Written by Marty Carlson Friday, 11 January 2013 08:30 -



In the November 2012 election to determine the fate of nine proposed constitutional amendments, 1.7 million Louisiana voters cast ballots on proposed amendment number two – and 73 percent of those voters approved of giving Louisiana the strongest gun rights protection in the US.

Then came the horrific, heartbreaking events in Sandy Hook, Connecticut.

And with it, as with past mass shootings, the horror generated a rekindled dialogue about the gun ownership rights in this country.

Those past national conversations have tended to lose steam as new national issues briefly emerge; but this one is different and appears to have a good deal of staying power.

So it seemed a good time to check in with Rep. Jeff Thompson about our state's recent adoption of a constitutional amendment that provides stronger protection of gun ownership.

Before Thompson's observations, a re-fresher on the amendment language: "The right of each citizen to keep and bear arms is fundamental and shall not be infringed. Any restriction on this right shall be subject to strict scrutiny." In the lead-up to the election, there was also discussion about the potential for changes in national gun ownership laws if the US Supreme Court saw new, and more liberal appointments to its bench over the next few years.

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Thompson, a co-sponsor of the amendment, said that it raised the bar in favor of the gun owner. He also noted that the legislation was crafted by the National Rifle Association (NRA) and is a first of its kind, model legislation.

"What passed was a set of instructions to our courts for how to review any attempts to infringe on your (gun ownership) rights," Thompson explained. "It doesn't repeal gun free zones, you still cannot take a gun into a courthouse or school."

As to the national conversation, Thompson said, "I think we're seeing people with a knee-jerk reaction ... let's leave these poor grieving families to grieve and put the first focus where it should be – mental health issues."

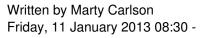
Thompson makes an important point; the people who have committed such horrors as the Aurora, CO and Sandy Hook, CT massacres are/were mentally ill. But they walk the streets today because we – through our state and federal leaders – made the decision some years ago that as long as the mentally ill were afforded out-patient care and took their medication, there was no concern.

This gun rights conversation appears to have tremendous energy – and could, without widespread public input, become a one-sided effort to ban more than assault weapons and high capacity magazines. News programs are filled with the likes of Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-CT, who proposes to pass new laws that are "better and stronger" than existing laws and without the kinds of exemptions and exceptions that now exist. Blumenthal also proposes background checks for ammunition purchases.

Worse, there's discussion of the possibility that President Barak Obama could issue executive orders to effect gun ownership restrictions. And Congress, no doubt gratefully detracted from the looming fiscal cliffs facing this country, will press to hold hearings, investigations, and who knows to what result.

This is a national discussion to which we should all pay close attention. We have been here before and perhaps did not make our voices loudly enough heard – we are now reaping the results of passing the Affordable Care Act so that "we can see what's in it."

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We need to have a voice in the American citizen gun ownership discussion – or live with outcomes we could have prevented.re

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