

**Roger Pilon Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato  
Institute :**

Except as it pertains to international or interstate shipment, gun safety legislation belongs properly to the states, not to the federal government, and state laws vary to reflect local circumstances. Over the past two years, the Supreme Court has made it clear that the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms is an individual right, but that states may reasonably regulate the exercise of the right. That's the focus of a number of lawsuits at the moment. It's conceivable, for example, that high volume clips of the kind the Arizona shooter used could be banned, but that's for legislation and litigation to determine.

The main concern of gun-safety laws, however, should be to protect the rights of law-abiding people -- their right to safety, and their right to keep and bear arms, including for self-defense -- by keeping weapons out of the hands of dangerous people. Yet strict gun-control laws do just the opposite: Dangerous people find ways to get guns, while law-abiding citizens are left defenseless. The evidence on that point, both here and abroad, is overwhelming.

We're left, then, with the very difficult problem of how to determine who is dangerous, and how then to keep weapons out of the hands of such people. In an imperfect world, we'll always err on one side or the other.

But solutions start at the lowest level. We've heard very little about the parents of the Arizona shooter, for example. We've heard anecdotes from neighbors, classmates and school officials. Yet that's where solutions must begin, to get such people "noticed," and into treatment. It may not help much with the "loner," or the person who "just snaps." That's where self-defense enters, since the police can't be everywhere. In short, whether as family or acquaintances, or as unrelated individuals, safety is largely an individual responsibility.