

Gun control: Has Newtown already been forgotten?

Newtown was supposed to change everything, said Dana Milbank in *The Washington Post*. But three months after the massacre of 20 children in Connecticut, “the NRA has already won,” and meaningful gun-control legislation now seems doomed to failure. Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will likely bring a bill before the Senate next week that would require background checks for all gun purchases and toughen penalties for gun-running—but he has already separated out provisions that would ban assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, saying they’re unlikely to pass. Republicans have vowed to filibuster even the watered-down bill if it includes expanded background checks, even though 90 percent of Americans support them. Last week, President Obama beseeched the country to remember how the killings in Newtown united us in sorrow, horror, and determination. “Shame on us if we’ve forgotten,” he said. Apparently, we have: Support for stricter gun-control laws has dropped 10 percentage points since the shootings, to just 47 percent. It’s a major victory for the NRA, said Doyle McManus in the *Los Angeles Times*. But supporters of the legislation have themselves to blame, too. Democrats can’t agree which measures to support, while pro-gun-control groups have failed to “beat the NRA at its own game: making legislators fear the consequences if they vote the wrong way.”

Given the nature of the proposals before Congress, said Gene Healy in *WashingtonExaminer.com*, perhaps “a little distance from the horror” of Newtown is no bad thing. Universal background checks wouldn’t have stopped Adam Lanza from carrying out his senseless massacre, since he had no criminal or psychiatric record; an assault weapons ban might have prevented him buying a Bushmaster rifle, “but not the Glock and Sig Sauer handguns he



Reid: No assault weapons ban

also had.” The reality is that school shootings remain extremely rare. We shouldn’t let a single tragedy cloud our good judgment and “spur a legislative panic that leaves us no safer and considerably less free.”

It’s ridiculous to claim that gun laws wouldn’t have affected Lanza’s killing spree, said Eugene Robinson in *The Washington Post*. Though he owned handguns and a .22-caliber rifle, he went to the Sandy Hook Elementary School armed like “a commando,” with an assault weapon and numerous 30-round clips, so he could kill as many first-graders as possible. Lanza fired off 154 bullets in just five minutes. Had he not had access to so much firepower, some dead children might still be alive. No rational person can doubt that robust gun-control laws make us safer, said Adam Gopnik in *NewYorker.com*. Gun deaths are significantly lower in states with stronger controls on assault weapons, trigger locks, and storage requirements. “Any impediment to violence, however low, is better than none at all.”

Even if Newtown produces no new laws this year, said Janelle Bouie in *AmericanProspect.org*, it doesn’t mean it has had no impact. Five years ago, Barack Obama and virtually all Democrats dodged the gun-control issue, fearing its political cost. But now Obama is aggressively pushing for change, and in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Colorado, and Maryland, governors and legislators have already enacted or are moving toward bans on assault weapons, limits on magazine capacity, and universal background checks. Just as gay marriage took two decades to gain momentum, the gun-control pendulum has begun to swing in the other direction. It may take many years, “but the politics of the issue are changing, and eventually, something will give.”

Only in America

■ An Idaho high school science teacher is being investigated by the state’s professional standards commission for using the word “vagina” in a 10th grade biology class. Parents sparked the investigation by complaining that veteran teacher Tim McDaniel discussed women’s private parts in a lesson on reproduction. “I don’t teach anything the textbook doesn’t mention,” said a puzzled McDaniel.

■ A U.S. Marine returned home from Iraq, only to be told that he can’t fly an American flag on his property. Hypoluxo, Fla., officials told Gregory Schaffer that the flag must come down until he gets a permit costing about \$1,000 for his flag pole. “I fought for the flag, and now I’m paying for the flag,” Schaffer said.

Good week for:

Starting that diet, after a new airline, Samoa Air, began charging passengers by the pound. Since heavier passengers use up more fuel, said CEO Chris Langton, “there is no doubt in my mind that this is the concept of the future.”

Bargain hunters, after a typo in a Macy’s catalog resulted in a \$1,500 necklace being priced at just \$47. Dozens of customers snapped up the 14-karat gold and sterling silver necklace at stores before the department store took it off sale.

Women, after Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban said he was considering drafting 6-foot-8 Brittney Griner, collegiate women’s basketball’s most dominating player. “Right now, I’d lean toward yes, just to see if she can [play in the NBA],” Cuban said.

Bad week for:

Parenting, after two moms had a fistfight at an Easter egg hunt in Seattle when one mom pushed the other’s kid out of the way so her own kid could reach the eggs first. One mom got a black eye.

Sanity, after a new poll found that 30 percent of Americans believe that a “secretive power elite” is conspiring to rule the world, and 15 percent believe the government adds secret mind-controlling technology to TV broadcasts.

Walmart shoppers, after a Pennsylvania man was charged with whipping out a handgun, firing several shots, and killing a deer he spotted in a Walmart parking lot. After arresting Arcangelo Bianco Jr., a wildlife officer conceded that “it was the nicest buck I’ve seen taken in Indiana County.”

Boring but important

An embassy fit for a Kennedy

Caroline Kennedy is being vetted for the position of U.S. ambassador to Japan, and the president reportedly intends to appoint her in the next few weeks. Kennedy, the last surviving member of President John F. Kennedy’s immediate family, was an early Obama supporter and served as co-chairwoman of his re-election campaign. Her appointment would continue a long tradition of rewarding political support with ambassadorships. But critics have attacked Kennedy’s lack of government and business experience, pointing out that she was forced to abandon her last, brief venture into politics—a bid for one of New York’s Senate seats in 2008—after a series of awkward public appearances.