



Peter H. Wolf
Guest columnist

Unsafe at any caliber

In 1965, Ralph Nader published “Unsafe at Any Speed” about automobile safety. It became a national nonfiction bestseller. We should apply lessons from motor vehicle safety to gun safety.

There will always be car accidents that would not otherwise happen without cars. Some drivers inevitably speed, become distracted, use cell phones, run red lights or stop signs, get sleepy or wrongly assess what another driver or pedestrian will do.

There will always be shootings and killings that would not otherwise happen without guns.

It is inevitable that some users will get mad at someone (as trivial as road rage), feel their manhood is threatened, misjudge threats, shoot into crowds, leave guns accessible to third persons or children, seek revenge or notoriety, or act impulsively, immaturity, angrily or out of mental illness.

The more automobiles there are on our streets, the more accidents there will be. The more guns there are in circulation and carried in public, the more shootings there will be.

The syllogism of the previous sentence exposes the tragedy of the Supreme Court’s June 23 Bruen decision, enabling anyone to carry a firearm outside the home without a showing of special need.

The court’s newly discovered jurisprudence about the Second Amendment eventually collapses from its own illogic:

The Second Amendment is the only right among the Bill of Rights with a preamble (“A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of



John Parkin, co-owner of Coyote Point Armory, displays a handgun at his store in Burlingame, Calif., on June 23.

a free State...”). It takes Ph.D. historians to figure out the amendment’s meaning at the time of adoption. They disagree. The court has unfairly cherry-picked among them and the preamble has lost all meaning in the centuries since its adoption anyway. It was essentially ignored in the Supreme Court’s 2008 Heller decision, which created a new personal right to keep and bear arms.

U.S. Courts of Appeals since Heller have unanimously factored into their decisions a balance between the so-called right to bear arms and public safety. Yet the Supreme Court last month unworkably said courts must rely on ancient history alone, rejecting any balance with a transcendent right not to be maimed or slaughtered.

Unsafe at any caliber, continued

Of course, there are differences between motor vehicles and guns, and therefore the ways they can be regulated. Autos are for transportation. Guns are solely for killing — wildlife and humans, including by suicide. There is less safety concern with gun design than what kind of weapon it is, who is using it, and how it is possessed, carried and used.

Nader reoriented us. From exclusively blaming drivers for inevitable accidents, he taught us to be as concerned with the physical characteristics of the motor vehicles they were operating.

He wrote about suspension design causing rollovers, proper tire pressure, gear shift and “park” alignments, seat belts and air pollution. He stressed car design that would lessen injury or death to pedestrians and from “the second collision” inside the car as well as the initial impact.

His revelations led to mandatory seat belts, air bags, collapsible steering wheels, stronger passenger compartments, safer dashboards, gas mileage standards and the establishment of the U.S. Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration.

Even before Nader, we mandated age requirements for new drivers, written testing on rules of the road, eyesight examination and road testing of driving and parking ability. We required insurance, developed point systems that could lead to license suspension or revocation, perfected sobriety tests and even devised systems a judge could impose to prevent an inebriated person from starting a car. We also license and regulate motor vehicles themselves.

Regulation of guns pales in comparison.

We can tighten the types of guns available for citizen ownership, gun sales, waiting periods, age at purchase and buyer/owner background (mental, prior criminal record, threatening conduct).

We can mandate training, insurance, where and how guns may be carried, court-ordered removal of guns from dangerous people, magazine capacity, storage, ammunition, registration to enable gun tracing and technology allowing a firearm to be discharged only by its owner.

As Nader showed, since accidents will happen, we must, and have, designed motor vehicles and roads to minimize the damage. No matter the caliber, guns are unsafe. The more guns that are owned and carried, the more people will unjustifiably be shot.

The Supreme Court has said that some regulation is permitted.

We must press those boundaries relentlessly to minimize the likelihood of daily and mass shooting carnage — 45,000 people killed by guns per year! About 110,000 injured.

We must keep at it, federally and state by state, until the Supreme Court comes to its senses.

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