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Senate failure on gun control shows lack of political courage

Pat Perriello | Apr. 19, 2013 NCR Today

Well, it has happened. The Senate voted Wednesday on whether there should be background checks before an individual is permitted to purchase a gun online or at gun shows.

These would be the same kind of background checks required before any individual is allowed to work in a school or work with children. Yet, the Senate turned out to be six votes shy [1] of the 60 votes arbitrarily required to pass the amendment to a larger gun control bill.

I find the result unimaginable. Let me tell you why.

Upwards of 90 percent of Americans consistently support the measure in recent polling [2]. About 85 percent of gun owners approve [3] of the background checks, including gun owners in my home state of West Virginia.

The amendment itself had been tailored to address the objections of those who oppose the bill proposed by Majority Leader Harry Reid, including ensuring that no registry of gun owners will be developed. Any attempt to do so would result in a felony charge.

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., collaborated on the amendment demonstrating how two stalwart gun rights activists can put ideology aside to address the horrors of gun violence we have seen all too often. These two senators deserve to be recognized for their courage and common sense in this shameful episode.

Most damning of all is that senators found it in their hearts to say ?no? to parents and victims of gun violence. To stand on the floor of the Senate and say there is nothing we can do to reduce gun violence is, to me, beyond belief.

The obvious reason for the failure of the Manchin-Toomey amendment and others has to be the failure to exercise even a modicum of political courage.

These senators are not representing the American people. Instead, they are responding in fear to the power of the gun lobby. With its amendments, no one can say this was a bad bill. One might question how effective it might be, but it represents at minimum a good faith effort to make a positive difference.

Therefore, the only plausible reason these senators have for voting no is their fear of losing their congressional seat. Many commentators believe that ultimately they would not lose their seat and the greater danger may be in caving to the gun lobby.

But my question is, who cares? What is the point of being a senator if you can not take even a baby step to protect the citizens you are called to serve? Surely there are worse things than not being in the U.S. Senate.

Hopefully, they will bring this bill up again in a couple of weeks and it will pass. It is the right thing to do. It is past time to do it. It is such a small step that it is incomprehensible that it has not been done already.

There should be universal outrage and heavy pressure on every senator who voted no. This cannot be the final message we send to the parents of Newtown, Conn., and those who continue to suffer from every other gun tragedy.

Do these senators really want to say to the American people that there is just nothing we can do? Is this just how it is in the United States of America? Is this simply the price we must pay to protect our Second Amendment rights? Do we have to accept as necessary the next major gun tragedy?

No. We are a better country than that. The response of Americans to the bombing in Boston illustrates who the American people really are. These recalcitrant senators deserve our recriminations. They need to redeem themselves, and hopefully they will.

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/politics/gun-control-falls-first-attempt-newtown-supporters-re-their-resolve
[2] http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2013/apr/18/gabrielle-giffords/gabby-giffords-says-americans-overwhelmingly-suppo/
[3] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-34222_162-57564386-10391739/9-in-10-back-universal-gun-background-checks/