

## David Trahan: Gun debate should be more about safety

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By David Trahan

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What is “gun safety”? For many Mainers, like me, that live “gun safety” every day, it means teaching the responsible and safe use of firearms and acting responsibly when you use and store a firearm to insure it is never used in a way that would bring undue harm to another.

In recent years though, that phrase has become a political term for gun control advocates to hide a much more aggressive agenda and, in a sense, hijack the work of thousands of firearm instructors and law-abiding gun owners across the state. If you Google the term “gun safety,” you will find hundreds of stories from in and out of Maine where “gun safety” is used to identify groups that want to pass numerous aggressive gun control measures.



Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine Executive Director David Trahan, shown in 2011 at his Augusta headquarters. Portland Press Herald file photo by Gabe Souza  
When you blend that fact with the numerous pro-gun control newspaper editorials that focus on the availability of guns and the need for tougher

regulations, the resulting debate has become all about gun control.

As a result of this one-dimensional debate, gun owners and gun control advocates have dug in for a long and nasty fight. To illustrate, I am reminded of the famous Second Amendment rallying cry from the late actor Charlton Heston, as he held a rifle in one hand above his head and with a clenched fist exclaimed, “out of my cold dead hands.”

On the other side, popular Maine author Stephen King dismissed gun owner rights in this famous quote, “How many have to die before we will give up these dangerous toys?”

Instead of fighting, perhaps it is time to tone down the rhetoric and look at real gun safety ideas that we all might agree on. In a series of columns, I will share some of the knowledge I have accumulated as a state legislator and gun owner. I will offer a number of gun safety ideas that, when combined, would save lives.

I will cover the safe storage of firearms first, then domestic violence, school security and finally education. I hope people will read these columns for what they are — a sincere attempt to make our communities safer and start the gun safety debate down a more productive path.

For years, gun locks have been promoted as a cheap way to make firearms safe. Unfortunately, my experience is that thousands of gun locks are used a few times and then are either discarded, end up in back of a drawer with spare batteries and broken flashlights, or are tossed out altogether. Yes, some people use them, but their effectiveness is limited.

I am not advocating for anyone to stop distributing gun locks. Instead, I’m asking for Maine people and the Legislature to consider making all firearm safety equipment more accessible through incentives.

At my request, Rep. Patrick Corey, R-Windham, has introduced legislation to create a new tax credit of up to \$250 and a sales tax exemption for the purchase of gun safes, lock boxes and other firearm safety equipment.

Most firearm owners have more than one firearm; many have a dozen or more. Wouldn’t it make more sense to own a gun safe capable of securing all the firearms in a home than trying to maintain a gun lock and key for every gun?

In addition to gun safes, handgun lock box technology allows handgun owners to purchase safes with complex locking mechanisms such as fingerprint recognition and computer passwords. Higher-end gun safes and lock boxes

are almost impossible for young kids to access. Like anything though, the better built the more expensive. Fortunately, with the right planning and education this hurdle can be overcome.

Most people are unaware of the financial incentives available to groups and individuals that are likely to own firearms. For example, members of organizations like the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Maine Professional Guides, Inland Fisheries & Wildlife employees, and veterans can receive membership discounts on outdoor gear, including gun safety equipment, at several Maine retailers. The member discounts range from 10 to 25 percent, depending on the retailer.

Using a mid-range Liberty brand 24-gun safe priced at \$929.99 as an example, a new \$250 tax credit, sales tax exemption and a 25 percent discount would allow gun owners to purchase a gun safe for \$396. For those that don't belong to one of these groups, the price still drops, but only to \$628.85.

In addition to these savings, the legislation could be amended to establish a separate fund seeded by private and public sources to provide sliding scale grants to lower income families. In addition, there are safes on the market that range from \$300-\$500.

Such a plan would need a corresponding public education campaign that I will address later, but expanding access to devices that promote the safe and responsible storage of firearms should bring all Maine people together.

*David Trahan of Waldoboro, a former state legislator, is executive director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of that organization.*