

When it comes to guns, Idaho's view stands

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

"United we stand."

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

"E pluribus unum - out of many, one."

Blah.

Blah.

Blah.

When it comes to doing something about gun violence, the U.S. is so polarized you have to worry whether our experiment in self-government is failing.

Whether it's 20 students and six teachers killed at Newtown, Conn., 14 more murdered at a San Bernardino, Calif., office party or the 49 killed and more than 50 wounded at an Orlando, Fla., nightclub, the response is always the same.

Nothing can be done.

It's not as if anyone is talking about registering guns.

Nor is there a serious suggestion to ban military assault weapons. People even throw up their hands in defeat about limiting the capacity of magazines.

But how in the world has the country's politics become so sclerotic that you can't even make incremental steps?

How does restricting the sales of weapons to suspected terrorists weaken anybody's Second Amendment rights? Ask the U.S. Senate, where Republicans such as Idaho's Mike Crapo and Jim Risch voted against Democratic plans they considered too robust.

Net result: stalemate.

The country can't even get its act together filling the background check loopholes that may allow gun sales, largely over the internet, to go unscrutinized.

Somehow keeping guns out of the hands of convicted felons, individuals so mentally ill they have been adjudicated as dangerous to themselves or others and people with a history of domestic violence is an assault on gun ownership rights of law-abiding citizens.

How about untying the hands of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to research ways to effectively combat gun-related deaths - most notably suicides? You wouldn't think an investigation would undermine anybody's gun rights. But for two decades, the National Rifle Association and its allies in Congress stymied that effort by stipulating the agency may not spend its funds "to advocate or promote gun control."

More than a dozen attorneys general, including Washington's Bob Ferguson, have asked Congress to reconsider.

Why would holding a gun owner accountable for keeping his firearms out of the reach of minors weaken the Second Amendment?

And why isn't the gun rights lobby not more enthusiastic about developing smart gun technology? How would a gun that won't fire for anyone other its owner violate anybody's constitutional rights?

Public opinion is not standing in the way.

As the Associated Press reported Monday, universal background checks enjoy broad support - 85 percent told Pew they support the idea. A separate poll shows the idea has support among 74 percent of the NRA's membership.

In fact, the public would go much further than the politicians:

- 70 percent would support having the feds monitor who bought and sold guns.
- 57 percent would go along with banning military assault weapons.

But the answer in Idaho - and other rural states - is always the same.

Treat the mentally ill. Do something about terrorists.

All to the good. Reverse four decades of neglecting mental health. Address lapses in security. But where is it written that reasonable efforts to restrain gun violence should not be part of that same package?

The leave-my-guns-alone mantra prevails because the Senate gives voters in small states such as Idaho a voice equal to that of large states such as California.

No matter what the nation as a whole believes, a lot of voters in Idaho follow as gospel what the NRA says. If a candidate gets an "A" from the NRA, Idahoans tend to vote for him. If the candidate gets a "F" from the gun lobby, they don't.

All of which gives the gun lobby outsized leverage over how Idaho's politicians vote in Washington, D.C., or

Boise.

It's not going to change until ordinary folks in Idaho stop interpreting every idea that comes along, however modest, as the beginning of the end of the Second Amendment.

In their hands, Idahoans hold a veto over solving this problem. They also carry the burden that comes with

it. - M.T.