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# West Seneca Bee

## NY Safe Act should be repealed; state needs discourse on safety

The events of Dec. 14, 2012, in Newtown, Conn., will always be remembered as among our nation's darkest days. It was every mother's, father's, brother's and sister's worst nightmare come to life. Each and every American still mourns for those 20 children, their six teachers and the entire Newtown community.

It's unfortunate it took this long, but Newtown sparked a dialogue beyond what had previously emerged in the aftermath of similar tragedies. It seemed that this country was finally on the precipice of having a national conversation about societal violence, mental health and public safety.

Each of us — regardless of political persuasion — was ready.

As a captain in the New York State Police and as sheriff of Erie County, I have seen the ebbs and flows of violent crime from a front-row vantage point for more than two decades. When Gov. Andrew Cuomo, like many elected leaders across the country, directed New York State government's undivided attention toward ensuring that New York led the way with new policies to improve public safety and reduce gun violence, I hoped that I would have the opportunity to apply real-world experience and perspective to this complex set of problems.

But something else happened. Instead of using this unique moment in time to make New York's schools, its communities and its citizens safer by applying proven public protection strategies like illegal gun interdiction, targeted anti-violence enforcement programs and broader implementa-

tion of school resource officers, the conversation devolved into an encroachment on law-abiding citizens and our constitutionally guaranteed rights.

The speciously named NY SAFE Act identified an arbitrary number of bullets as too many, it determined that certain purely cosmetic features can redefine a sporting rifle as an assault weapon, and it focused its attention on law-abiding gun owners rather than the criminals who continue to terrorize inner-city neighborhoods across the country with illegally obtained, possessed and used firearms.

What's worse, by ignoring long-established crime prevention data from widely respected institutions such as the National Institute of Justice and the National Research Council, the NY SAFE Act exploited our emotions in the false name of safety.

Like the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban and the New York State Combined Ballistic Identification System before it, the NY SAFE Act fails to acknowledge fundamental characteristics of gun violence in the United States: that rifles are responsible for less than 5 percent of all gun-related crimes, and the overwhelming majority of all gun crimes are committed by individuals with criminal histories.

I voted against the NY SAFE Act and support its repeal because I believe it infringes upon the Second Amendment and because a lifetime spent understanding criminal behavior and public protection would not allow me to assent to its rhetoric of making New York safer.



**PATRICK  
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