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Governor Jay Inslee has announced plans for significant new restrictions on the ownership of firearms by law-abiding Washingtonians. The members of the Washington Sheriff's Association and I, believe the proposed restrictions will serve to erode constitutionally protected rights without addressing the root causes of violent crime. We are particularly concerned with the so-called "assault weapons ban" and "permit to purchase" laws.

The members of the Washington State Sheriffs' Association and I are responsible for two essential tasks. The first is to protect life and property by enforcing criminal laws. The second is to uphold and protect guaranteed rights. We take both responsibilities very seriously.

Restrictions that shift focus from offenders to law abiding citizens send the wrong message and erode Constitutional guarantees upheld by the United States Supreme Court. "Magazine bans" like the one passed by Washington's legislature last year have already been ruled unconstitutional by the United States 9th Circuit court of Appeals, and mandated annual background checks to possess firearms are also under challenge.

The Governor's proposed legislation is also inconsistent with Article I Section 24 of the Washington State Constitution, which mirrors the language of the Federal Second Amendment. The new proposals to restrict gun ownership would further infringe on the rights that have been clearly and repeatedly established.

Like the citizens of Washington State who elected us, we, too are concerned with the troubling growth of violent crime. The most effective path to addressing the root of the problem lies in addressing the misguided desire to take human lives. We want to find ways to reduce crime and protect life and property. We believe that a greater focus on dealing with offenders, especially repeat offenders, is the approach we need to take. But this effort should not involve a weakening of the rights of all citizens in the process.

The rise in violent crime that so concerns citizens has happened even as regulations and restrictions on firearm ownership have grown. Of course, this is because the people impacted by restrictions to the constitutional right are those who obey laws in the first place-the people who we know aren't the problem.

We know violent crime is a complex problem with many sources. But narrow solutions that diminish the rights of the law-abiding people aren't the right solution. The Washington State Sheriffs' Association and I, are committed to working with Governor Inslee and the state legislators to strengthen our criminal justice system and reduce violent crime. To do so is essential to our mission. But our mission also involves the safeguarding of rights. We view both as central to what we represent.

Paul D. Budrow,
Sheriff

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