

## **Balancing Second Amendment Rights and Public Safety**

By Michael Wood

We mourn the victims of the mass shooting in Lewiston. Thoughts and prayers are important, but are simply not enough.

There have been more than 130 mass shootings in the USA this year. 35,000 people have died from gun violence in the first nine months of this year: 1400 of those killed were teens or younger. These are harrowing statistics.

In the United States, mass shootings have repeatedly sparked heated debates about the delicate balance between Second Amendment rights and public safety. It is a conversation that needs a nuanced and thoughtful approach to address the underlying causes while respecting individual freedoms.

We as a party firmly support the right of citizens to own and carry firearms for personal defense and recreational purposes. The Second Amendment is a cornerstone of American democracy, and it must be upheld.

At the same time, we believe that it is crucial to differentiate between firearms meant for self-defense, hunting or sport and weapons of war - namely rapid-fire assault rifles. Existing laws do not allow the general public to purchase weapons of war; these restrictions should be expanded to prohibit the purchase of semi-automatic assault rifles. These weapons have no place in civilian hands and have been tragically instrumental in multiple mass shootings. Ownership of assault rifles needs to be tightly controlled.

We support responsible firearm ownership and commend private organizations that promote and teach the safe usage of guns. Proper education and training play a vital role in reducing accidents involving firearms. Ensuring responsible gun ownership is an essential step toward a safer society.

Another critical component is a system of stringent background checks. Functional background checks help strike a balance between individual rights and public safety. Such pre-purchase screening ensures that those who should not have access to firearms may not legally purchase a gun. Those persons with a felony criminal record or a history of mental health issues should be prevented from obtaining guns. To this end, we support stringent background checks for the purchase of any firearm.

This is but one measure to help minimize the risk of firearms ending up in the wrong hands. It is simultaneously imperative to recognize mental health issues as a significant part of the problem of gun violence. According to the CDC, more than half of gun deaths in the USA were suicides. Rather than solely focusing on restricting access to firearms, we should also allocate substantial funding to public mental health programs. Adequate mental health services can help identify individuals in crisis and provide the support they need, potentially averting violent incidents before they occur.

Finding a balance between Second Amendment rights and public safety is a complex challenge. It is however possible to preserve our constitutional freedom to keep and bear arms while supporting responsible gun ownership. Tightly controlling access to assault rifles, implementing stringent background checks and investing in mental health programs are just three steps towards addressing gun violence in America - but they are steps we could take today.

Only through a comprehensive approach can we hope to reduce the tragic toll of gun violence in our country.