

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

If the participation in a concealed carry weapons class this weekend in Imperial serves as any indication, people here value their gun rights and fear future legislation could chip away at that.

Nearly 80 people attended the three one-day classes held here. That's an amazing amount. I'm guessing that most don't plan to carry a concealed weapon. Instead, they want to obtain their permit before federal legislation snatches that right from them.

The shooting of 20 innocent school children in Newtown, Conn., has proved to be the tipping point for more intense debate on a renewed ban on assault rifles, along with the banning of oversize clips and magazines.

President Obama has said new gun legislation will be introduced in Congress to ban assault weapons and stiffen gun laws. Expect a mandatory background check for gun purchases to be part of that.

In 1994, Congress passed a 10-year ban on manufacturing of assault weapons for civilian use. That law expired in 2004 and efforts to renew the ban have been unsuccessful.

Today, assault rifles such as the AR-15 (which was used in the Newtown and Aurora, Colo., shooting massacres) and AK-47 are flying off the shelves. Many want to get one before another ban goes into effect.

Even if new gun legislation passes Congress, they are not going to make it illegal to own an assault rifle if you already have one.

I'm no different in thinking my gun rights could be compromised. Last year, I purchased a handgun—something I had never owned my entire life. Sure, I've owned a shotgun for years, but never a handgun.

So why did I buy one? I was just like everyone else out there right now—afraid federal legislation could ban me from owning one in the future.

I'm not a member of the National Rifle Association and sometimes don't agree with their positions. But I do appreciate their efforts to insure my right to bear arms, as granted in the Second Amendment.

Both sides of the gun lobby must come together to find some common ground on legislation that protects our rights while helping to eliminate the likes of the shooting that took place in Newtown.

In my opinion, the first thing on the table is over-sized clips and magazines for any gun. Does the average Joe Q. Citizen need an ammo magazine for an AR-15 that holds 30-100 rounds? Or a 15-30 round clip for a handgun? I don't think so.

Then, there's the issue of background checks. I had a background check when I obtained my gun permit. Anyone purchasing a gun, whether at a store or a gun show, needs to have had a background check.

Gun shows represent the fly in the ointment when it comes to background checks. Correct me if I'm wrong, but they aren't needed to buy a gun privately at a gun show. I think that represents some of the common ground where both sides can come together as well.

None of us want to see another Columbine, another Virginia Tech, another Aurora theater or another Newtown. But none of us want to lose our rights under the Second Amendment. It's time to find some middle ground to protect us all.