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OPINION

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Lamont's firearms plan a losing proposition

By Holly Sullivan and John R. Lott, Jr.

Connecticut likely will lose the lawsuit against the state's current assault weapon ban. Still, instead of learning lessons from court decisions around the country, Gov. Ned Lamont is doubling down and pushing to expand the prohibition to "grandfathered" firearms.

But some important leaders in the Democratic-controlled state legislature, such as Sen. Gary Winfield, the chair of the Judiciary Committee, have said they are resisting the change.

In June, after the U.S. Supreme Court's Bruen decision, even a three-judge panel for the liberal 9th Circuit Court of Appeals vacated a lower court's decision that upheld California's more than 20-year-old ban on military-style rifles. Similar moves are occurring across the country.

Lamont calls firearms such as the AR-15 "military-style," but they function the same as any small caliber semi-automatic hunting rifle — firing the same bullets, with the same rapidity, and doing the same damage. For semi-automatic guns, which are around 85% of the firearms sold in the United States, one pull of the trigger fires one bullet, and the gun reloads itself. The alternative is a manually loaded gun where you must physically put another bullet in the chamber after each shot.

The term "assault weapon" is nonsensical. Finally, the Associated Press's highly influential stylebook, used by the news media, recognizes that fact. As the AP now acknowledges, the term conveys "little meaning" and is "highly politicized." Politicians such as Lamont and Attorney General William Tong will keep calling AR-15s "assault weapons" and "weapons of war," but at least the bible of media etiquette is now recognizing that these firearms are fundamentally different than military weapons. No military around the world uses these semi-automatic rifles.

Lamont claims that these guns have "the sole purpose of killing the largest number of humans within the shortest amount of time" and that "we can implement laws that respect the rights of Americans to own guns for their own protection." But that is not the case. He ignores that semi-automatic guns provide critical self-defense benefits. After each shot, a semi-automatic gun reloads itself. A single-shot rifle, by contrast, requires



Assault rifles are displayed at Coastal Trading and Pawn on July 18 in Auburn, Maine. President Joe Biden and the Democrats have become increasingly emboldened in pushing for stronger gun control. The president pushed the weapons ban nearly everywhere that he campaigned this year. **ROBERT F. BUKATY/AP FILE**

manual reloading. If you face multiple attackers or fire and miss or wound but don't stop an attacker, victims might not have the luxury of time to manually reload their gun.

But there are more important practical objections to the ban. Lamont is simply wrong in claiming: "You can't be tough on crime if you are weak on guns!"

In 2021, Federal Judge Roger Benitez ruled that the state of California's experts could not provide evidence that either federal or state assault weapons bans reduced any type of violent crime.

One of the co-authors of this op-ed, John Lott, was a statistical expert in that case, and Judge Benitez adopted his findings. There was no drop in the number of mass public shootings with assault weapons during the 1994 to 2004 ban. There was an increase after the ban sunset, but the

change was not statistically significant.

More importantly, if the assault weapon ban drove any drop in attacks, we should see a drop in the percentage of attacks with assault weapons during the federal ban period and then an increase in the post-ban period. But the opposite is true. It just doesn't make sense for the ban to reduce the number of attacks without the share of attacks using assault weapons falling.

With all the concern about assault weapons since the federal ban sunset in 2004, all rifles together account for a small share of murders. Moreover, even that share has fallen over time. The percentage of firearm murders with rifles was 4.8% before the ban starting in September 1994, 4.9% from 1995 to 2004 when the ban was in effect, and just 3.6% after that (3.9% if you look at just the first 10 years after the ban

ended). The FBI data shows that only 2% of murders involve any rifle.

The vast majority of handguns and rifles sold in the United States are semi-automatic. In 2018, the U.S. made almost 3.9 million semi-automatic handguns, compared to fewer than 700,000 revolvers. So, about 85% of all handguns made were semi-automatic. A similar percentage holds for rifles.

Lamont's push to undo the grandfather provision will not only make Connecticut residents less safe but will further cost the state needless legal spending for a case it very likely will lose.

Holly Sullivan is the president of the Connecticut Citizen Defense League. John R. Lott, Jr. is the president of the Crime Prevention Research Center.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Curiosity must breathe or creativity is stifled

I, like the vast majority of youths in this nation, have struggled with feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt in my place in society. Like my friends, when I was young, I was told to trust in the American educational system to help me find a place where I belonged, told to wait because I would always have time to try something new and find myself in the coming years. Like all of my friends, I was lied to, and I placed my trust in a system that played me, and now that I'm going into college expects me to front the tab.

Education isn't just there to give students important life skills or marketable abilities — first and foremost the goal of school is to give students access to opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have, and teach students to try new things in order to learn what they like. And while this might have been true years ago, modern society has stripped those intentions away, leaving behind a system that force-feeds marketable skills to students, turning interests into obsessions, and hobbies into nostalgic memories.

This process could be stopped. We need to teach our educators that self-betterment comes first. We need to keep capitalism away from our schools, and teach our students to support all of their interests and ideas, not just the ones they can sell. We need to teach our children to nurture their hobbies and value every part of themselves without cutting anything away, and we need to start paying more attention to the unappreciated people of America, whose brilliant talents have gifted them a dead-end job. If we don't, creativity will continue to die in our school, and our children will be nothing more than the products of our economy.

Noah Auden, Colchester

A Bronx cheer for Gary Franks

Sunday's Op-Ed by Gary Franks [Dec. 11, Opinion, Page 2, "Selecting the House speaker should not be that difficult"] was way off-base. While mixing poker and baseball metaphors, Mr. Franks is so far off base he imagines a vast "liberal media" that has established some sort of "sympathetic bond" with President Biden and the Democrats, even as papers owned by the Tribune Media Co., including the Courant, tilt to the right, and Fox News and Sinclair Broadcasting blanket the airwaves with right-wing propaganda.

As a politician, Mr. Franks proved to be a radical ideologue who opposed affirmative action, favored reducing capital gains taxes, was all for Clarence Thomas's nomination to the high court and opposed abortion rights after initially favoring them. His pitch using that tired trope of a "liberal media" suggests he also is high and tight.

How else to interpret his blithe dismissal of the Jan. 6 attack on the nation's capital as a "phony threat to Democracy" created by "liberal" spin? And when Franks tosses the

notion that the decades-long border crisis, Covid-induced supply chain issues, the big pharma-related opioid epidemic, and the chaotic departure from Afghanistan (resulting from a Trump-Taliban deal) were all uniquely Biden-created problems, his pitch — instead of up and in — ends up in the dirt.

The spitball may be illegal in the Big Leagues, but Franks hurls a doozy in his assertion that Biden hasn't served the U.S. well, largely basing his claim on the president's lagging poll numbers. While conveniently overlooking the recently passed Marriage Equality Bill, the CHIPS semiconductor bill, and the modest gun control legislation enacted earlier this year, Franks dismisses the benefits of lowering prescription drug costs and the infrastructure bill as "far off" in the future. But just as a competent manager must think beyond the first inning, so too Biden, in ushering these measures through Congress, shows he's intent on keeping the U.S. in it for the full nine.

Scorecards are useful for comparisons, and Biden's, in just two years, already records more homers and RBI than Trump's after a full term. Mr. Franks likewise whiffs in his apologetics for the Republican Party. By soft-pedaling his party's Draconian stance on what women can do with their bodies, and its obsessive desire to dismantle Social Security and Medicare, Franks deserves a Bronx cheer.

Christopher Brooks, New Hartford

Bill about big cats is the right thing to do

We've all seen them: pictures on social media of people hugging, feeding, or playing with tiger or lion cubs. The animals are adorable, and the people look like they're enjoying themselves. But Americans have increasingly come to understand that "cub petting" attractions like this are harmful to all involved — cruel for the cubs, and potentially dangerous for the people. To make things worse, these operations churn out older big cats who too often end up loosely confined to neighborhood backyards and garages only to break free, generating still greater public safety and animal welfare concerns.

Fortunately, Connecticut bans all of these scenarios, and the nation will soon follow the state's example. Last week, the U.S. Senate passed the Big Cat Public Safety Act, H.R. 263. This is a great victory for big cats and a long time in the making. The bill prohibits public contact with big cats and keeping these species as pets. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., led the Senate bill, S. 1210, along with Sen. Susan Collins, R-ME, and we could not have gotten to this moment without Blumenthal's dedication and hard work. The bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year. We urge President Biden to expeditiously sign the bill into law to protect public health and promote animal welfare.

Sara Amundson, Washington, D.C.
The writer is President of the Humane Society Legislative Fund

State lets down women in addiction recovery

By Donna Brooks

Connecticut had one in-patient unit available for women in addiction recovery. Now, it's gone.

I can't talk about women's health and treatment without being political, especially not when the state of Connecticut is failing some of its most vulnerable women.

There were once three state-funded rehabilitation programs serving individuals in recovery from substance abuse in Connecticut Valley Hospital. Two units were all male. The third program, known as Sisters Together Achieving Recovery, or STAR, was the state's only female in-patient unit for addiction recovery.

Now, 30 years after we fought to build it, STAR is gone. At least for now.

I spent decades working in the field of mental health care. Back in the '90s, I was one of several staff members working for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, or DMHAS, who submitted the initial proposal for gender-responsive treatment models. It centered women's needs in addiction recovery. A year later, I became a founding member and director of Connecticut's STAR Program.

The STAR program was once the highest level of care available in Connecticut for treating chemical dependency. At its height, it contained 40 beds and served as a one-stop shop for women's health and recovery needs, with 600 admissions and discharges each year.

When I first started this work, women represented only around 15-20 percent of patients receiving treatment for substance abuse. But 50 percent of substance users are women. The small portion of women who sought treatment within our co-ed facilities would rarely complete their recovery programs.

There were several reasons why co-ed treatment programs were unsuccessful. Often, women turn to addictive substances to self-medicate against trauma. The women who came to us had often endured unfathomable violence through repetitive emotional, sexual and physical injury.

A woman would arrive in treatment to find that the gender of their rapist, their oppressor, their pimp, or their john was in the same room. I watched again and again as women would shut down, closing off from treatment because they did not feel safe to receive care. Sometimes, a domestic partner would call and threaten to abandon her children, forcing her to leave treatment immediately. Other times, a jealous partner would pull her out after finding she was around other men in therapy.

In March of 1996, we established STAR in Connecticut after years of identifying how these (and several other) unique challenges inhibited women on their journeys toward recovery. At the time, there were no other programs like it in our state.

As far as I know, that was still the case until the STAR program's recent demise. When the coronavirus pandemic began, STAR was consolidated with the men's unit.

Many women came to STAR with co-occurring disorders. They battled chemical dependency, eating disorders, mental trauma, domestic violence, postpartum depression, and had other medical conditions. Some were pregnant.

STAR offered wrap-around services with a special team of nurses, psychiatrists, physicians, social workers, dentists, educators, and addiction counselors to provide holistic care to women in recovery.

We never turned away a woman who met the criteria for admission. As the program got on its feet, we also took in trans women. As time went on, with more and more women completing the program, we found that they trusted us enough to refer family members. We proudly considered that to be a stamp of approval.

DMHAS cites staffing shortages as the reason for the collapse of the STAR program. It has stated the intent to reopen STAR. DMHAS must promptly hire the staff necessary to reboot STAR and uphold the state's commitment to care for women.

STAR transformed the way that a woman viewed herself during treatment. Our mission was to help a woman see herself not as an addict but as a participant in her own well-being, that of her loved ones, and within society. One alumna after another shared her immense gratitude. With our gender-responsive treatment, they were back in control over their lives.

When STAR was consolidated with the men's unit, we regressed 30 years. We fought so hard to create healing spaces in which women could properly recover. STAR is Connecticut's unique treatment model, designed to meet women's needs.

Now, these needs are failing to be addressed once again. We are entirely at risk once again. I am mortified that almost 30 years later, we are right back where we started, fighting the same fight for equality and treatment in the never-ending struggle for women's rights.

Donna Brooks is the retired director of the STAR program for women at Connecticut Valley Hospital.