

Vestal: ‘They’re coming for your guns’ paranoia makes a mockery of real victims of mass shootings

Shawn Vestal/SR

Two days after a disaffected loner with a mountain of personal firearms shot up a community college, a group of North Idaho residents gathered in a park.

They prayed for the victims. They called for unity. They said the time had come for action.

“President Obama is coming,” the rally’s organizer warned them.

Coming for what? To take their guns.

Maybe you thought the nine dead and the torn-apart community of Roseburg, Ore., were the victims of the latest school gun massacre. But in this case, as with all of our near-daily mass shootings, there arose an insistent and grotesque chorus claiming that the real victims are law-abiding, responsible gun owners whose guns Obama is coming for.

You know who else thought it was important to buy more guns before some despot took them all away? The mother of the man who killed those people in Oregon, and who lived with him in an apartment filled with firearms.

The timing and tone of Saturday night’s rally at Coeur d’Alene City Park – a gathering in support of more concealed guns everywhere – would be bizarre if it were not so commonplace. It is now simply routine, this fervor from gun zealots in the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting, followed by a rush to the gun store for more.

“I’ve just ordered some more ARs,” the owner of a gun shop in Roseburg told the Guardian the day after the shooting. “There’s always a rush on them after a big shooting. We can’t keep the stuff on the shelves.”

Always a rush after a big shooting. People keep saying that nothing changes in our preposterous gun politics, and it sure seems that we have normalized school shootings, turned them into televised festivals of “healing” and candle-lit ignoring, where reporters and sheriffs sanctimoniously point out that they are not saying the killer’s name – as if it were a curse or a spell and not a fact – and we all try to make that pass as action, as addressing the problem, while any and every attempt to add practical, concrete safeguards to the system is thwarted, no matter how broadly popular it is.

But this isn’t right. Something changes with every single shooting.

Gun sales go up.

Always a rush after a big shooting. The single largest day of gun purchases run through the FBI background check system – the Black Friday of sales for the people who make and sell guns – came one week after the Newtown massacre in 2012. That was the day that the NRA’s Wayne LaPierre gave his unhinged “good guy with a gun” speech, and it became apparent that a school full of dead children would not only not dent the zealotry that controls this issue in America, it would also be excellent for gun sales.

A report by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms showed that gun production in the U.S. soared during Obama’s presidency. Another way to look at that is: Gun sales exploded at a time when shootings of four or more people at a time are a near-daily occurrence. The website Mass Shootings Tracker tallied 336 such cases in 2014, and 297 so far this year.

In the year before Obama took office, gun makers produced about 4.5 million guns, the ATF report showed. That jumped to 10.8 million in 2013, an increase of 140 percent.

It’s a sick marketing loop, with a killer slogan: He’s coming for your guns. They’re coming for your guns. Your guns – they’re being come after.

Which brings us back to Coeur d’Alene, “constitutional carry,” and the failures of common decency. The rally was organized by the Idaho Second Amendment Alliance, a group that has pushed hard for more guns in more public places. It is trying to get cities and counties to overturn laws prohibiting guns in public parks. It has taken aim in particular at Coeur d’Alene’s ban on firearms at parades and public assemblies. Saturday’s rally was focused on its push to get Idaho to adopt “constitutional carry” – under which anyone could carry a concealed weapon anywhere, no burdensome permit required.

The park gathering of about 200 – according to media reports and information posted by group members online – included the usual suspects from the self-described “patriot” nation: Some Oath Keepers, Matt Shea, Heather Scott (the Idaho representative who posed proudly with a Confederate flag, as Richard Butler used to do), and lots of conspicuous guns being cradled lovingly by their gun parents.

Organizer Gregg Pruett told the crowd that Obama “has made it clear on BBC that his biggest frustration as president has not been his ability to take away your guys’ guns,” according to a story in the Coeur d’Alene Press.

That is how Pruett characterizes Obama’s disappointment in the failure to pass “common-sense gun-safety laws.” It illustrates perfectly the main failures of honesty and responsibility on the part of the most extreme gun owners: their unwillingness to countenance the most minor “burdens” – whether it’s getting a permit for a concealed handgun or undergoing a background check – in an effort to make a difference, and their willingness to peddle nonsense in the defense of paranoid selfishness.

We've been encouraged to draw a bright line between "good guys" and "bad guys" when it comes to guns. But sometimes they sound awfully similar, and the guns they worship flow from the same booming market.

You know who else loves open carry? Whose beliefs and rhetoric would fit right in at a constitutional carry rally – right after the prayer for victims, of course? The mother of the Oregon shooter.

Here's one of her Facebook posts from before the shooting: "And when the mood strikes ... I sling an AR, Tek-9 or AK over my shoulder, or holster a Glock 21 (not 22), or one of my other handguns, like the Sig Sauer P226, and walk out the door."

Shawn Vestal can be reached at (509) 459-5431 or shawnv@spokesman.com. Follow him on Twitter at @vestal13.