

Guns !

Since the carnage in Las Vegas, there's been a lot of talk on TV and commentary in print about gun control. Not just any gun control of course, but "reasonable" and "common sense" gun control.

But since words matter, it matters how you define "reasonable" and "common sense."

And on this, liberals and conservatives might as well be inhabitants of two different planets. As Daniel Henninger succinctly put it in his Wall Street Journal column: "Progressives embrace the benign, conservatives fear the malign. Liberals says, give peace a chance. Conservatives say, Annie get your gun."

To that I'll add, liberals embrace the federal government, conservatives are deeply suspicious of all that power – and think they need guns not just to protect themselves from common criminals but maybe even from their government.

I heard one liberal pundit on TV, after calling for what she considered reasonable tweaks in our gun laws, add, as if to satisfy silly concerns, well "no one's" for taking *everyone's* gun away.

Well, actually some people are for taking everyone's gun away.

Back in December 2015, a journalist and author named Phoebe Maltz Bovy wrote this in the New Republic:

"Ban guns. All guns. Get rid of guns in homes, and on the streets, and, as much as possible, on police. Not just because of San Bernardino, or whichever mass shooting may pop up next, but also not *not* because of those. Don't sort the population into those who might do something evil or foolish or self-destructive with a gun and those who surely will not. As if

this could be known—as if it could be assessed without massively violating civil liberties and stigmatizing the mentally ill. Ban guns! Not just gun violence. Not just certain guns. Not just already-technically-illegal guns. All of them.”

She’s not alone. You think progressives like Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, if they could snap their fingers and make it happen, wouldn’t echo every word of what Phoebe Maltz Bovy wrote in the New Republic?

This is not an argument for doing nothing. It is an argument, though, for acknowledging that there may not be much government can do to stop what happened in Las Vegas.

Leah Libresco, a statistician, wrote in the Washington Post that two-thirds of gun deaths in America are the result of suicide; the next biggest group, about 20 percent, are young men killing each other, often in gang violence; then came women who were killed, usually the result of domestic violence.”

Focus on those groups, she wrote – “not broad attempts to limit the lethality of guns.”

The killer in Las Vegas had 23 firearms in his hotel room and 19 more at his house. Is that too many? It sounds like too many to me, but what should the legal limit be? Ten? Five? One?

The gun lobby won’t agree to any of that. Absolutists aren’t big on compromise. Even small, limited restrictions, they believe, will inevitably lead to more intrusive restrictions. And let’s be clear, the gun lobby isn’t only the National Rifle Association. It’s a big chunk of the American people.

A few days ago Rosanne Cash had an op-ed published in the New York Times where she called on her fellow country singers to stand up to the N.R.A. But she knows it won’t be easy. Anyone

who gets too vocal about guns and says the “wrong” things winds up in the crosshairs him or herself. Here’s what Ms. Cash had to say about that.

“I’ve been a gun-control activist for 20 years. Every time I speak out on the need for stricter gun laws, I get a new profusion of threats. There’s always plenty of the garden-variety ‘your dad would be ashamed of you’ sexist nonsense, along with the much more menacing threats to my family and personal safety.

“Last year, I performed at the Concert Across America to End Gun Violence with Jackson Browne, Eddie Vedder, Marc Cohn and the Harlem Gospel Choir, and we got death threats. People wanted to kill us because we wanted to end gun violence.”

The Las Vegas killer used something called a “bump stock” to turn his rifle into an automatic weapon, a kind of machine gun that’s been illegal for quite a while now.

Both Republicans and Democrats – and even the N.R.A. – are signaling they might support legislation that would restrict or flat out outlaw the use of bump stocks.

That sounds like a legislative limit a lot of Americans could get behind. But is it a change the absolutists can live with? Or will they worry that it’s the camel’s nose under the tent, the first step to more restrictions that will ultimately gut what they see as their Second Amendment rights?

Will anything change after Las Vegas? I’m not making any bets on that. But this much I’m sure of: Americans, a lot of them anyway, love their guns. And politicians – few of whom are profiles in courage – love their votes. So you tell me if anything will change after Las Vegas. And if it did, would it make any real difference regarding gun violence in America?