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Weiner and Filtz: Still dawdling on guns -- how can the nation declare vaping 'crisis' but not guns and mass shooting?

By Robert Weiner and Zach Filtz Weiner was a Clinton and Bush White House spokesman, spokesman for the House Government Operations Committee and senior staff for Congressmen John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, Ed Koch and Sen. Edward Kennedy. Filtz is Policy Analyst for Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

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Robert Weiner

Courtesy of Richard A. Bloom

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On Sept. 25, under House Judiciary Committee Chairman Gerry Nadler, D-NY, Congress finally began hearings on banning semi-automatic weapons with magazines larger than 10 rounds. The Brady Bill had barred these and reduced mass killings, but Congress permitted these guns and weapons since 2004.

Under the radar and somewhat buried under the onslaught since the Virginia Tech massacre, 68 mass shootings have occurred since April 16, 2007; Virginia Tech's tragic day when thirty-two died. The two pistols used by the Virginia Tech mass shooter, a Glock and a Walther with high capacity ammunition, would have been outlawed by the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

"It's not mental illness that causes nine people to die in 30 seconds, it's a high gauge weapon," the famous journalist Cokie Roberts said of gun control, in her last ever interview on "This Week," Aug. 18, re-aired Sept. 22, following her death on Sept. 17.

A video circulating on the featuring Democratic presidential candidates advocating for gun safety reform has gone viral. It shows leading Democratic candidates Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Joe Biden, and punches the viewer hard in the gut. The video shows senseless killing assault rifles are used for, as well as the defensive“duck and cover” to try to survive, and shows children and parents buying bulletproof backpacks as modern-day school supplies. We are “stepping past Democrat and Republican,” the video says. It was made by Giffords, an organization supportive of gun control measures named for Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-AZ), who was shot and disabled.

A package of additional bills passed the House Judiciary Committee on Sept. 11, adding to the background checks bill already sitting on Senate Leader Mitch McConnell desk. One bill would allow judges to order guns taken from people thought to be a public danger; another would outlaw large-capacity magazines. A third bill would bar those convicted of a misdemeanor hate crime from owning a weapon.

However, Senate leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has made no indication of allowing any of these bills to enter the Senate, and President Trump has issued statements on both sides as he continues to meet and talk with the NRA’s Wayne LaPierre.

In the early 1990s, Congress got something done. The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act passed Congress in 1994 and became a key accomplishment of President Bill Clinton’s White House.

This law, also known as the Brady Bill or simply the federal assault weapons ban, outlawed three aspects of these weapons. It banned 18 models of assault rifles. It also banned features most commonly found on military weapons, including bayonet mounts, flash suppressors, and folding stocks. It also banned “high capacity” magazines, which this law defined as any magazine capable of holding 10 rounds. As of Sept. 2019, 24 out of 25 of the most recent mass shootings were committed using legally purchased AR-15 assault rifles.

The manufacturer of an assault weapon, Colt, said they will no longer produce the AR-15.

According to an AP VoteCast poll conducted during the 2018 midterm elections, 62 percent of midterm voters in the U.S. say that they believe that new gun laws need to happen.

By the closing of the gun show loopholes, America can make a clearer distinction about the legal or illegal status of the guns that are currently being exchanged off-the-books at shows. The gun vendors at these gun shows are not required to register as licensed gun dealers under the Gun Control Act of 1968. According to the nonprofit organization Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, it would make it much easier for law enforcement to track the weapons that are bought and sold. Most importantly, it would require all guns to be registered with the government.

House Judiciary Chairman Gerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said: “Recent studies of the effectiveness of that law (1994 Brady Bill) have showed that mass-shooting fatalities were 70 percent less likely to occur compared to the periods before and after the ban. Another study found that the federal assault weapons ban was associated with a 25 percent drop in gun massacres and a 40 percent drop in fatalities.”

Background checks are effective, and tighter control will help even more. Since 1994, 1.3 million convicted criminals were prevented from buying a gun, according to the nonprofit Coalition Against Gun Violence.

The Trump administration recently has declared a public health “crisis” of the 17 deaths from vaping. How can a president do that and not say there is a real crisis which requires stepping in to stop mass shootings?