



# *City of Charleston*

*Joseph P. Riley, Jr.*

*Mayor*

December 21, 2012

Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice-President:

I very much appreciate the opportunity to have been part of the conference call today on reducing gun violence. As I mentioned, I believe it is critical that the Attorney General develop with all deliberate speed a simple, direct, focused piece of legislation that will allow us to address most effectively the problems that last week's heartbreaking tragedy in Newtown exposed. It is clear that the nation's attention is riveted on this issue, but it is important to act before that attention turns elsewhere.

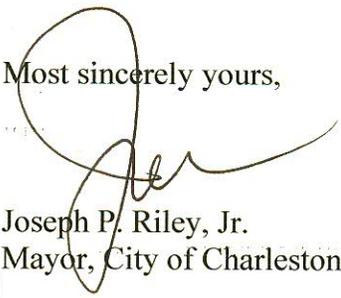
I believe that the most compelling and understandable legislation would address assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and the loopholes in current gun laws. The entire situation is, of course, complex, and I think that a comprehensive study of all facets by a task force on violence in America could take a broader approach once the initial legislation is passed.

I have enclosed a copy of an op-ed piece I have written for our local newspaper, as well as a copy of the letter I sent to all nine members of the South Carolina Congressional Delegation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be part of today's call. Please let me know if I can be of assistance in any way.

With warmest regards, I remain

Most sincerely yours,

  
Joseph P. Riley, Jr.  
Mayor, City of Charleston

JPR,jr/cb



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OP-ED by Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr.  
December 21, 2012

As a nation we will only add to the heartbreaking, unspeakable tragedy of the killing of precious children at Sandy Hook Elementary if we do not act decisively to reduce the likelihood that such a monstrous act will happen again.

To this end, there are several measures that Congress can and should quickly adopt. This must be the first order of business when the new Congress convenes in January.

- 1) Restore the Assault Weapons Ban. These are not sporting weapons. They are not needed for protecting our homes or for self-defense. And conversely, when they get in the hands of deranged or hate-filled people, they become the tools of mass murder. An assault weapon can shoot many rounds per second. These are deadly, certain to kill – the weapon and the operator of the weapon can reload in seconds and keep firing.
- 2) Ban high-capacity magazines. These magazines offer deranged individuals who wish to massacre large numbers of people the means to do so. They can equip semi-automatic and automatic weapons to fire a hundred rounds per minute. An assailant with a backpack or pockets full of these magazines can keep firing for a very long time. There is simply no place for high-capacity magazines in self-defense or home-protection.
- 3) Strengthen the background check system and close the loopholes in our gun laws. Through the gun show loophole, for example, a person who would not be cleared by a background check can go to a gun show and buy an arsenal and go to another gun show and buy another arsenal. Through purchases at gun shows, any individual can bypass the background check system and fill a house with weapons they are not legally allowed to purchase. This is ridiculous.
- 4) We should impose stiffer penalties on “straw purchases” of guns. A straw purchase is when someone who can legally purchase a gun buys one for someone who cannot. A person who facilitates illegal possession of a weapon should face penalties for helping the illegal purchaser circumvent the law and for the consequences of any illegal use of the weapon.

None of these measures violate the Second Amendment to our Constitution or the reasonable rights of citizens to have guns. They are common sense measures that an overwhelming majority of Americans support. We owe it to the children who died, their grieving and heartbroken families, friends, and neighbors. We owe it to every citizen in America who wept when learning of the news or watching the aftermath on television. We owe it to them to take action now.

I will share a brief story: My good friend, Bill Regan, who was the City's Corporation Counsel for 27 years, had a surprise visit from a distant relative from Ireland whom he did not know and who had not been to America before. While in Bill's home, he showed Bill photographs of the family lands, including a picture of a 450-year-old thatched roof farmhouse. Bill said, "Wow, I would love to see that the next time I go to Ireland." His distant cousin said, "Oh, we tore it down a few years ago because we needed the land for more farming." Bill said, "You got permission to tear it down?" He said, "We don't need permission. It belongs to us. You can tear something down if you want to." Bill said, "Well, we have a Board of Architecture Review that would keep you from doing that in Charleston." He said, "You have a Board that can tell you that you can't do whatever you want to with your property? That's crazy."

Then Bill's distant relative noticed a large oak tree that was perilously close to an adjacent house. He said, "Bill, your neighbor ought to cut that big oak tree down. It might harm the house." Bill said, "Well, that's a grand tree so you would need permission to cut the tree down." His relative said, "You have to get permission to cut one of your own trees down? That's crazy." Then it happened that they started watching the national news on television, and there was a segment on the assault weapon ban. Bill's relative saw the footage of someone carrying one of these assault weapons and said, "Bill, you can buy something like that in America and own it?" And Bill said, "Yes." He said, "Let me get this straight. You have laws telling you that you can't tear down a piece of property you own, that you can't cut down certain size trees that you own, but you can go out and buy a weapon that could kill huge numbers of people almost instantly? You know, that really does not make any sense."

Our Constitution protects the right to own property but allows restrictions in the form of zoning and other land use regulations – because they are of public benefit.

Our Constitution protects the right to own guns but allows restrictions that are of public benefit. It is past time for Congress to put these restrictions in place to prevent another Sandy Hook tragedy.



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Joseph P. Riley, Jr.  
Mayor

December 21, 2012

Dear Congressman

The unspeakable and heartbreaking tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday has awakened in this whole country, I believe, a pressing demand to pass sensible gun laws that will protect the public.

I urge you to adopt as a first order of business in January legislation that will:

1. Restore the Assault Weapons Ban.
2. Eliminate the sale of high-capacity magazines.
3. Close the loopholes in current gun laws, especially the gun show loopholes.
4. Stiffen the penalties on store purchases by straw purchasers of guns that are then used in crimes.

I have enclosed a copy of an op-ed piece that I have written for the *Post and Courier*. I urge you to pass this legislation quickly, which I believe will be overwhelmingly supported by the public. As we think of those precious children whose lives were lost, we know that it is time to act.

Most sincerely yours,

Joseph P. Riley, Jr.  
Mayor, City of Charleston

JPR,jr/mas

Enclosure



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