

**The Turning Point
in the Campaign against Gun Violence
Students, Teachers, Businesses, Legislators Lead the Way**

by Nick Gier

*Simply putting a gun on the premises and
hoping someone's going to do the right thing is baseless.*
—Chris Grolnek, active shooter specialist

*I know that my community, our schools, and public gathering
places are not made safer by any person having access to
the best killing tool the Army could put in my hands.*
—GOP Rep. Brian Mast on the AR-15 assault rifle

The combined voices of students, teachers, businesses, and legislators may represent a turning point in the battle against gun violence. It is now time for our legislators to heed the will of the people, large majorities of whom have long supported stricter gun control laws.

Students Organize National and Local Protests

Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida have filed a permit for 500,000 people for “The March for Our Lives” on March 24 in Washington, D.C. There are plans for city marches all over the country, and in just three days the students raised \$3.7 million, \$2 million from national celebrities.

Laura Ingram of Fox News has told the students to “shut up,” and an editorial in conservative *National Review* contends that young people should not be policy makers. What these condescending comments overlook is the fact the students have a right to express their opinions, and, by and large, they are just as well argued as any adult in the debate.

Mrs. Trump Praises Students; Her Step-Son Disses Them

I commend Melania Trump who praised the students: “I have been heartened to see children across this country using their voices to speak out and try to create change.” In a tweet, Parkland shooting survivor Lauren Hogg urged Mrs. Trump to have a conversation with her step-son Donald, Jr., who “liked a post about a false conspiracy theory which in turn put a target on my back.” Hogg continues: “To call me and my family horrific things re-victimizes us and our community.”

These students are showing more maturity and civic responsibility than Florida state legislators who cancelled meetings with them, or GOP Congressmen who have previously refused to hold town meetings. They are certainly more mature than State Sen. Dan Foreman who also cancels meetings and yells at constituents who disagree with him.

In a protest in front of the White House Daniel Gelillo, a senior at Richard Montgomery High in Rockville, Maryland, declared: “We are young and can fight until we can vote and then we can vote out every politician that obstructs real change and is owned by the NRA.”

Businesses Ends NRA Discounts and Branded Credit Cards

Inspired by the hashtag @BoycottNRA, major businesses have eliminated discounts for NRA members. Enterprise Car Rentals (including National and Alamo) led the way, and Avis, Budget, Hertz, and TrueCar have followed suit. Also discontinuing discounts are Symantec computer security, SimpliSafe home security, Lockton Affinity insurance, Starkey Hearing Technology, Norton anti-virus, Chubb insurance, Met Life, Allied/North American Van Lines, Delta, United, and Wyndam Hotels.

Kroger, the country’s largest grocery chain and owner of 46 Fred Meyer stores, has announced that it will not sell guns or ammunition to anyone under 21. L.L. Bean has followed suit, and REI will no longer carry items from Vista Outdoors, which REI believes has not done enough for gun control.

The First National Bank of Omaha, the largest privately-owned credit card company in the country, and hedge fund Blackrock will longer offer NRA credit cards. Black Rock and Trillium Asset Management are also reviewing their weapons investments.

Why Not Discounts for Safe, Gun-Free Families?

Philadelphia’s Center for Injury Research and Prevention reports that “1.7 million children live with unlocked, loaded guns,” and “among children, the majority (89%) of unintentional shooting deaths occur in the home.” In 2013, an estimated 100 children were accidentally killed by guns in homes or vehicles, and over 600 are hospitalized for non-fatal firearm injuries. Women are not safe there either. The same study cited research that showed that “an abusive partner’s access to a firearm increases the risk of homicide eight-fold for women.”

GOP Gov. Rick Scott Proposes Gun Legislation

None of these actions will bear fruit unless there is serious gun control legislation. Except for universal background laws in eight states after the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre, many states passed pro-gun measures instead.

That has now changed, and Florida Gov. Rick Scott is calling for raising the age for buying rifles from 18 to 21, the minimum age for handgun sales. Scott also favors legislation restricting those with mental health problems and those convicted of domestic violence and stalking from buying weapons. However, the first bill that Florida’s legislators proposed is one that grants \$67 million for training teachers to use guns to protect their students.

Washington and Oregon Pass Gun Control Bills

In addition to universal background checks, Washington has just passed a bill outlawing bump stocks, the feature that allowed the Las Vegas shooter to fire his AR-15 automatically. Just last week, Oregon passed a law that prohibited a person convicted of stalking, domestic violence, or those under a restraining order from purchasing a gun. *HealthDay News* (11/30/17) reported that states that require gun confiscation of those under restraining orders experienced a “22 percent reduction in gun-related intimate partner murders.”

Governors Conference Promises Action on Guns

At the recent National Governors Conference both Democratic and Republican chief executives spoke in favor of the measures mentioned above. Significantly, GOP Gov. John Kasich of Ohio has removed Second Amendment language from his website and in its place there is a call for a “common sense” approach to gun violence. He is also considering a ban on the sale of assault rifles such as the AR-15. A recent Quinnipiac University poll found that 67 percent supported a nation-wide ban on assault rifles.

Large Majorities Favor Stricter Gun Control

There are now two bills in Congress, first being legislation to reduce the age for buying a handgun to 18. This goes against state legislative trends and the national mood. A Politico/Morning Consult poll found that 64 percent of voters (49 percent of Republicans; 55 percent of gun owners) support stricter gun laws with only 29 percent opposed. Seventy-nine percent favor banning “bump stocks” and 88 percent support closing the loopholes for guns sales.

Bipartisan Gun Control Bills in the Senate

The second bill is sponsored by GOP Sen. John Cornyn and several Democrats, who want to strengthen the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. Flaws in this system allowed a Texas man, who was convicted of domestic abuse while in the Air Force, to buy the AR-15 that led to the murder of 26 people in a Sutherland Springs church. GOP Rep. Louie Gohmert, however, opposes the bill because it would penalize responsible gun owners.

Sen. Marco Rubio, after a dramatic confrontation with Parkland students and parents, is now introducing a “gun violence restraining order” to allow police to prohibit those such as the Florida shooter from purchasing a gun and confiscating the weapons that such a person may already own. He is also teaming up with Sen. Orrin Hatch in co-sponsoring the Stop School Violence Act, which would improve school security and help identify threats.

GOP Rep. Ryan Costello has called for universal background checks, a ban on bump stocks, and appears ready to ban assault rifles. He has argued that the Dickey Amendment should be repealed. This proviso prevents the CDC from doing research on the public health crisis that guns have caused.

In response to the Parkland shooting House Speaker Paul Ryan stated: “I think as public policy makers, we don’t just knee-jerk before we even have all of the facts and the data.” Ryan cannot have these data while his own party blocks comprehensive research on gun violence.

Trump Budget Cuts Funds for School Safety and Mental Health

GOP Senate leader Mitch McConnell announced that he was going to focus on Idaho Sen. Mike Crapo’s banking bill instead of gun legislation. He did say that he favors adding money for school safety, but Trump’s budget proposals cut \$425 million for that purpose. Trump said that the Florida shooting wasn’t “a guns situation (but) a mental health problem.” His budget, however, calls for a \$400 million reduction for mental health services.

Police Officers: Arming Teachers is a Bad Idea

Many legislators and police officers have joined teachers and parents in rejecting Trump’s call for arming teachers. Even with some training, how accurate could teachers shoot when New York City police, with years of training, hit only 13 percent of their targets during gun fights?

Former UI law school dean Donald Burnett recalls that, when a bill was introduced in the Idaho Legislature allowing guns on campus, “a national firearms expert testified that if you have multiple people using firearms all at once, it is very difficult for police to pick and choose who the wrong shooter is.”

Parkland Father: A “Weapon of War” Killed My Daughter

In the wake of the Florida shooting, teacher union leader Randi Weingarten declared: “No amount of training can prepare an armed teacher to go up against an AR-15.” With a standard 30-round magazine, the AR-15 fires bullets at a much higher velocity (three times faster) and causes much more damage than does the typical handgun that a security guard or teacher would carry. Trauma surgeon Dr. Carnell Cooper has testified that AR-15s are often able to hit their target five to six times instead of one of two times in the case of most handgun injuries.

Florida GOP Rep. Brian Mast is an army veteran, and he admits that “the defense my concealed 9 mm affords me is largely gone if the attacker is firing from beyond 40 yards, as he could easily do with the AR-15.” Calling for a ban on this weapon, he states: “I cannot support the primary weapon I used to defend our people being used to kill children I swore to defend.” In a dramatic exchange with Sen. Rubio, Fred Guttenberg, father of a slain 14-year-old student, said: “These kids, these teachers, they were killed by a weapon of war in their school.”

Major Retailers Discontinue Assault Rifle Sales

After Sandyhook, Walmart stopped selling assault rifles and high capacity magazines, but now their minimum age for guns sales will be 21. With 610 stores in 47 states, Dick’s

Sporting Goods Dick's will no longer sell assault rifles and their magazines, and one must be 21 to buy any weapon. Shaken by the Florida shooting, Chairman and CEO Edward Stack declared: "We need to do something, and we're taking these guns out of all of our stores permanently." Stack expected a huge backlash, but instead they received many positive messages and even flowers.

Illinois Gun Show Bans Sale of Assault Rifles

For 40 years the Pioneer Valley Sportsman's Association has held an annual gun show. This year will be different: a raffle to give away an AR-15 has been cancelled, and there will be a ban on the sale of all assault rifles. After receiving complaints and threats of protests, spokesman Frank Cesare announced that "we did the ban to try to calm the situation down and show them we are willing to work with them." The movement in favor of sensible gun control is indeed gaining force.

We Cannot Risk the Chance of Accidental Shootings

Just after the Idaho Legislature passed a law allowing guns on campus, a chemistry instructor shot himself in the foot with his pistol. After the Taliban caused the second largest school shooting in the world, Pakistani school teachers were allowed to carry guns. Just recently a girl was shot dead in a hall by a teacher who was cleaning his gun.

In 1993 a student was killed at Los Angeles' Fairfax High School when a handgun fell from a classmate's backpack and discharged accidentally. One month ago, also in Los Angeles, a 12-year-old girl brought a handgun to school. It, too, went off and injured two students, one critically. A Georgia teacher has been arrested for firing a gun through a classroom window, but fortunately no one was hit. Just as children are not safe in homes with guns, neither are they secure in schools with guns.

Blue States: Lowest Gun Deaths; Most Restrictive Gun Laws

The average gun death rate in the U.S. is at least 10 times higher than most European countries, New Zealand, and Australia. The ratio is almost 20 to 1 in some Red States, except for Blue State New Mexico. Alaska has 23 per 100,000, followed by Alabama at 21.4, Louisiana at 21.2, Oklahoma at 19.6, and Montana at 19. Idaho is lower at 14.6 per 100,000.

Massachusetts has the lowest gun death rate in the country (3.4 per 100,000), which correlates well with some of the most restrictive gun laws. Bay State residents must pass a fire arms safety test before receiving a license to own a gun. Assault rifles are banned and all magazines are limited to ten rounds.

After a mass shooting in Australia in 1996, a conservative government passed comprehensive gun control, which, among many restrictions, led to the confiscation of 650,000 weapons. For over 20 years there have been no mass shootings, and the gun death rate there is .93 per 100,000 Aussies. Germany stands at 1.01, Denmark is at 1.28, while our

“frontier” neighbor to the north comes in at 1.97. *Contrary to pro-gun propaganda, gun control legislation works in this country as well as around the world.*

These facts put the lie to this pro-gun maxim: “A slave with a gun will be free, but a man without a gun will be a slave.” Commenting on the difference between Australia and the U.S., Odysseus Patrick explained: “We Australians have a profoundly different relationship with weapons. Americans love guns. We’re scared of them.” The claim that there is a necessary connection between free citizens and gun ownership strikes most people around the world as absurd.

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