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Congress must show courage when it comes to gun legislation

Pat Perriello | Mar. 22, 2013 NCR Today

I don't have much to say about the latest debacle in Congress over gun legislation. I think Ron Fournier has said it all [1]. Fournier also references an article by Mike Lupica [2] in the New York *Daily News* that focuses on the destructiveness of assault weapons.

These pieces are must-reads for all Americans who understand the need to address gun violence in our society.

The bottom line is that after the tragedy in Newtown, Conn., everyone understood that the status quo was no longer possible. Americans had an obligation to address gun violence in meaningful and significant ways. The safety of our children was the most important issue. Yet at the national level, we are apparently failing to do what is necessary.

We are allowing worn-out arguments and powerful interest groups to take the stage and win the day. How can this be? The laws being proposed are clearly constitutional. They will obviously play an important role in making us safer. Yet we listen to untenable arguments that banning assault weapons will not reduce gun violence. We are told that since no law can guarantee there will never be another mass shooting, we should do nothing. Data showing that gun laws have made an enormous difference in other countries are scoffed at. No one accepts these spurious positions of the gun lobby, yet their position seems to prevail.

Politics and money are carrying the day in Congress. Too many legislators, including Democrats, are more worried about winning re-election than they are in doing what is right for America. Where is the courage needed to stand up for protecting our children? Surely there are worse things than losing an election.

We can do better. We must do better. This isn't a question for debate. Americans know what needs to be done. We just need to do it. Now is the time to write letters to Congress, sign petitions, and demand action on this most obvious of issues.

I am a believer in the notion that half a loaf is better than none, and I will take whatever half-measure Congress is able to pass. This, however, needs to be the beginning, not the end of the legislative effort. There are some positive signs: Colorado just passed strict legislation in the wake of tragic shootings in their state. There is a good chance Maryland may follow suit. The efforts of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, former Arizona Rep. Gabby Giffords and others are encouraging. Yet the effort must be ongoing and persistent.

The small fraction of Americans who oppose this legislation must not be allowed to win. The United States has a history of a legitimate gun culture, which is not at risk. The attitudes of this vocal minority do not represent what the majority of gun owners believe. Reluctant congressmen need to be made aware that failing to vote to protect the children of this country from horrendous acts of violence will not be tolerated. It is time for Congress to show some courage. It is time for Congress to pass comprehensive, constitutional gun legislation.

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[1] http://www.realclearpolitics.com/2013/03/20/congress_wimps_out_on_assault-weapons_ban_304300.html
[2] http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/lupica-lanza-plotted-massacre-years-article-1.1291408