

OUR VIEW

New laws seem to say: ‘Shoot first. Shut up.’

Florida’s gun-friendly laws may soon become even more friendly, more dangerous and more irresponsible thanks to the National Rifle Association, which call the shots in the state Legislature.

Two versions of a bill pending in Tallahassee — SB 128 — would change key definitions in Florida’s notorious Stand Your Ground law.

Each would make it easier for a citizen to shoot another citizen, then claim self-defense and avoid prosecution and a trial by jury.

Each would further encourage the “shoot-first, ask-questions-later” mentality.

One has passed the House; the other the Senate.

One is awful. The other is worse.

Under Florida’s current Stand Your Ground law, individuals can use deadly force in self-defense if they think it

is necessary. A key provision of the 2005 law is that they have no “duty to retreat” before using force — a common component of self-defense claims.

In a 2015 ruling, the Florida Supreme Court said immunity in the law “is not a blanket immunity, but rather, requires the establishment that the use of force was legally justified.”

And, as the law is currently written, the burden of proof is on defendants to convince a judge they should not be brought to trial on charges.

The proposed law flips this.

Under the proposed legislation, the burden of proof switches to the prosecution. State attorneys would need to build a convincing case — before the formal trial — that charges were justified.

The basic premise for the shift has widespread support in Tallahassee.

Which is bad enough. But the issue in this Legislature is now how much proof will be required.

The version passed by the House would force prosecutors to prove they had “clear and convincing evidence” to move forward.

The version passed by the Senate would require an even-tougher standard: Prosecutors would need to prove that charge “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Which, as we know, is the same standard used for conviction.

That means prosecutors would face that legal hurdle twice: to both bring a charge and to win a conviction.

Naturally, that will lead to fewer prosecutions. And it makes it much easier for defendants to avoid prosecution and avoid a trial by their peers.

Naturally, that makes it less likely citizens will hesitate to defend themselves

with a gun if they feel threatened — if they imagined themselves to be seriously threatened.

They aren’t legally compelled to back off. They aren’t compelled to convince a judge they were justified. And the state has to prove a charge is justified either through “clear and convincing evidence” or evidence “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

All that before an actual trial by jury, when defendants would get another shot at the “beyond a reasonable doubt” threshold.

The upshot?

More shootings in questionable circumstances.

Why not?

Fewer consequences. Shoot first and keep your mouth shut. The law is overwhelmingly on your side.

Here’s how to spread lies, racism



Ronald Dupont Jr.

Want to spread lies? Scare people? Spark racism?

Then look no further than the two people who went to the Venice Municipal Airport recently and said that a flight school there was knowingly training future terrorists.

Here is what the man in the video says: “This is to me outlandish and shocking, that we can still be training Arabic Muslim men to learn how to crash planes.”

The two people in the video, Michael and Beth (who don’t give their last names), apparently base their racist, slanderous claims on nothing more than the fact that the schools are, indeed, teaching people from other countries how to fly planes.

Their “proof” is the fact that they saw the names of foreigners listed on certificates hanging on the door.

Well, Michael and Beth, you had better hope that these schools do not learn your last names, because you are prime candidates for a slander lawsuit, one that you will lose quickly and will be literally paying for, likely for the rest of your lives.

As *Venice Gondolier Sun* Senior Writer Bob Mudge reported in his front-page story last week-end, there is a shortage of pilots worldwide. Florida has become a big magnet for pilot training because there are many schools here and lots of sunny days, meaning you can learn to be a pilot a whole lot faster here than you can in other countries (or even in other areas of the United States). And it’s a lot cheaper, too.

A great example is India, which desperately needs commercial pilots. Learning to fly in that country costs roughly \$100,000. But come to Florida and even after you throw in lodging, meals and the transportation to get you to and from India, it costs roughly \$50,000.

The same is true for a whole host of countries in the Middle East, too. But you two, Michael and Beth, see names of foreigners as clients of these flight schools and immediately accuse these schools of training future terrorists.

And by the way, if you two do

end up before a judge, the burden of proof will be on you. In court, you will have to produce evidence that these flight schools are committing these alleged illegal and treasonous acts.

My guess is that you have zero evidence.

If you had done any research whatsoever, you would have learned that the government conducts a security check on all foreign flight students before their first lesson. You would have learned that these flight schools are not teaching people from any of the countries that President Donald Trump had on his travel ban list.

You would have learned that these flight schools are law-abiding international businesses that are bringing jobs and revenue to Venice and to the region. You would have learned the truth and not have been spreading innuendo based on fear.

And that is the difference between a journalist doing his or her job and some person with a camera pretending to spread “truth.” A good journalist digs hard for the truth, interviews multiple people and presents the facts before the readers in an unbiased way.

In short, a good journalist does not aim a camera at some buildings, throw out innuendo

that sparks fear and then fan the fires of racism.

Like almost everybody reading this column, I have the same fear that we all have — of another 9/11-type incident happening.

I hate the fact that we went from a country with the Statue of Liberty welcoming immigrants to one where we legitimately have to worry about some terrorists slipping in and causing more carnage.

But that is the new reality. We have to be careful. There is a difference, however, between being careful and being somebody who sees evil in every person with a last name that doesn’t sound “American,” whatever that means.

I was in Chicago giving a speech on journalism when the 9/11 attacks happened. It took me nearly a week to get home because of the airports being closed and because of rental cars being so scarce.

One morning, I went to eat breakfast in my hotel’s restaurant and there was a man of Middle Eastern heritage sitting by himself, crying. Outright crying.

Before long, I went over and sat with him and asked him if he was OK.

“No,” he replied. “Everybody is looking at me like I am a killer.”

That single sentence shook

me to my bones. That man’s comment made me realize more than ever how much I need to be great as a journalist, to present the facts so that people get the truth.

That is not what was happening in the Venice airport video.

Thanks to that thrown-together fear video, more good citizens of this planet we call Earth will have to worry about people looking at them as killers.

As *Americans* — not just as journalists — we need to set the example for the rest of the world and do our best to present the truth. Not fear. Not lies. Not innuendo.

The truth.

Part of keeping the United States of America a great country is not giving in to such fear-mongering. It is our job to stand up and demand proof.

Journalists cannot do it alone. We need all of you to help.

Let’s be great. Let’s be caring. Let’s be vigilant, but with truth on our side.

Let’s set the example. Let’s not just say we are Americans.

Let’s be *Americans*.

Ronald Dupont Jr. is the editor of the Venice Gondolier Sun and can be reached at rdupont@VeniceGondolier.com.

MORE AND MORE RESTAURANTS ARE BECOMING ‘PET-FRIENDLY.’ WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS? CALL US AT 941-207-1111.

Let ’em



Have It

Editor’s Note: The number for the Let ’em Have It Line is once again 941-207-1111.

Here Is Why We Pay. I’m responding to callers who say if you don’t have bikes, you shouldn’t have to pay for them. Well, guess what? I chose not to have children. Why do my taxes get locked into a large portion of the budget to finance children, schools and everything associated with children? I don’t have children so why do I have to pay for schools with my taxes?

I don’t have a car. Why do I need to pay for roads? I don’t use the roads, I stick to the sidewalk. There are many things in this life we have to pay for in this society that we

don’t necessarily agree with. Shut up and grow up.

Charge Farmers Market Rent. The present Farmers Market owners make money and should be charged a fee, much like for city property usage. One place they could go is at the Community Center parking lot. They would have to deal with the county, I believe, but that would be their problem. I see no reason that the average city taxpayer receives any benefit in any way from this venue.

We once had six vendors with vegetables, flowers and bread. It now sells everything possible, and the tents keep growing, making more money for the ones who own the Farmers Market. Apparently, no one has found enough enthusiasm to deal with this problem. I would like to see the city look at this and do something about it. I don’t think they should continue to run without some sort of fee paid to the city for the money that they are making.

Keep Venice Beautiful. I think downtown has too many festivals. It seems too crowded and it makes it very difficult to get around. We bought in Venice because it’s so beautiful, but we seem now to need more moderation. It takes away from the beauty of the town.

Money For Everything Except River Road. It’s interesting that we can pay \$50 million in tax dollars to extend the Legacy Trail, and another \$75 million to \$95 million to



build a minor-league baseball stadium; but we can’t seem to find any money to fix the problem with River Road, which is the main evacuation route for a good portion of North Port, South Venice and other areas in Englewood.

I suggest that the next hurricane that comes, you hop on your bike and pedal your you-know-what out of town or give the Braves a call and maybe they’ll fly you out on their private jet.

Support Trump. Many of you contributors need to stop whining, enabling and being obstructionists. Instead, consider making a positive change in the world. President Trump deserves a chance to

make a better country; and from where I sit, he is making progress, despite the hatred. Our country needs jobs, security and hope for those coming of age that will join the workforce.

Let’s give all of our faith to President Trump to make this happen.

Motorized Bike Rights? I’m calling about the rights for walkers. I walk every morning on Pinebrook Road and there are bicycles that come up behind you and run you off the road. There’s all kinds of bike money being spent, and we get run off into the grass and ants and what have you. Now there is a motorized bike that comes down the highway. I don’t know

what their rights are, whether they belong on the sidewalk where we’re trying to walk.

The Let ’em Have It line allows readers to sound off on issues of local interest. Opinions expressed here are solely those of the callers. Personal attacks on private individuals; attacks on or commercials for specific businesses; local candidate endorsements or attacks during election season; or opinions or comments otherwise unfit for publication will not be printed. If you would like to participate, call the line at 941-207-1111. Call no more than once a week. Please keep your comments brief. The line is available all hours. Caller identification is not required.