

## Readers' action required

### Get behind common-sense agenda on guns

The Second Amendment is not in jeopardy. It is not going to be revoked or altered.

The right to bear arms, as awkwardly as it might be expressed in that amendment amid what appear rather limiting qualifiers (aren't we already paying for a well-ordered militia?), will not be abridged. No one is going to take away anyone's guns.

With that stipulation in place, might it be possible to have a discussion that would be considered reasonable and compelling were the number of dead caused by any means other than guns? Is it possible to take stock of the handgun killings in the United States and at least agree that, if for no other reason than that the number is by far greater than it is anywhere else in the developed world, we should be looking for ways to reduce the killing?

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence, a coalition of more than 50 national faith groups and organizations, is on the right track in its attempt to wrest the discussion of gun violence from the simplistic and fatal grip of the National Rifle Association (see Page 1). Not only does it have a good argument, it has good evidence showing the decrease in violent crimes in jurisdictions that have put sane gun control laws in place and an increase in violence in those places that have reversed such sane measures as background checks.

The national conversation about gun violence for too long has been fixed at two disparate points: outrage and helplessness. The outrage is evident most often after mass killings such as those recently at a military base, a historically black church, and a movie theater.

The website [shootingtracker.com](http://shootingtracker.com), a crowd-sourced listing of mass shootings, takes an interestingly different look at mass gun violence. It counts not just the shootings in which multiple people were killed, but those in which four or more people were shot, and it has determined, using that calculus, that by Aug. 3, the 215th day of 2015, there had been 217 mass shootings in the United States, more than one a day.

The pattern, however, is that after the rage, numbness sets in. Even the horrific slaughter of schoolchildren in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012 was unable to move federal legislators to enact what the public widely perceived as reasonable mandatory background checks. In the face of NRA money and fear-mongering, the country seems powerless.

While mass shootings grab headlines, they account for only 1 percent of gun-related violence in the United States. The vast majority of deaths — more than 11,000 in 2011 alone — are individuals killed by handguns.

In a recent *Washington Post* column, Fareed Zakaria draws a telling comparison. Since 9/11, 74 people have been killed in the United States by terrorists while the country, during that time, has invaded two countries, conducted military operations in many others, and spent more than \$800 billion on homeland security. Over the same years, more than 150,000 Americans, the equivalent of "almost three Vietnams," have been killed in gun homicides.

Franciscan Sr. Marie Lucey of the Franciscan Action Network puts her finger on it. Background checks and handgun licensing are not threats to constitutional rights. They would, instead, balance out the individual right to own a gun with the equally important rights of the larger community to be safe from the random and increasingly frequent deadly

force plaguing our cities.

The matter is a very real concern and was the cause of an Aug. 4 summit of police officials from a number of jurisdictions across the country who are agonized by the growing number of homicides, mostly by handguns, in their cities. The law enforcement officials noted that the proliferation of firearms was high on the list of problems facing major cities.

According to a report in the *Post*, one police chief described "going to shooting scenes now where you've got more and more victims being shot, you've got more spent rounds being collected as evidence, and we're finding more and more high-capacity magazines involved in those shootings."

The police at the summit recommend tougher gun laws and harsher sentences for gun law violations and for the use of high-capacity magazines.

Perhaps the problem had to reach epidemic proportions. Perhaps some of our streets had to begin to resemble the war zones on news feeds from what we would describe as lawless countries in some other part of the world, before the national conversation could move forward. The harsh reality is that sections of our cities are becoming lawless and deadly places for too many.

It is time to take action and get behind Faiths United's common-sense agenda. Write or call your federal legislator and insist that Congress enact laws that:

- Require every gun buyer to pass a criminal background check;
- Take military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines off the streets;
- Make gun trafficking a federal crime.

Being the world's leader in the number of deaths by handguns reflects badly on the vaunted "freedom" that enables such carnage. It's time to change the conversation and the law.

### Tell Congress world is safer with the Iran deal

In late July, Iran and an international coalition known as the P5+1 — comprising the United States, China, France, Germany, Russia and United Kingdom — concluded nearly two years of intensive negotiations with a historic agreement to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. As the accompanying graphic shows, Congress is in 60-day assessment period leading to the vote to ratify the agreement Sept. 17.

"After years spent teetering on the brink of war with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action offers an unprecedented opportunity for lasting peace," says the Friends Committee on National Legislation. "This deal seals off Tehran's potential pathways to a nuclear weapon and subjects Iran to a robust transparency and inspection regime. The world is safer with the Iran deal than without it."

The Quaker lobby group is one of many faith-based groups that have endorsed the Iran deal and are working to secure congressional approval.

In a letter urging all members of Congress to support the deal, Las Cruces, N.M., Bishop Oscar Cantú, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, called it a "momentous agreement" and — quoting Pope Francis — said "the negotiated framework is 'a definitive step toward a more secure and fraternal world,' a goal we all share."

According to organizations like the Friends committee, the Arms Control Association, Council for a Livable World, and the Center for Arms Control and Non-Prolifera-

tion, support for the deal extends to the entire U.N. Security Council, a very long list of former U.S. and international security leaders and advisers, active and former diplomats, and the majority of Americans. Support in Congress, however, is wavering.

To secure congressional approval, in early August, President Barack Obama began a series of high-profile speeches and appearances to rally public support for the agreement.

On a July 30 conference call with a large number of progressive groups, Obama said Democratic members of Congress were "gettin' squishy" on the issue and asked for help to stiffen their spines. "They start getting squishy because they're feeling political heat. And you guys have to counteract that," Obama said, according to The Associated Press.

Those interested in building peace by stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons should contact

their representatives and senators and tell them to approve the deal with Iran. The Friends committee suggests making these points:

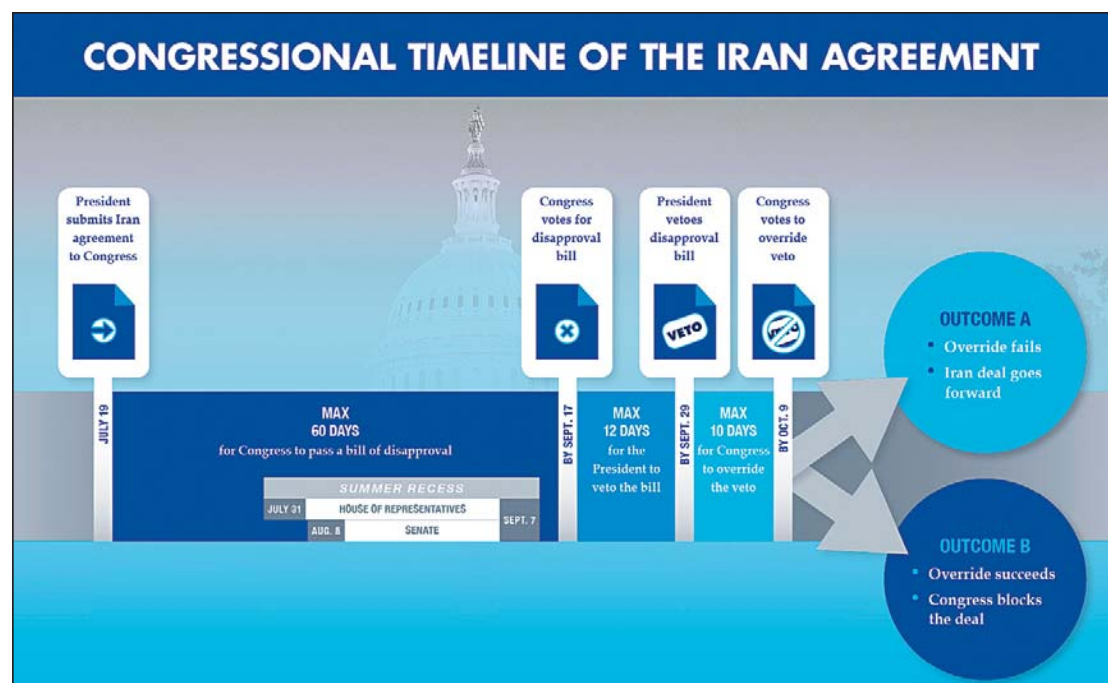
- The deal dramatically shrinks Iran's nuclear program. Under the deal, Iran will retire most of its centrifuges, eliminate most of its enriched uranium stockpile, and convert its plutonium reactor to operate exclusively for research. Iran would not have enough nuclear material to build a bomb, and restarting its program would take several months to more than a year.

• Inspectors will have 24/7 access to Iran's nuclear facilities. If the international community demands it, Iran has to grant inspectors access to other suspicious sites within 24 days. The waiting time respects Iran's sovereignty without jeopardizing the inspectors' effectiveness. The incentives of lifting sanctions were strong enough to keep Iran at the negotiating table and are strong enough to ensure compliance.

• This deal is only about Iran's nuclear program. The international community can and will continue to address Iran's human rights abuses and Iran's support of terrorism. The deal, in fact, keeps in place sanctions against Iranian support for terrorism. A more internationally engaged Iran may make diplomacy on security, trade and arms easier.

• Congress could jeopardize all this progress. If Congress rejects the deal, Iran has little incentive not to join the nuclear club. An active nuclear program — not this deal — increases the risk to our Middle Eastern partners, including Israel.

The world truly is safer with the Iran deal than without it. Applying pressure to our elected representatives will keep us on this path to peace.



—Courtesy of Friends Committee on National Legislation