

Carson City IHOP rampage sparks call for changes to gun laws

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

Law enforcement leaders, a shooting victim and some lawmakers are calling for a review of Nevada's gun laws after a mentally ill man shot 11 people with an assault weapon at a Carson City restaurant last month, leaving five dead.

Some states have responded to mass killings by banning assault weapons, outlawing high-capacity magazines or requiring gun owners to get licenses and release their mental health records.

And now, after the IHOP shooting, some in Nevada have called for similar state-level restrictions and bans on some firearms. But others oppose new firearm restrictions based on what they say is a knee-jerk reaction to a tragedy, and say the call for tougher laws is simply an effort to curtail the right to bear arms.

Nevada National Guard Sgt. Caitlin Kelley, one of the victims in the IHOP attack, responded to the shooting by calling for a ban on assault weapons, which can be purchased without a background check at many gun shows or through private sellers.

"I can't imagine why we are even selling assault weapons to civilians," said Kelley, who was shot in the foot and still uses a wheelchair. "There's no reason for an AK-47 or an M-16 or an M-4 to be in a civilian's home."

Washoe County Sheriff Mike Haley agreed, saying: "I don't see any logic to having assault weapons available to the public." But he said banning such weapons would spark a sharp response

by gun-rights advocates.

Robert Smith, president of the Nevada State Rifle and Pistol Association, said guns are not the problem – the problem lies with the people using them.

“It isn’t the weapon that’s bad, it’s the person” who commits crimes with the weapons, he said. “If you keep them away from private citizens, you’re making the private citizens unarmed targets.”

Semi-automatic assault weapons can easily be converted into automatic weapons – which are the same thing as machine guns – with a simple kit available online or at gun shows, officials said.

What happened at the IHOP “was as close to a war as most people will ever come, and they were helpless to defend against it,” Haley said. “But because of our love affair with weapons, we are subjecting the public to this type of violence. If this is going to change, the public has to stand up and demand change.”

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