

The bombastic Wayne LaPierre, public face of the National Rifle Association, says he'd never participate in a national task force on gun violence, which will be led by Vice President Joe Biden. No sense, LaPierre says, in even talking to people who clearly want to destroy the Second Amendment, which the powerful gun lobby wears like a religious raiment.

But the truth is that the Second Amendment, ratified in 1791, was passed to protect state militias of that era from the threat of authoritarian government. It has been used, however, in modern-era debates over gun control as a justification for guaranteeing every American the right to have guns. Was that its original intent? It's not a simple question, except, that is, in the eyes of the NRA.

The lobbying group stands by that position no matter what. And now, in addition to the horrific murders of 20 children at a Newtown, Conn., elementary school (six adults also died) earlier this month, "no matter what" includes the ambush shootings of firefighters in western New York state on Monday.

A man, who as a convicted criminal shouldn't have been able to even have a gun, set fire to a house and car to draw firefighters in Webster, N.Y., near Rochester, and then shot at them with a semi-automatic gun like the one used by a young man to commit the Newtown murders. The death toll stands at three, but the incident still is being investigated.

Like Adam Lanza of Newtown infamy, William Spengler clearly was an individual with serious psychological problems. And like Lanza, he took his own life after taking others.

Real solutions

The NRA says the school safety issue can be addressed by putting armed guards in all schools. And just where would it end? Will the NRA's next suggestion be to arm all teachers? Or perhaps those kids in the upper grades could be given weapons.

Other countries, Australia and England to name two, have responded to incidents of gun violence with much stronger regulation in places where the laws weren't exactly nonexistent to begin with. Rates of gun violence in countries where regulation is far beyond anything in the U.S. are low, in fact, very low.

And the world has not come to an end in those places. People are not absorbed in the gun culture. They do not believe their freedoms are threatened because it is difficult to have ownership of a firearm. These are, of course, free and democratic countries. And while the public is certainly divided at any given time about the competence of prime ministers, they don't believe their leaders are members of a conspiracy to confiscate rifles and pistols.

The urge to arm oneself in such countries just isn't widespread. And the threat of gun violence is not a fear that seems to linger on the minds of many.

The opportunity

American legislators, including those in North Carolina's congressional delegation, need to stand up to the pressure from the NRA against even a ban on military-style assault rifles, a ban that was in effect at one point without any threat to the republic. But don't hold your breath. Many members of the delegation, most really, hold an "A" grade from the NRA, which means they step lively to the organization's called tune. They also get campaign contributions from the pro-gun lobby.

One "F" student, and proudly so, is David Price of the 4th District, which includes part of the Research Triangle. He favors the assault weapons ban and also more investment in mental health care, given that people who tend to commit such crimes needed help earlier in their lives.

That's exactly right. If only Price's colleagues would take his word over that of pro-gun lobbyists who stand against sane regulation that would make this country safer. The year has been too bloody, and the wait for reason has been too long.