



Nevada's suicide toll from guns

Within one week of the mass murder of 50 people in New Zealand by a white nationalist with automatic weapons, the prime minister announced the country would ban military-style semiautomatic weapons and assault rifles. Those violating the new law will face up to \$2,700 in fines and three years in prison. The leader of the center-right opposition party agreed with the new policy, saying it's "imperative in the national interest to keep New Zealanders safe."

Imagine a country that responds to a tragedy with such a unified, practical solution, protecting its people from zealots with overly powerful guns that no one needs.

Back in Nevada, we can't even agree that background checks should be uniformly performed when guns transfer ownership. Many rural sheriffs are defying the Legislature's approval of Senate Bill 143, which requires background checks for all gun purchases, even those outside of regulated gun stores. Although these rural sheriffs are hardly scholars of constitutional law, they've proudly declared their counties

"Second Amendment sanctuaries" and are refusing to enforce what they've decided is an unconstitutional law, saying they're sworn to protect the Constitution.

All GOP legislators voted against SB 143. Now they've offered their own Wild West "constitutional carry" bill, Assembly Bill 437, to eliminate required permits to carry concealed weapons. Republican leader Jim Wheeler submitted the bill on behalf of the GOP caucus, knowing it's dead on arrival. Democrats are united in moving the other way, towards gun safety. Wheeler's strategy seems designed to keep rural Nevada firmly in GOP hands, although it's unlikely to help the party with urban voters the party desperately needs to win statewide.

Nonetheless, we're left to ponder what should be done to enforce the new background check law. County commissioners in three counties—Elko, Lyon and Nye—have passed formal resolutions opposing background checks, with some openly declaring themselves Second Amendment sanctuary counties. Eureka, Lander and Pershing

counties are likely to follow. Will the governor and attorney general allow county governments to thumb their collective nose at state law? Will sheriffs be allowed to neglect their duties to make a political statement? Will big gun shows leave the urban areas (please!) and invade rural communities to sell their wares, attracting criminals and others who can't pass a background check?

As this issue plays out in the coming months, our leaders should take a close look at the 2018 suicide statistics, which show significant increases in the use of firearms as a means to commit suicide. In 2018, 57 percent of the suicides in Nevada were completed by using a firearm, compared to 52 percent in 2017. Rural residents used firearms for suicide significantly more than people living in urban areas. Nearly three-quarters of all suicides in the frontier counties of Elko, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Pershing and White Pine were completed with a firearm. 68.1 percent of suicides in Nye, Lincoln and Esmeralda Counties used a firearm, as did 65.3 percent of suicides in

Carson City, Churchill, Douglas, Lyon and Storey Counties. Suicide by gun is a public health catastrophe in rural Nevada.

According to "Guns and Suicide: The Hidden Toll"—a report from the Harvard School of Public Health—"Far more people kill themselves with a firearm each year than are murdered with one." The report contains horrifying information about the lethality of suicide by firearms, especially in rural communities, concluding, "Cut it however you want: In places where exposure to guns is higher, more people die of suicide."

Before climbing on their Second Amendment horse, the GOP posse of renegade sheriffs and elected officials should think about the serious harm they're inflicting on their communities with their constitutional interpretations. How about saving some lives instead? □

The figures cited here can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y6a69akk>

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8:30 A.M.
5K Timed Run

9:15 A.M.
5K Walk

10:30 A.M.
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