

Editorial ? Gun control, American-style?

The worst massacre in U.S. history since the destruction of the twin towers in New York City has led President Donald Trump to conclude, without any supporting evidence, that the shooter was mentally ill and to talk vaguely of somehow regulating the use of the Bump Fire stock, a \$99 accessory that effectively converts a semi-automatic rifle into a machine gun.

As everyone no doubt knows by now, gunman Stephen Paddock opened fire on a large crowd of concertgoers at a country music festival on the Las Vegas Strip Oct. 1, leaving 58 people dead and 489 injured. In a 10-minute span, 64-year-old Paddock of Mesquite, Nevada, fired hundreds of rifle rounds from his suite on the 32nd floor of the nearby Mandalay Bay hotel before committing suicide.

Police who found his hotel room littered with firearms and ammunition determined that 12 of the semi-automatic rifles had been converted to fire automatically by the retired accountant and high-stakes gambler whose only apparent motive was to demonstrate the ease with which he could engage in mass killings without any formal training.

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the incident was that the killer broke no U.S. or Nevada law prior to the moment he opened fire. That's because a federal ban on semi-automatic firearms was allowed to lapse and there is no law limiting either the number of such weapons one can own or restricting the purchase and installation of the ?bump stocks.? The only law bans their use.

Interestingly, in the wake of the massacre, Trump has said virtually nothing on the subject of gun control, choosing to address much more important topics such as Puerto Rico's debt and National Football League players' kneeling during the U.S. national anthem in protest against police shootings of black men.

Since 1986, U.S. gun-makers have been prohibited from manufacturing civilian guns capable of firing automatically, but records compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) show that 11,752 machine guns are held by gun owners in Nevada. And that, of course, doesn't include the unknown number of firearms that have been converted with bump stocks or other similar accessories.

Because such accessories do not alter the inner workings of a firearm, they are not subject to regulation by the ATF, although some states, including California and Connecticut (but not Nevada) do restrict them.

In 2013, in the wake of a massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, California Senator Dianne Feinstein proposed a law that would have banned bump-fire devices or any accessories designed to increase a gun's rate of fire. The legislation never went to vote.

Now that the White House and even the National Rifle Association have suggested they are open to some regulation of bump stocks, it appears that the debate in Congress will be over whether the devices should be regulated or banned outright.

For some strange reason we've never seen explained, even the idea of regulating such devices is seen by some Trump supporters as somehow infringing the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As passed by the Congress in 1791 and preserved in the U.S. National Archives, the amendment says: ?A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.?

Without a doubt, the amendment gives ?the people? (whatever that means) the right to own a firearm.

But did ?the people? mean everyone, including slaves, felons and the seriously mentally ill? More importantly, did ?Arms? include semi-automatic rifles, which weren't invented until 1862 and surely aren't needed to kill a deer?