

THE OKLAHOMAN

Gun control proposals serve as empty gestures

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The mass shooting in California has prompted some to promote gun control laws while, bizarrely, bashing those who pray for victims as do-nothing phonies. But the gun control laws touted would have little or no impact on mass shooting incidents.

An analysis by David B. Kopel for the Cato Institute shows most proposed gun control laws are impractical and ineffective — even if you ignore constitutional questions.

Federal law already requires anyone who sells weapons for a living to conduct a criminal background check prior to any sale. Gun control proponents want that law expanded to include private sales, such as when a hunter sells a rifle to a neighbor.

But it would be almost impossible to implement that requirement. How would government officials know if one man

quietly sells another a hunting rifle, or if that sale occurred after the date a private background-check law was mandated?

Therefore background checks on private sales would require “retroactive registration of all currently owned firearms in the United States,” Kopel wrote. Yet real-world experience shows such registration efforts are folly. A universal gun registration effort in Canada was a “fiasco,” Kopel noted.

“The registration system cost a hundred times more than promised. Noncompliance was at least 50 percent, and the registration system proved almost entirely useless in fighting crime,” Kopel wrote.

Furthermore, criminals selling guns to each other in violation of existing law “are not going to comply with a background-check mandate.”

And mass killers have bought weapons — legally — despite existing background checks. Kopel notes that Dylann Roof, who shot churchgoers in Charleston, S.C., was previously arrested and admitted to using methamphetamine. Under existing federal law, Roof should have been banned from firearm purchases; FBI officials failed to enter him into the proper database.

John Russell Houser, who shot up a movie theater in Lafayette, La., was forced by a court to undergo a mental health evaluation in 2008. But since he was not involuntarily committed, Houser wasn't prohibited from buying a weapon under the 1968 Gun Control Act. Houser passed a background check and legally purchased a handgun in 2014.

Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez, a shooter who targeted two military installations in Chattanooga, Tenn., purchased firearms lawfully after passing background checks.

Oregon has some of the nation's most stringent gun laws, including background-check requirements for many private sales. Yet Christopher Harper-Mercer, who shot and killed nine people at Umpqua Community College, legally obtained

firearms.

Some suggest banning large-capacity magazines would hinder mass shootings. But changing magazines hasn't impeded mass murderers. In the Newtown, Conn., shooting, Kopel notes that Adam Lanza changed magazines seven times. At the Virginia Tech shooting, Seung-Hui Cho changed magazines 17 times.

What of so-called "assault weapons" bans? Kopel notes those bans are based on guns' cosmetic features and have little impact. Connecticut passed an "assault weapons" ban in 1993. The rifle used by Lanza at Newtown wasn't covered by that law or by the federal ban in place from 1994 and 2004.

Kopel argues a serious effort to prevent mass shootings would focus not on gun control, but on strengthening civil commitment laws since many shooters are mentally ill. That's a point we've raised as well.

Regardless, Kopel's analysis makes clear that the people offering empty gestures in this political debate aren't those who sincerely pray for victims of violence, but those touting gun control policies that are proven failures.