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Gun control matters

by Phyllis Zagano

Just Catholic

Can you tell me, what's the deal with everybody wanting guns? The last time I looked out the window, there weren't any British soldiers marching down the street. But the gun-rights hysteria gripping the nation has angry people talking about "concealed carry" permits while peaceable folks just shake their heads and hope for common sense.

OK, not everybody wants guns. But I've heard and read enough comments from enough surprising sources to cause me pause. And I simply do not think more guns answers anything.

The armed camp's Second Amendment rights that include concealed handguns and assault rifles are of relatively recent vintage. Over the years, the loose constructionists on the Supreme Court gradually opened the lockbox on all manner of weaponry. What Congress originally passed is this: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Does that mean only police and military may carry weapons? Or does that mean because the state may need to call up a militia, it needs folks to bring along their personal squirrel-shooting equipment? Congress passed the Second Amendment, we must recall, toward the end of the 18th century.

The National Rifle Association and its 4.5 million members hold sway over the conversation. The NRA supports essentially free rein for gun lovers. Lacking organized opposition, it slides all sorts of legislation through the grinder, such that state and federal laws are a sausage of conflicting concepts and controls. It has to stop.

The NRA has gone well beyond its original goal: to provide marksmanship training for potential members of the militia. Its founders, Civil War colonels William C. Church and George Wingate, learned too late that their Union soldiers had not been shooting cans off the fence during lazy teenaged summers. When

they fought, they couldn't shoot straight. So in 1872, Church and Wingate bought Creed Farm in Queens, N.Y., for NRA shooting matches. After 20 years, New Yorkers ran them off that moor. They moved to New Jersey.

So far so good. Riflery is a legitimate sport, and plenty of squirrels ran around in the 19th century, even in the northeast.

But now, in addition to training sessions and matches, the NRA supports all sorts of pro-gun measures under the Second Amendment umbrella. Hence, the Senate dropped an assault weapons ban from its gun control measure, and the president does not want a national gun registry. Get this: The Senate needs to *debate* whether to extend background checks for gun sales.

Hello? Earth to Senate: People's lives are at stake.

Gun control matters, and it matters big time. Once militia prospects, now too many teenagers are armed thugs. Witness the recent events in Brunswick, Ga., where De'Marquis Elkins, 17, shot a woman pushing a stroller. Then he shot her 13-month-old son. In the face.

No, that's not the NRA's fault, exactly. The culture of violence seeping from television and film productions threatens to flood the nation. But the NRA's lack of boundaries is a violence. The residents of beleaguered Newtown, Conn., which lost 26 of its own to a deranged gunman in December, recently suffered a spate of NRA pro-gun robocalls. Individuals, major and minor, are beginning to take notice. Even New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg plunked down \$12 million to mark his bet. He's sponsoring an ad campaign supporting background checks for folks who just can't do without a new Beretta.

The gun business has to stop, and it has to stop now. Too many people in too many places are venting their anger with weapons. Too many people in too many places are getting hurt. The roots of anger and the supports for violence are all around us; even humor denigrates the person. Compassion, kindness and gentleness are overwhelmed by roughness at every turn.

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I don't mind that the NRA advocates for gun safety and training. Maybe rural folks really need something in case the occasional elk wanders into the living room. Otherwise, I do not get it. No matter whether shooting skeet, rabbit or deer, I cannot think about firing a weapon. But the hodgepodge of local laws that brings handguns to teenagers is a disgrace to the Constitution. For that, I blame the NRA.

Here's the deal, and it really is the bottom line. When the NRA moved to New Jersey, it deeded its rifle range back to the state. By then called Creedmoor, the farm became the site of a mental hospital opened by the Lunacy Commission of New York State. Some things you just cannot make up.

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