The reforms under consideration include the basic: reinstating the ban on the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. They include good governance: bolstering state reporting on felons, drug abuses, the mentally ill for the FBI database, strengthening mental health screening. They include what many of us would consider common sense: higher penalties for carrying a gun near our schools. And they include applying regulations already in place universally: requiring a background on every gun sale to check to screen out felons, the mentally unstable and terrorists.

Texas Republican freshman Sen. Ted Cruz immediately declared the proposals to be unconstitutional — but the Supreme Court has stated the Second Amendment doesn't forbid reasonable gun-control reforms. Democratic freshman Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, coming from the rural state of North Dakota, suggested the reforms were "extreme." Yet it is hard for anyone in an urban area to understand why we require a license and training to drive a car, but not to buy a gun. Crazy drivers and crazy gun owners can and do kill people.

In Chicago and most urban areas, this is a question of national security and basic public safety. Assault weapons outgun our police. Handguns shoot up innocent victims in drug wars. Terrorists and the drug cartels too easily find access to guns. And those who have a gun in the house for protection are more likely to shoot a relative than a robber.

A rational discussion on guns

Written by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr.
Thursday, 10 January 2013 08:24 -

In more rural states, of course, guns are central to a culture of hunting and a spirit of liberty. Gun shops, gun shows and shooting ranges are widespread. Hunting is a ritual often passed from father to son. Folks don't want their liberty infringed upon or their way of life disdained.

In this divide, there is still room for a national consensus. Few want terrorists or felons or drug dealers to have easy access to assault weapons. No one wants police to be outgunned. Only a minority of Americans accept a future in which schools become armed camps, and society is reduced to the days of Dodge City before the law came to town.

Most Americans favor sensible reforms. Three-fourths have consistently supported requiring that everyone have a permit from the local police before buying a gun. And 63 percent favor a ban on high-capacity magazines, according to a New York Times/CBS poll last year.

What stands in the way of these reforms is the gun lobby — the manufacturers and the front groups they help to finance like the National Rifle Association. But the NRA is not as formidable as legend suggests. As Paul Waldman reminds us, the NRA spent \$13 million trying to defeat President Barack Obama last year. Seven of the eight senatorial candidates it backed lost.

We can do a better job protecting our children and our streets while not threatening the culture of hunting or the rights of hunters. We can distinguish between hunting rifles and assault weapons.

After the horrors of Newtown, and given the daily death toll in our cities, it is long past time to get to it.