



## Fact-Free Zones in the Public Square

by Richard W. Rahn

Fuzzy and fact-free thinking are too kind as definitions for much of what has passed as public policy analysis this past week. The discussions regarding the Parkland school shooting, the Russian political investigation and the immigration debate illustrate the problem.

The FBI, the local sheriff's office, the local school officials and the local mental health officials all had been made aware that the school shooter was likely to do exactly what he did. The people in these government agencies failed to do their jobs. Rather than discuss what punishment should be handed out to each of those who failed in their responsibilities, most of the media's and others' attention was incoherently directed at attacking the NRA and "assault weapons."

The NRA is an organization that promotes responsible gun ownership and runs gun safety and training courses. An "assault weapon" is just another semi-automatic rifle that does exactly the same thing that all other semiautomatic hunting and target rifles do — and that is fire a bullet each time the trigger of the gun is pulled. The so-called "assault weapons" normally are painted black and have a pistol grip as part of their design but are no more or less lethal than any other semiautomatic rifles — which have been standard hunting firearms for decades.

Banning "assault weapons," as has been shown by past bans, is likely to do nothing to prevent mass shootings. Putting government officials in jail for not fulfilling their responsibilities is likely to be far more effective.

A number of companies have announced they are no longer going to give discounts to NRA members. Punishing NRA members, who are your customers, is likely to cause a loss of business and is not a coherent response to the failure of law enforcement and mental-health officials to do their jobs.

Some argue that no one "needs" an assault-style weapon — which accounted for fewer than 300 deaths last year. But also no one "needs" a motorcycle — which accounted for over 5000 deaths yearly. And no one "needs" (according to whomever is defining "a need") hundreds of other products that cause many deaths each year. But many of us do have a constitutionally guaranteed "need" to be reasonably free of the nanny state.

A number of political leaders and media types asserted that the Russians had interfered with the 2016 elections. It was decided that a "special counsel" needed to be appointed to look into the matter. Rather than beginning with places that had already been identified as receiving Russian money — with likely political intent — such as U.S. environmental organizations and the Clinton Foundation — the "special counsel" has so far indicted a few Americans for actions that appear to have had nothing to do with alleged Russian interference, along with a few Russians who will never stand trial.

The Russians contributed to the infamous Steele dossier — but again, to date, the "special counsel" and the Justice Department have been apparently blind to the issue. Their actions are inconsistent with the facts — unless one assumes that there is a certain political agenda which might explain why the "special counsel" hired many prosecutors who contributed to the Hillary Clinton campaign.

The Washington establishment seems to be mystified as to why only approximately half of the estimated 1.7 million DACA eligible have filed an application for permanent residence. Could it be they realized that if they filed, the government might also ask questions about their parents and other relatives who are living in the U.S. illegally? Perhaps, their nonresponse has been rational, given the facts.

Recent polls indicate that Americans overwhelmingly want to move to a "merit"-based immigration system. But who is going to define "merit" — a government official, a businessperson, an ideological academic, a friend of the applicant? One way of breaking down "merit" is to look at the real needs of American employers and the effects that any immigrants are going to have on specific groups of workers.

For instance, there is considerable evidence that farmers need more seasonal workers to pick fruit, vegetables, etc. There is also considerable evidence that many from Mexico and Central America would like seasonal work in the U.S., but not become permanent residents. To solve this problem, public policy foundation director, Helen Kriebel, developed a system for temporary worker employment, enabling these workers to cycle back and forth between the U.S. and their home country. This proposal has been endorsed by many leading politicians, including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Too much of the immigration discussion now occurs in a "fact-free zone." Breaking the problems down into understandable pieces — e.g. Christian refugees being forced out of Muslim-majority countries, and graduates in advanced degree STEM programs from leading U.S. universities being forced to return to their home countries when many U.S. firms need workers with such training — could lead to widely acceptable, if not perfect, solutions.

All too many in the media and the political class succumb to the temptation to sell emotion rather than accuracy. Fortunately, not all is lost — we have a cumbersome political system and it often takes a long time to obtain both destructive and constructive legislative changes. This gives time for real facts to emerge and reason to prevail — if enough people care.

*Richard W. Rahn is chairman of Improbable Success Productions and on the board of the American Council for Capital Formation*

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/26/fact-free-zones-in-the-public-square/>

Copyright © 2018 The Washington Times LLC. All rights reserved.