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Where has all the sanity gone?

by Morna Murray

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Maybe I am into song analogies lately. Or I'm showing my age. Whatever the case, it seems that nothing can happen in Washington these days without criticism all the way around. Thus, nothing happens. That is nothing new. But conditions outside the Beltway *are* changing. And something better change inside the Beltway or we are in serious trouble.

For instance, Newtown, Conn. Can someone possibly explain to me the position of the National Rifle Association in the wake of possibly the most horrific massacre of children in our history? Vice President Joe Biden, who is heading up the task force to address common-sense gun measures, was met with downright derision from the NRA after meeting with them Thursday. They called Biden's task force an "attack on the Second Amendment."

The vice president, noting there is a very tight window for action in Washington, said, "There is nothing that has pricked the consciousness of the American people (and) there is nothing that has gone to the heart of the matter more than the image people have of little 6-year-old kids riddled -- not shot, but riddled, riddled -- with bullet holes in their classroom." And yet NRA President David Keene continues to pound the airwaves with absurd Second Amendment arguments.

I am only repeating what hundreds if not hundreds of thousands of people have said. But tomorrow, it will be a month since Newtown. Are we really this dysfunctional? New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo went on television with a speech that should be shown 10 times a day in every public arena, saying we must "stop the madness."

"This is not about taking away peoples' guns," Cuomo said, adding that he's gone hunting and owns a shotgun. "It is about ending the unnecessary risk of high-capacity assault rifles."

Cuomo hits what many consider the basic issue here: People are afraid "the government" will take away their guns. If you haven't seen the interview of Alex Jones with Piers Morgan, you should. Jones' statement -- "1776 will commence again if you try to take our firearms. Doesn't matter how many lemmings you get out there on the street begging for them to have their guns taken from them. We will not relinquish them, do you understand?" -- may go down in history as one of the scariest and most revealing comments, underscoring the paranoia of people who oppose common-sense gun legislation. Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell called it "nuts" on MSNBC's "NOW" program today, probably a much more apt term.

Initially, I was a huge proponent of working together and bringing everyone to the table. Now I'm not so sure. How do you work with this level of insanity?

Then, though no comparison in significance to common sense-gun control but still on the topic of "everyone's a critic," President Barack Obama's getting heat for the "look" of his "all-male" inner circle. Come on. He has appointed two women to the Supreme Court. The White House staff is 50 percent women. And Valerie Jarrett probably has more influence than all those men in his inner circle. But criticism *must* be had. Everyone *must* weigh in. I'm the biggest supporter of diversity, but let's look at substance, not optics, please.

Now Jack Lew is getting criticism from all sides for his nomination as Secretary of the Treasury. He's not progressive enough. He's not conservative enough. Chuck Hagel is not conservative enough to be Secretary of Defense. Is there anyone who wants to look at what these two men have actually done? Is there anyone who wants to check their actual credentials and history?

Jack Lew is too close to Wall Street because of his tenure with Citibank, but Timothy Geithner was OK? Anyone who looks at Lew's background can see he is way more progressive than Geithner on regulation. Chuck Hagel is one of the most rational, sensible people in public service on matters of defense. He is *exactly* the kind of person we need right now, as we end two wars while the neocons yammer for a third in Iran.

I wonder: Is there anyone Obama can nominate for anything now that he's in his second term? I nominate myself for Nominations Monitor. I'm pretty sure someone will find out I don't always separate the recyclables. When they do, I'm dead in the water.

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Of course, the paragon of diversity, Mike Huckabee, slammed Obama for his choices. What does the former governor do these days? Oh, yeah: He's a growing media personality.

Everyone's a critic. And especially on common-sense gun measures, sanity has flown the coop. The general public overwhelmingly supports changing our gun laws, as poll after poll shows. Is there any way to bring some sanity back to Washington? We really need to get something done.

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