



America is still reeling from the school shooting that occurred in Florida last week. In the wake of such a tragic and heartbreaking event, we're bombarded in the news, on social media ... truly, everywhere we turn ... not with words of sympathy for the victims' families, but with demands for gun control legislation.

In a time when a serious national discussion is needed to solve a very real and very serious problem, gun-control advocates have once again stolen the spotlight with demands that our nation's citizens relinquish their Constitutional rights.

As long as anti-gun activists continue to spin the false narrative that this horrific incident (and those that have come before it) could have been prevented by overturning the Second Amendment, they spectacularly fail the children we so desperately wish to protect.

If we truly want to reduce the threat of violent attacks on our children and families, we must set aside our political agendas and work the problem.

The availability of guns is not the problem.

The problem is that too many people are filled with such rage and disillusionment that they feel justified in taking the lives of others en masse.

Taking guns away from non-violent, law-abiding citizens doesn't solve that problem.

The Florida shooter, Nikolas Cruz, is an extraordinarily troubled young man. Both local and federal law enforcement officials were aware of his violent tendencies.

In hindsight, it seems obvious Cruz was a time bomb waiting to go off, yet when we turn on the nightly news, nobody is talking about steps professionals can take to intervene when they detect early warning signs or how citizens can donate time and money to organizations that work to prevent youth violence.

The fact that Cruz had legal access to a firearm is incidental. The fact that Cruz and those who have perpetrated other mass shootings over the last couple of decades were overlooked and dismissed before they became household names is significant.

To solve the problem, people on both sides of the political spectrum need to start focusing their attention on prevention long before any weapons enter the picture.

If every person in the country who is currently caught in the "ban-guns" loop were to stop for a moment and write down five solutions that focus on the needs of potential perpetrators instead of the weapons they choose when they ultimately snap, we'd be on a path to a safer nation.

There's no telling how many viable ideas could come out of a serious conversation between people who are honestly committed to seeing this pattern of violence come to an end. People who recognize the fact that access to firearms doesn't make people so unhappy they feel their only recourse is mass murder and (often) suicide.

Instead, the nightly news is filled with sobbing victims and legislators regurgitating the same, one-track talking point, in spite of the fact that their solution – disarming the American citizenry – would be ineffective at best and disastrous at worst. At a time when every possible solution should be on the table, it seems that those who are shouting loudest actually have zero interest in solving the real problem. They have only one agenda, and reaching any compromise that maintains or expands the rights of gun owners is not part of it.

The fact is, the only way to protect our children is to make sure the Second Amendment remains in place. Not because only people with guns can stop other people with guns (although this has often proved to be the case), but because our right to bear arms protects us from something far more dangerous than a madman with a gun. It protects us from tyranny.

If we give up our liberty, our children have no future.

None of us wants to see innocent children murdered. None of us wants to imagine the terror the students and faculty at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School experienced that afternoon or contemplate how helpless we'd feel if we were trapped in a classroom while a madman gunned down our friends and colleagues. And certainly not a single one of us wants any parent to lose a child to violence.

But in ignoring proposals for actual solutions and instead calling for federal legislation that infringes upon our liberties, the anti-gun contingent demonstrates just how little respect they have for their fellow Americans. Including those young people who are falling through the cracks and choosing murder as an option. And including the families devastated by the events in Parkland last week.

The moment the Second Amendment was brought into the arena, the 17 individuals who were murdered in Parkland last week stopped being innocent victims of violence and became pawns in a campaign to further a single agenda.

I cannot think of a worse way to honor the families that were torn apart last week than to enact a "solution" that not only fails to prevent future tragedies, but also strips the survivors of their Constitutional rights. Restricting the rights of law-abiding citizens to further a political agenda is no way to honor anyone's memory.

We cannot afford to respond to senselessness with more senselessness. We must focus our collective attention on solutions with true potential to protect our children. Stripping them of their rights does just the opposite.

Austin Petersen is a candidate for the United States Senate. If elected, he will not only fight further gun control measures, he will encourage legislators to explore strategies to prevent violence and protect our youth without infringing upon our Constitutional rights. Learn more at austinpetersen.com.

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