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Why Gun Control is Not the Answer, and What We Can Do to Stop Gun Violence | Farmington Flyer

By Clayton Perry, Staff Writer

No topic has taken the country by storm as fiercely as the debate on guns since the tragic events at Sandy Hook. It has divided the nation into what most people see as two distinct groups: those that believe we should institute stricter gun laws, and those who believe we should arm our schools to stop future shooters. As both a Liberal and a gun owner, I'm here to tell you that both of these proposals are ill-informed. Stricter gun laws were in place during the Assault Weapons Ban between 1994 and 2004, but that didn't stop the shooters at Columbine in 1999. Also, most teachers have little to no experience with firearms, so providing them with weapons won't solve the problem either.

People are too overcome by their emotions in this debate that they don't stop and look at the facts regarding gun violence in this country. Historically, stricter gun regulations do not keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Instead, stricter gun laws keep guns away from people like myself: reasonable, mentally-stable, law-abiding people, who know how to safely use a firearm. Though it may seem like violent crime is escalating out of control in this country, it has actually been steadily decreasing in recent years. We are safer now than we were during the Reagan Administration and even during the Assault Weapons Ban. Gun control advocates often cite the 11,000 gun murders in this country each year as justification for stricter gun laws. However, cancer kills fifty times that many people in the U.S. every year.

So why hasn't anybody proposed legislation to control cancer? Not to say that the 11,000 people killed in gun violence every year isn't tragic, but I find it just as tragic that you're fifty times more likely to lose a loved one to cancer than you are to gun violence. Most people are also too focused on how many people are killed by firearms each year that they often ignore the fact that guns actually save more lives than they take. Guns are used

far more often in self-defense than in a crime and 98% of the time that a gun is used in self-defense, not a single shot is fired. Take the case of 22-year-old Nick Meli. This Oregon concealed-carry permit holder was present during a mall shooting in Clackamas, Oregon last month. Once he heard shots firing, he saw a gunman with a rifle who had just shot and killed two people. He positioned himself behind a pillar and drew his gun. He presented himself to the gunman who, upon seeing Nick's gun, turned his own weapon on himself and pulled the trigger. Had he not been present, we may very well have seen another Sandy Hook-style shooting just days after the tragedy.

But the question still remains: how do we prevent school shootings? In the case of Adam Lanza, the 20-year-old shooter at Sandy Hook, stricter gun laws would not have worked. Before the shooting, he attempted to purchase firearms, only to be denied on the basis of mental instability, thus proving the effectiveness of background checks that are required for all over-the-counter gun purchases. His only option was to steal the guns from his mother. People are under the impression that Lanza used an assault-style rifle in the shooting, when in actuality, he didn't. The police later found one in his car, but it was not used in the shooting, proving that you don't need an assault-style rifle to carry out a shooting spree. (So that again begs the question: why ban them if it won't stop school shootings?)

One huge factor that plays into all of the recent mass-shootings is the issue of mental health, something that has been going largely unaddressed in this whole debate. Had Adam Lanza had the proper mental health diagnoses and treatment, this tragedy may not have happened. Unfortunately, though we have made huge strides in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders in the past 50 years, people still struggle with mental illness every day unable to get help. To put it into perspective how little attention we put towards mental health, the biggest mental health treatment facilities in the U.S. are located at Riker's Island Jail in New York, LA County Jail in California, and Cook County Jail in Illinois.

Gun control advocates and opponents both want the same thing: guns out of the hands of criminals and into the hands of people who know how to use them. With that in mind, I have a solution for this issue as well as a suggestion for how to prevent school shootings in the future. One idea that has been proposed by both gun control advocate and opponent alike is universal background checks. Under the nation's current gun laws, background checks are required when you purchase a firearm from any Federal Firearms License (FFL) holder. However, there is a loophole in this law that allows people to purchase firearms without a background check at gun shows and private sales. Closing this loophole would mean that only people who are allowed to own firearms will be able to purchase them legally. As a staunch defender of the Second Amendment, I agree whole-heartedly that we should have universal background checks. I go through a background check whenever I purchase a firearm from an FFL holder, so I have no problem submitting to a background check when purchasing a firearm in any setting.

As for the issue of stopping school shootings, look no further than a piece of legislation submitted to our own state legislature by State Representative Brian Duprey(R-Hampden). Proposed shortly after the Sandy Hook shooting, it would allow any teacher or administrator with a Concealed Carry Permit to carry a concealed firearm into a public school. Now before you accuse me of flip-flopping, let me be absolutely clear: my justification for not providing weapons to public schools is that most teachers and administrators are not experienced with firearms. However, if a teacher or administrator has a Concealed Carry Permit, it is proof that they have submitted to the long and arduous legal process required by the state to make sure that they are in their right mind and are trusted with a concealed firearm in the eyes of the state. It is also proof that they have taken a handgun safety course, and are therefore experienced in safely handling and shooting a handgun. This law would ensure that only

teachers and administrators who are experienced with firearms and are deemed eligible by the state may carry a concealed firearm into a school setting. And just like Nick Meli in the Oregon mall, they may be able to stop a shooter from committing a tragedy without even having to fire a single shot. As a future educator and Concealed Carry Permit holder, I would feel much safer knowing that I would have the ability to protect my students and colleagues should the need arise, but I hope that I never have to.

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