

Debunking the Republican Myths on Immigration Reform



There is no doubt that the sheer complexity of comprehensive immigration reform makes it a daunting topic to tackle. The now famous group formed within the U.S Senate to tackle the long overdue legislative reform, which adopted the title “the Gang of Eight,” created a bill called the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013.” The Act consists of seven major components. Rather than addressing all seven contained within the 800-plus pages of the proposed legislation, I will debunk a number of popular myths used by conservative-minded opponents of progressive immigration reform to dissuade our population from sensibility and replace it with xenophobia.

It would reward those who broke the law:

Technically, this is true. The repeal of Prohibition also rewarded lawbreakers. When making a right turn on a red light was made legal, were those who had previously committed such reckless infractions suddenly rewarded?

Undocumented workers have little impetus to view themselves as lawbreakers in any meaningful sense. It is technically a violation of the immigration code to stay past one’s work visa expiration, but migrant workers have been doing that with our government’s understood consent for many years. Furthermore, it was the U.S. government’s participation in the NAFTA treaty that effectively decimated many Latin American labor markets making the United States a logical place to seek employment.

It would punish immigrants who followed the rules:

In fact, it would change the rules completely. An accurate metaphor would be the end of baseball season and the start of football season.

Immigrants will take American jobs:

Why would undocumented workers be any more likely to take jobs than documented workers? Furthermore, what advantages could an undocumented worker provide an employer than a documented one? Risk? Incentive for exploitation or tax evasion? The logic behind the *South Park* argument of “They took our jobs” simply does not hold water.

It would drain federal funds:

It is likely that the majority of undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Some pay via income or property. Most pay consumer taxes. Furthermore, immigration enforcement is very expensive, given that securing the border means beefed-up security measures. These efforts include \$3 billion to the Department of Homeland Security for better fencing, increased border patrol agents, unmanned drones and drone operating staff, and increasing funding for border crossing prosecutions.

There are approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States out of a general population of 314 million. The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) and NumbersUSA both produced reports stating the many exorbitant expenses comprehensive immigration reform could incur. Both of these organizations and their studies were commissioned by biased, right-wing funding. No credible study has indicated that legalizing undocumented immigrants is likely to harm the economy. I hesitate to even mention the report commissioned by the right wing think-tank The Heritage Foundation, which insinuates that Latin Americans are incapable of achieving the same IQ levels as “native Americans,” meaning those of European decent.

It would change our American identity:

This is one of those cultural imperialistic exclamations of pure American naïve realism, also known as xenophobia and (dare I call it out?) racism. The vast majority of Americans are descended from immigrants. Even those who trace their genealogical pedigree to the Mayflower were running from one land and evicting the established occupants by force or extermination. We have no official language and the great lady who greeted so many of our grandparents and great grandparents declared by inscription:

“Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

I have yet to notice any fine printed disclaimer under the Statue of Liberty’s credo, and I dare any constitutional literalist to bluster about their rights as an American, yet not stand by the words of Lady Liberty.

It could create a permanent Democratic majority

To quote that fine specimen of an American citizen, literary icon Biz Markie, “Oh snap, guess what I saw!” My suspicion is that the development of a strong and increasing population that trends overwhelmingly to the Democratic side of the bi-partisan spectrum is the only true rationale for preventing undocumented immigrants from achieving citizenship. Most undocumented immigrants are Latino, and most Latinos vote Democratic. Republicans have put on an hysterical show of trying to court the Latino vote and have failed spectacularly, and I find it extremely entertaining to watch. However, in the face of abysmal failure at old, white men foolishly trying to show how in touch they are with the same population they blatantly disenfranchise, the next best thing is to try and get them the hell out before they irreparably upset the voting curve.

Searching for Answers In the Face of the Truth

Marijuana reform has become one of the most significant topics in recent US politics. For the first time in decades, national polls show that a majority of Americans (52% to be exact) support marijuana reform and believe that its use should be made legal. Over the past 15 years, we have witnessed the District of Columbia, as well as 17 other states (including Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island) implement some manner of medical marijuana legislation. We have seen a revival of support for industrialized hemp, with Kentucky, North Dakota, Arizona, Virginia and West Virginia all exploring the potential value of hemp as a legitimate cash crop in our nation. We have seen a slue of states pass legislation to decriminalize marijuana, with Mississippi, Ohio, New York and the rest of the Northeast, leading the charge. In fact, there are over 30 states where legislation for marijuana reform has been introduced (in some manner) to reflect public distaste toward current federal laws. All of this, in the wake of the legalization bills passed in Colorado and Washington, strongly suggests that the United States is on the verge of a cultural revolution.

How will our Federal Government respond to this “new” revolution? This is the question that has reform advocates cowering in fear. Though the Obama administration has publicly stated that (in states where marijuana has been made legal) recreational users would not be made a “top priority,” there have been numerous altercations that suggest the revolution will not be met without resistance. Most of these events have included licensed medical marijuana dispensaries, which have been targeted by federal agencies operating under a federal law that currently allows prosecutors to penalize an individual with a five-year-to-life term in prison for the sale of marijuana. This presents a very dangerous risk to those who wish to operate under state laws and regulations, in areas where marijuana reform has gone into effect. This also shows a complete disregard for the desires of citizens who have voted for these changes within their particular regions.

Luckily, we have also seen the beginning of a revolution within Congress. Where showing support for any type of drug reform was once thought to be a career ender, politicians from all parties are forming bipartisan alliances in attempt to change current drug policies. Thus far, six bills have been introduced in the 113th Congress, two of which involve the topic of industrialized hemp, focusing on the use of cannabis as an agricultural resource. Other bills presented on the federal level focus on medical marijuana and the state’s right to tax, regulate and govern marijuana commerce as they see fit. A final bill to mention is House Bill 499 - Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2013, which would actually put an end to the prohibition on marijuana. Though these bills are highly unlikely to succeed in Congress, they clearly demonstrate the obvious change in both political and public opinion.

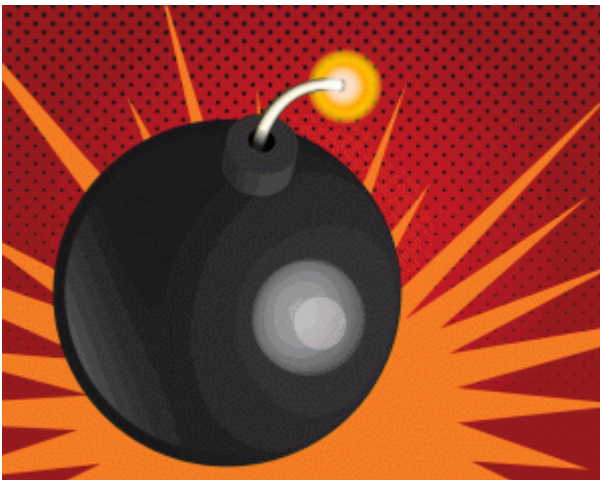
What lies ahead for the movement to end marijuana reform? In short, the road ahead looks promising but will require a lot of hard work and lobbying. More people need to take a stand and become vocal about their beliefs concerning current marijuana laws. Signing petitions is a small start but people must also contact state representatives and other public officials to let them know that they support this movement - whether that support be for economic, social or personal benefits or for the intrusion on our Constitutional rights.

Let others in the community know of your stance on marijuana prohibition and what the facts truly are. You must strive to demonstrate to shop owners, local merchants and the “average Joe” that the stigmas associated with the cannabis culture are founded on false propaganda and misguided stereotypes.

Engage with the opposition and present them with educated facts and discussion, for only in the face of the truth will they find the answers.

From the pages of 13 Folds Magazine by Dave Sorgman, editor. 13folds.com.

Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave in the Age of Terror



Recent atrocities involving horrific bombings of innocent victims at the Boston Marathon certainly deserve the concern of the nation and the full scrutiny of the law enforcement professionals seeking answers to the who, what and why behind such a violent act of terror. This, coming on the heels of the awful massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown,

Connecticut, has put Rhode Islanders on full-time alert. Our state is sandwiched between two very recent acts of terror and has, itself, felt the shock of an incident at URI involving a highly inappropriate prank that could be categorized as an act of terrorism.

After all, what is terrorism? The most extreme incidents involve indiscriminate violence for the purpose of causing an equally extreme public reaction based on fear. However, if an individual rides the wave of others who caused actual harm, one need only whisper of the potential of such violence and he or she fans the embers of fear back to flames of terror. The individual who uttered something to the effect of, "I'm a good guy with a gun," outside a URI door earlier this month was, in fact, committing an act of terror akin to yelling, "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Whether playing on the irony of the "good guy with a gun is the only means of stopping a bad guy with a gun" or actually intending to do harm to other humans, the public may never know. But this person, whoever he or she may be, is a terrorist.

Columbine High School, the Unabomber, the Oklahoma City Federal Building, the Atlanta Olympic Bombings, the Twin Towers and now, the Boston Marathon - all acts of terror.

Even though in the case of the URI Whisperer the only evidence found by a lockdown and sweep by armed troopers was a toy NERF gun, the fear that spread from students to parents to media to public became frenzy. And that, unfortunately, indicates that the terrorists have been highly effective in accomplishing their super-objective. While their individual motives may have been different, the overall desire of these assholes has been the same: to stimulate fear and create distrust throughout society. They do it in the most cowardly way possible. And it works.

Is there an answer to combating the unknown? In other words, how do we as Americans respond to the threat of terror? The media often proves little help, as being first on the scene is often more important to fueling the 24-hour news cycle than being sensible and providing concrete answers to the public's questions. I was receiving tweets about the "gunman on the URI campus" from various news sources long before any actual evidence was presented to back this statement up.

A common response was to put more security on campus. The immediate, reactionary, de facto response to these situations is "more guns equal less violence." No. More guns equal more guns. Another common response is to blame a sub-genre of the American population — gangbangers, or Muslims or the mentally ill. So, in effect, we blame America for terror against America.

Perhaps immediate blame is the wrong reaction. Perhaps this creates an irrational collective mentality that falsely equates justice and vengeance. Action with bravery. Immediacy with thoughtfulness. Hammurabi's code with Christian values.

In this editorial, I am not standing above the rest of the nation and speaking down as if I have the answers. Terrorism works because it catalyzes one of the most irrational emotional responses in the human psyche. That can not be minimized for its validity. My humble suggestion is to pause for consideration of who we, as Americans - as Rhode Islanders - wish to be. To truly deny the satisfaction of the assailants in such situations, mourning, praying, feeling and honoring the victims is natural and necessary. But then carrying on in spite of fear is the true disempowerment of terrorists and their agenda. We are the land of the free and the home of the brave and the anomalies are the cowards who perpetrate such acts of indiscriminate violence against the innocent - the terrorists.

This is no easy task, but the America that truly wishes to live up to its best potential must carry on as the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Rhode Islanders for Tax Equity Defies the Fallacy of the Flight of the Lords



Rhode Islanders for Tax Equity held a recent press conference at the Rhode Island State House and brought attention to legislation that could mean \$66 million in much needed revenue for the state. The March 12th presser was organized by a number of labor organizations and social action groups and included the sponsors of both the House and Senate versions of the bill. Representative Maria Cimini spoke on behalf of the House side and Senator Juan Pichardo testified to the need for the bill to pass in the Senate.

The proposed legislation calls for a 2 percent increase in income taxes for the few Rhode Islanders earning \$250,000 or more. The catch phrase “2 percent on the 2 percent” means the current top tier of taxation at 5.99 percent will increase to 7.99 percent and all revenue generated will go into the general revenue fund. This could generate up to \$66 million in revenue and help relieve property and car tax pressure that weighs most heavily on Rhode Island’s struggling middle and lower income demographics.

Senate President, Teresa Paiva-Weed, decided to hold her own press conference at the exact same time as the RITE event and publicly denounced any support for raising taxes on even 2 percent of Rhode Island’s population. Paiva-Weed argues that the proposal is bad for business and believes that this will create a flight of the lords phenomenon. House Speaker, Gordon Fox, has been non-committal on the subject, but has historically shied away from the idea. Governor Chafee said he agrees with the concept of raising taxes on the rich at a national level, but not at a state level.

In spite of the rhetoric from the Governor and the General Assembly leadership, one must ask whether the logic of the tax breaks that were initially enacted in 2006 and only slightly modified in 2010 have done anything positive for Rhode Island’s economy. Prior to the 2006 reform, the tax rates for the top earners were 9.99 percent. In a measure to “simplify” the tax structure and make Rhode Island a more competitive place for business, the income tax structure was modified to its current form and ... well ... one can see the results. Rhode Island is consistently competing for the highest levels of unemployment in the nation and boasts some of the highest property taxes in the northeast. The infrastructure is crumbling, the education system is poor in every definition of the word, and poverty is high. All of these things are causing an unprecedented population decrease. This is not a flight of the lords. This is a flight of everyone else.

But, for those in power, appeasement of those who earn more than \$250,000 makes sense. After all, a person can cast only one vote. But a rich person can donate a lot of dollars, if given the right quid pro quo. The lords stay put. The leadership stays put and the rest of the lot can continue to complain about having no bread. Let them eat cake? Look what happened to Marie Antoinette. I’m just saying ...

Rhode Island needs to upend its “lords and serfs” mentality. The job creators have had seven-plus years of this income tax rate and have not created jobs. Nor have they fled. So, the logical step is to try something new. And the something new proposed by Rhode Islanders for Tax Equity is very reminiscent of something old. Raise the taxes on the rich. They can afford it. Two percent on the 2 percent is far

from an unreasonable request and necessary to offset the proposed cuts to corporate taxes and possible cuts or reductions to sales and entertainment taxes. Contrary to popular belief, Rhode Island doesn't have a spending problem. It has a spending problem compared to having an enormous revenue problem. The state needs to spend on education, on infrastructure, on public services, on clean water, and on many other basic necessities that citizens take for granted until their car falls into a pothole the size of a Newport mansion on the way to bringing the kids to a school with no arts, sports, or music programs in a car taxed for more than its blue book value.

The 2 percent increase on 2 percent of the population is a simple remedy to alleviate the weight of part of this problem. It seems like a no brainer. At least it does to 98 percent of us.

The Bet

I'd been living with my boyfriend for less than a week when he posed a playful (albeit somewhat rhetorical) question: "I wonder, how long until you yell at me for something?" I affixed an appropriate level of feigned indignation on my face and glanced over at him, hoping he'd find my lower lip pout adorable.



Our leisurely post-brunch stroll through Lisbon's hilly streets had taken on a sudden air of competition. Brow furrowed earnestly, I declared that I'd *never* yell at him. Brow raised sardonically, he basically told me I was delusional. "Fine then," he said with his usual teasing smirk. "Let's make a bet."



He continued, eyes gleaming: "If you yell at me, I get to throw away your sweater!" Still aghast at his distaste toward my adorable Fair Isle sweater, I gritted my teeth and took a breath. This meant war. "Fine," I said, "but when I *don't* yell, all your soccer jerseys are going in the trash." Game on.

Wanting to make the best of the warm weather, we hopped in the car and headed south to Lagoa de Albufeira in the town of Sesimbra. Unlike Lisbon, which borders the Tagus River, Sesimbra touches the Atlantic Ocean. Swarms of kitesurfers dotted the bright blue sky like shreds of rainbow confetti.

After I directed an impromptu photo shoot like a maestro does a symphony, we wandered hand-in-hand along the beach. "Baby, you *have* to feel the water," he said excitedly. He broke free from my grip while I lingered behind, fearing the frigid sea spray. It took a bit of persuasion, but I finally met him at the coastline.

Well, that was a giant mistake. As I bent to dip my fingers into the approaching drift of saltwater, rushing surf followed, drenching us both to the knee. As we slopped our way toward dry land, a fury of angry words came screaming out of my mouth, met by his uncontrollable, wild laughter.

I lost the bet in under two hours. I've yet to relinquish my sweater.

The Second Amendment Shoots America in the Foot



As an eight year old, I loved to play with toy guns. I never saw them as instruments of real death. At eight I had very little experience with real death. I knew *Robocop*, *Commando*, and *Murder She Wrote*. A big question of the time was "Who shot J.R.?" I knew of cowboys and quickdraws. I knew G.I. Joe used guns against the evil forces of COBRA. I knew that policemen were your friends and carried pistols in holsters. But, for many reasons, real and make believe - action and reaction - life and death - did not compute. And, when I hit junior high school and a shiny semi-automatic handgun was pointed at me in A.P. social studies when the teacher was out of the room, a pang of fear was quashed by the inability to emotionally process the reality of the situation. The gun was brought in by a student who took it from home. It was, luckily for me, not wielded with malice of intent. But it was the first time I had a gun pointed at me.

I will come right out and say that I do not support the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. I think that it should be rewritten to the point of virtual unrecognizability or abolished completely. I do not believe that civilians should have the right to bear arms other than those designed solely for the purpose of and limited exclusively to hunting animals within the limits of the laws pertaining to hunting.

There are several versions of the Second Amendment's text, and each version has differences in capitalization and punctuation. This is based on text found in the official documents surrounding the adoption of the Bill of Rights. One version was passed by the Congress, while another is found in the copies distributed to the States and then ratified by them.

As passed by the Congress:

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.

As ratified by the States and authenticated by Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State:

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.

For years I have conducted informal polls asking people to explain to me the need for a civilian citizen to own a device designed solely for the purpose of taking human life from various long distances. A common answer goes something like this:

“Americans need the power to defend ourselves from a potentially tyrannical government attempting to overstep their bounds by assuming marshal law.”

That’s a preposterous argument. If the most powerful military in the history of civilization wants to take over their own country, your owning of a Glock 9 or an Armalite AR-15 or an AK-47 is not going to stop them from sending tanks and drones and F-22 Raptors. I’m looking for a rational explanation of why the means by which to commit mass execution of human beings should be made easily available. That argument for the Second Amendment may have had its place in society several centuries ago. But, contrary to the arguments of Constitutional literalistic conservatives, we have, as a nation, outgrown the relevance of the Revolutionary War rationale.

The next argument usually consists of a self-righteous diatribe about having the right to defend oneself and one’s family. This comes with some reasonable and compelling points. Unfortunately, these points tend to be far more idealistic and theoretical than factually founded. Most instances of guns in the home lead to the gun owner mistakenly shooting a family member rather than a threatening assailant. Other common scenarios involve a minor seeking out or stumbling upon a loaded weapon and accidentally (or deliberately) harming or killing his or herself or another innocent individual.

The third and final common argument for maintaining America’s right to bear arms amendment has to do with hunting. Although I am not a hunter, I have no argument against those who are. In fact, those who hunt for food earn high levels of respect from me due to the actions they take for sustenance. I get my meat neatly packaged from the supermarket, neatly packaged by factory slaughterhouses that treat the animals inhumanely and rape the land and exploit their labor. Hunting is honest. That said, firearms designed for hunting animals tend to be distinctly different in design and purpose from those used to hunt humans. The main difference is that animals tend not to pose the threat of firing back. Have you ever heard a hunter say, “Cover me. Draw Bambi’s fire so I can get a shot at her.”? Can an individual use a single round, bolt-action rifle to take the life of another human being? Yes. But when one hears of instances of gun violence in the US, one does not often hear of a hunting rifle being used. Thus exists the term “assault weapon.”

I refuse to call these highlights. But, below are some of the most well publicized and, therefore, best remembered incidents between Columbine and present day.

April 20, 1999: Columbine High School, Littleton, CO: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire in their high school. Total injured and killed: 39

April 16, 2007: Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA: student Seung-Hui Cho, 23, opened fire on his school’s campus before committing suicide. Total injured and killed: 56

February 14, 2008: Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, IL: Steven Kazmierczak, 27, opened fire in a lecture hall, then shot and killed himself before police arrived. Total injured and killed: 27

November 5, 2009: Fort Hood, TX: Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hasan, 39, opened fire on an Army base in an attack linked to Islamist extremism. Hasan was injured during the attack and later arrested. Total injured and killed: 43

January 8, 2011: Tuscon Shooting, Tuscon AZ: Jared Loughner, 22, opened fire outside a Safeway during a constituent meeting with Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.) before he was subdued by bystanders and arrested. Total injured and killed: 19

July 20, 2012: Aurora Theater Shooting, Aurora, CO: James Holmes, 24, opened fire in a movie theater during the opening night of *The Dark Night Rises* and was later arrested outside. Total injured and killed: 70

August 5, 2012: Sikh Temple Shooting, Oak Creek, WI: U.S. Army veteran Wade Michael Page, 40, opened fire in a Sikh gurdwara before he died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a shootout with police. Total injured and killed: 10

December 14, 2012: Newtown School Shooting, Newtown, CT: Adam Lanza, 20, shot his mother dead at their home then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary school. He forced his way inside and opened fire, killing 20 children and six adults before committing suicide. Total injured and killed: at least 28

Of the 142 guns possessed by the killers, more than three-quarters were obtained legally. The arsenal included dozens of assault weapons and semiautomatic handguns. In fact, almost 70 were semi-automatic handguns, 35 were assault weapons, 21 were revolvers, and the rest were shotguns.

This leads to the NRA's propagandist argument that if more people were armed, the casualties would have been fewer due to deterrent action by armed citizens. Scientific studies have been conducted to disprove this argument. Most of the situational experiments conducted involved training individuals to use firearms and placing them, unbeknownst to the subject, in a situation involving a mock attack by an armed assailant. The test used paint balls instead of live rounds, and the results tended toward a lot of innocent victims covered in paint and the "trained" subject accidentally shooting himself in the leg, a la Plaxico Burrell.

But, even if that logic held truth, because of the most recent tragedy, should elementary school children be armed? "Here honey. Don't forget your lunch and your Glock. Now hurry before you miss the bus!"

There has even been talk of arming teachers. I will not even entertain this suggestion as worthy of discussion due to the sheer number of pages worth of flaws about which I would need to write.

I am sure to incur responses that include discussion of adequate background checks and mental illness. I am well aware of how much easier it is to obtain a gun than it is to receive adequate identification and treatment of mental illness. Mental health issues are fluid. Tuesday, I may pass every test for mental health and capacity for purchase of firearms. One day, week, month, or year later I may be psychologically unstable enough to unload 800 rounds into a daycare. But not if I don't have a gun.

If my lengthy discussion has not yet completely distracted from my earlier mention of my junior high school classroom stare-down with a smug adolescent wielding a shiny sidearm, I will revisit only long enough to say that there was no resolution or responsive action taken. Neither myself nor any other student in the classroom told on the kid. I don't remember if I was too scared or too desensitized to understand the reality of the situation. It was a rough school. Fights were common. Violence was an

accepted part of the curriculum. No harm, no foul. Right? I can't even remember the name of the youth in question. I couldn't even look him up on Facebook to see if he is a lawyer or a construction worker or a cop or an unemployed veteran or incarcerated for murder. I have former friends who are incarcerated for murder. I have former friends in the ground, shot execution style at the Johnston Landfill in exchange for a joyride in an early model Ford SUV. A friend (this one alive and well and on Facebook) responded to my inquiry about guns in America by saying "Guns are a part of our world." My response was, "So is cancer. That kills people, too. Should I have a Constitutional right for you to die of cancer?"

So, please. Anyone with a rational explanation of the ease of availability of high powered assault weapons created only to kill human beings en masse, explain. Extended clips and magazines for handguns included. Because I think they need to be banned and no one, as of yet, has been able to give me anything that doesn't translate to, "I like to shoot guns and you can't take that away 'cuz the Constitution says so."

Bang! You're Dead.



Kids used to do that with their fingers. Nowadays they use video games to mock shoot each other.

In San Antonio, Texas, an armed security guard stopped a mass killing when she shot and wounded a disgruntled employee who opened fire in the Chinese restaurant where he worked.

A would-be murderer recently broke into a home with a crowbar. The mother hid upstairs with her 9-year-old twins. The intruder found them, breaking down the door. She pointed a .38 revolver her husband showed her how to use at him and fired five times. Her children are alive. The intruder recovered from the gunshot wounds and is in prison.

In 1938, Adolf Hitler's Minister of Interior, Wilhelm Frick, passed regulations against Jews owning

firearms.

“The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to allow the subject races to possess arms,” Hitler said. “History shows that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by so doing.”

Currently, Massachusetts legislators are pushing hard to pass a mish-mash of gun control laws that would do everything from forcing gun owners to hand over their weapons to the state to requiring insurance, rendering the Second Amendment unaffordable to many — much like ObamaCare will render healthcare unaffordable to many.

In Rhode Island, the Farce Four — Langevin, Chickalini, Whitehouse, and Reed — are on the record to support any and all anti-Second Amendment legislation. And at Governor Lincoln Chafee’s behest, a working group has been formed to study gun legislation, which will likely recommend a ban on assault-style weapons.

In each contemporary debate, assault weapons seem to be at the heart of the matter. Of course, assault weapons are what the citizenry would need to protect itself from tyranny. And that, my friends, was the clear intent of the Second Amendment. Think about it, a bunch of cats who had just overthrown a government through violent insurrection ... those were the Founding Fathers.

Statistically speaking, assault rifles aren’t a significant killer - they just make big headlines. Handguns are used in 72 percent of firearm-related death in the US each year. And yet, the government has virtually no interest in banning pistols? Shotguns were used in only 4 percent of deaths last year, and other rifles - which would include assault weapons as a sub-category — also only 4 percent. Wouldn’t it make more sense to ban handguns and dole out rifles? Think about it - can a gang banger really conceal a 12-gauge shotgun, or would a .38 revolver be somewhat easier? The numbers simply don’t jibe with the government’s argument for a safer society.

The conclusion that does follow, logically, is that the government seeks to disarm those it finds to be a threat, guys like me, much like Hitler did to the German Jews.

No, I’m not Jewish; I’m a pantheist, in the Existential sense. You know what I mean.

People hear the term “gun control” and they believe they will be safer. Unfortunately, gun control makes criminals and madmen more powerful, and you - in the unlikely event that you’re neither a madman nor a criminal - will be more vulnerable. When the intruder came into that mother’s home with the crowbar, she called 911 immediately. Guess what, driving a car miles to someone’s home takes longer than charging up a flight of stairs and the cops arrived just in time to call an ambulance. Were she unarmed, they would have called the coroner.

Because of instances just like that, states such as Arizona, Texas, Wyoming, South Dakota, Kansas, and Tennessee are considering relaxing regulations on the lawful purchase of guns.

I live in the beautiful Hope Valley area, where folks hunt and rifle shots are heard on a daily basis - year-round - coming from the bountiful forests and big backyards. The sound rings of liberty, and security. I see hunters walk out of the woods on main streets with high-powered rifles on a regular basis. Only a madman or a fool would break into a home around here, for he would certainly be out-gunned. A friend of mine works third shift for the local police department, and he told me that not much

really happens other than a bunch of drunk drivers and occasional domestic disorderly. He acknowledged that - in part - the low crime rate stems from the fact that folks here are heavily armed and criminals know it.

A society able to defend itself sleeps far easier at night than one fearful of reprisal.

Travis Rowley, author of *The Rhode Island Republican*, provided his thoughts on the issue.

“Owning a gun is not a human right or a natural right. After all, how can a firearm be a natural right if man had to invent it? But the ability to defend oneself is a natural right. So as long as an armed government rules over a people, those citizens should not be stripped of weapons that could counter potential government aggression. The challenge of the Second Amendment controversy has always been to imagine what this scenario might look like, and to leave a satisfactory amount of firepower in the hands of the people.

“Gun control advocates have a difficult task in front of them, as they attempt to convince American citizens to comply with new firearm restrictions during a time of increased government hubris, intrusion, and control; during an age when more and more people are calling upon the wisdom of the framers.”

Being less subtle than my learned friend Travis, all I can say is: They can pry my gun out of my cold dead hand. Come and get it.

Rare Steak

Growing up in Riverside on the wrong side of the tracks, when my friends and I “borrowed” cars at 14 and 15, we’d travel to 324 Waterman Ave to Sax Steak, which we considered the greatest shaved steak sandwiches in the world. Our world anyway. That was more than 35 years ago, and the place remains a model of excellence and consistency. Sax toasts the Italian rolls and has a special steak sauce used during the grilling. When I’m in the Big City, I’ll sometimes jump over 195 to E.P. and get the #10. The place has changed hands a few times over the decades, and no one knows the exact number of years they have been at the original take-out location, but it must be more than 40. Sax remains my favorite steak sandwich, bar none. If you’re a vegan, there’s a lawn across the street.

Ska!

A tip of the cap to my good friends Mac Kenzie and Matt Di Chiara (The Copacetics) for their work with RI Ska Productions. This February they celebrate five years of promoting Ska. The genre always seems to do well along the coast, at venues like Ocean Mist, Paddy’s, or Newport Blues Café, but they’ve worked hard to invigorate city-dwellers with a style that makes you just feel young again - even if you’re not old.

Of note, Mr. Furious has been gaining a lot of steam on the scene and their popularity can be attributed to style and charisma, and they are one of the most enthusiastic bands you come across. They stay the entire show and skank the night away. Good music, good people, good times. Ska! Check out RI Ska Productions on Facebook.

It's All You



It began with a simple coincidence and an off-color joke, as all good love stories do. As fate would have it, we were seated side-by-side in the exit row of an airplane. While the flight attendants prepared the cabin for takeoff, I gestured toward the window with my thumb. "If we crash, it's all you." He smiled ... and I melted into a puddle.

I was headed home after a week-long vacation in Lisbon. His company was sending him to the US to open an office in Silicon Valley. The conversation took off before we left the runway, as natural as breathing the air. We were on that plane for six-and-a-half hours; it was the best first date of my life.

Three weeks later, I visited him in San Francisco. After a romantic long weekend that paralleled a movie, I flew home in tears. I didn't want to say goodbye. But sometimes in life you have to take a leap of faith. I gave my two-week notice at work and at the end of my last day, flew right back into his arms.

Eventually, he had to return home to Portugal. By that point, we knew we wanted to be together though we knew it wouldn't be easy. Schengen Zone travel restrictions state that I can visit for just 90 days within any 180-day period; so while, yes, I *am* moving there to be with him, I'm only allowed to stay for three months.

From there, we shall see.

Aesop Rock is Bumming Me Out



A wise man once said, "Have no expectations and you'll never be let down." Okay, maybe he wasn't a wise man; he was probably just some dude who couldn't get laid and listened to too much Morrissey. Another wise man once said, "Their earlier work is so much better than their later stuff." And then his friends were all, "He's so pretentious," because he probably was. But its about to get real pretentious up in here.

After crushing my hopes and canceling his last Providence show, Aesop Rock finally redeemed himself (sort of) and paid Providence a visit last night. I'd like to first take this moment to differentiate between Aesop Rock, arguably the best MC creeping around the millennial underground scene back in '01, named for Greece's famed fable-teller; and A\$AP Rocky, who "loves bad bitches," its his "f*ing problem." But I digress. I left the Met last night with a bad taste in my mouth.

Artists change as they mature, its the nature of the job. Aesop came onto the scene over a decade ago busting out syncopated a capella rhymes like a spoken word artist who just blew his last line. Like every artist in history who's had a lengthy career, his style is changed. No, he didn't "get shitty," but has traveled miles from his starting point. He's not the man I fell in love with.

The crowd exploded the one time he broke into a vintage rhyme and begged for more once he stopped. Yes, he's a fantastic performer, yes he still has a place in my heart as one of my favorite rappers, and yes, he probably feels like Lynrd Skynyrd does when has-been's scream "Free Bird" at them, but Aesop, you gave me blue balls. And I won't be calling you up for a second date.

Busdriver

I've seen all of the remaining members of Wu-Tang perform together, ODB's son and all (if his name isn't YDB, it should be). Opening act from LA, Busdriver, still takes the cake for best live hip hop show I've ever seen. His set was the kind of show where you look over to your friends to see if they're as wide-eyed as you are as they simultaneously look over to check your reaction too. So good that when I went home to listen to his discography I was disappointed.

Sage Francis

Of COURSE Sage hopped on stage to spit with opener, B.Dolan. He is the Where's Waldo of RI hip hop in the best way possible

Publisher's Note



For years now, I've been picking up Motif to find out what was happening in local theater, music, events and entertainment - as well as who's been caught with a hand in the cookie jar by Jim Hummel, or what shows and events are coming up.

I've enjoyed writing Motif's film column for the last several years, but have always been interested in doing more to work with our high-octane arts community.

I have grown deeply convinced that the depth of artistic endeavor in Rhode Island, in its many, many varied forms, far exceeds what anyone should expect from a community our size. RI has a justified national reputation in numerous areas - for achieving the highest standards in arts, from the theatrical to the culinary, the musical to the written. Yet many times these artists don't gain the same notoriety right here in our community.

At Motif, we want to help change that - to draw attention to highlights in the creative economy, and show locals and visitors the diversity and talent RI and nearby areas have to offer. In publishing Motif, I saw an opportunity to help that cause.

In our part of the world, some amazing things are happening - and some just plain fun, interesting or challenging things.

I'm stepping into some pretty big shoes - nobody pays more attention to what's happening in RI arts than Motif founder and outgoing editor Jim Vickers. I want to thank Jim for creating Motif and for all his advice. We'll continue to see some of his often controversial opinion pieces in these pages. Agree with him or disagree with him (I usually do both), but he's fun to read.

There's a tremendous team behind Motif that's keeping things on track as I transition into the role of your new Publisher. Please feel free to let us know what you think of any of the new features we'll be gradually adding - we have some exciting plans for content, for a new website, and more coming up.

We're also exploring new niches in the entertainment scene - I'm excited that this issue explores Electronic Dance Music, a genre that's escaped mainstream notice while thriving through newer social and online media, building a sub-culture and fan base almost invisible to those not involved in that scene. RI is full of stories like this - about robust cultures secreted in the crannies of our cobbled streets!

For now, we wanted to let you know there's been a transition, but Motif's mission in life hasn't changed - to celebrate the local, the different and the undiscovered treasure. So wish us luck, and enjoy!