

Bill No.: SB978-1

Hearing Date: April 2, 2019

Committee: Senate Judiciary

Comments:

Thank you for hearing the pros and cons of this vitally important measure. I strongly support the language, concepts and intent of the current bill, but in lieu of what recently happened in New Zealand and that country's quick response to help prevent such insanity from happening again, I urgently ask you to please consider adding the ban of assault weapons (the wording in HB 3223) and large-capacity magazines (HB3265) to a final bill that would make Oregon a safer place and a leader in the country toward returning to a saner society.

What follows is a horrifying account of a slaughter which two Oregon young women recently experienced and some logic to support why it's so important to add the above measure to your final bill.

I'd like to share this with you. A former colleague has two daughters in their early 20s, who decided to go to a country western concert in Las Vegas not so many months ago. Yes, the concert where dozens of innocent people were mowed down by a madman. Their personal accounts are riveting, I'll try to capsule one for you:

A band is playing when shooting suddenly starts, there are screams, people falling down getting trampled, many of them shot. No one knows where the shots are coming from, or how many shooters there are. Everyone is in total panic, starting to run but not knowing where to run and would a bullet hit them next. More shots, more people falling and blindly running, not knowing where my sister is, is she hit, is she dead, more running, more shots. Finally no place to run as a chain-linked fence blocks my pathway, nothing to do but hurriedly climb it, still praying not to get hit. Getting cut, bruised but still running ... Meanwhile the other sister finally reached a place which seemed secure until they started bringing the bodies in.

Neither girl was seriously injured physically, but mentally they may NEVER recover, going through the emotions so many troops do who are involved in a firefight, wondering why they survived, feeling guilty. The recent suicides from 2 Parkland survivors and a father from Sandy Hook are exclamation points to this.

As a society none of our children or our citizens should ever have to go through this horror.

Now some logic.

First, our incredible country is based on freedom. Conversely and unsaid, that freedom must also be based on responsibility, because as we all know freedom without responsibility equals anarchy.

Certainly our Constitution grants us the freedom to bear arms, the ownership of which necessarily bears a tremendous amount of responsibility as these dangerous weapons can kill or maim. Of course the majority of gun owners are responsible. And a minority are irresponsible, we read about them and the results their shootings daily. And there are some gun owners in-between.

The hope, I guess, is that irresponsible gun owners mature into responsible gun owners. The fear is that responsible gun owners might slide the other way, which never happens, right? The truth is we all are

human and we all have a tipping point, when something happens and we instinctively over react without thinking. Maybe you've never hit your tipping point, I know I have, when I was in the service during the Vietnam Era and my commanding officer hid under his desk to escape my anger. What causes the tipping point? It could be road rage, could be an insult, could be job related, could be a bully, could be an assault ... the reasons are numerous and the human reaction is to retaliate. Retaliate with what? Probably whatever you have access to ... and if you have access to an assault weapon or large magazines ... we know the end to the story. And all the background checks in the world probably would overlook you as a potential mass murderer.

Now a hypothesis. Our Constitution grants us the right to bear arms, or rifles the gun lobby says. Okay. I've invented a rifle that doesn't shoot normal bullets, but it's projectiles carry poison gas, plague, chemical weapons. It's a rifle, so it qualifies, right? Sure it's only purpose is to kill lots of people. But it qualifies, yes? Would you in your wildest dreams think our society would let my invention be manufactured and sold to the public? Hopefully not, but in reality, what's the difference between my hypothetical rifle and assault weapons? They both have no other purpose than to kill a lot of people.

But we have the freedom to own them, some might say, until we attach that necessary responsibility we have to manage our freedom. Then we don't.

Please be responsible enough to add these to your bill. Our children will thank you, our grandchildren will thank you and I believe most law enforcement groups and first responders would thank you as they, too, never should have to face the seriousness and insanity of these unnecessary weapons.

Our LEVO group nearly had this on the last November ballot, but the NRA stalling tactics prevailed so we could not start gathering signatures. But we did have to gather a preliminary couple of thousand signatures to even get started ... so I walked through my NE Portland neighborhood and in less than an hour had more than 90 signatures. Two people declined ... a 20 year old young man who shouted at me "no" but his mother came running from the kitchen saying "I will." The other was a former federal prosecutor who said we already have strong enough gun safety laws, they just aren't enforced.

Everyone else ... almost all strangers .. immediately signed, some pointing me towards others. It is a unique moment for you leaders, please don't let it slip away.

I would wager any amount of money the New Zealand prime minister would give anything to have been in your shoes and have had the chance to eliminate public access to these weapons of terror before they are used again. "It's not time to deal with this," rings so false. It's past time, but you folks have a golden opportunity in the coming days to do the right thing. Please don't pass it up. After all, banning bump stocks nationally wasn't so hard, was it? Oregon can lead the nation in this before the next massacre happens and my first grade grandson won't have to tell me when I ask how was his day, "we had a lockdown drill."

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