

BILL TOWNSEND

Our New Voice in Congress

P O L I C Y O V E R V I E W

SCHOOL SAFETY

Comprehensive school safety must be enacted and the United States Congress must lead the way. It is time to provide our children the same level of security that judges, courthouses, and Members of Congress receive.

The Left is calling for bans on guns based on their appearance and “choice” among mass shooters. The Right isn’t budging in the “ban guns” debate. Thousands of high school students are taking to the streets calling for gun bans, with some seeking a complete repeal of the 2nd Amendment of the US Constitution. Thousands more are silenced in school or by media for wanting to suggest that guns aren’t the issue, mental health is the issue.

Regardless of your position, the most important issue for all sides is something we can agree on: how best to protect children and teens in schools.

Schools use a variety of practices and procedures to promote the safety of students, faculty, and staff. Certain practices, such as locking or monitoring doors and gates, are intended to limit or control access to school campuses, while others, such as the use of metal detectors and security cameras, are intended to monitor or restrict students’ and visitors’ behavior on campus. Alas, as we have repeatedly seen, security cameras do little to prevent crimes and in many cases are moderately beneficial for the reporting of crimes.

In the 2013–14 school year, 93 percent of public schools reported that they controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours. This isn’t always true as I learned recently when I went to see one of our local elementary schools that “locks all their doors” only to find it was easy to walk into the office and hallways of the school. I then visited a high school and found the same thing: Easy access with nobody asking who I was or what I was doing there for at least several minutes.

Other safety and security measures reported by public schools included the use of security cameras to monitor the facilities (75 percent), a requirement that faculty and staff wear badges or picture IDs (68 percent, yet only 9% require students to wear badges or picture IDs, meaning any young person can walk into a school without the need to prove they belong there), and the enforcement of a dress code (58 percent).

Walk into 96% of the schools in America, where children age 5-18 spend the majority of their waking hours, and it is rare to find metal detectors and armed security. Only 4% of schools have metal detectors and only half of those schools require students, staff and visitors to pass through them daily.

Just 9% of schools require students to wear badges or picture IDs, meaning any young person can walk into a school without the need to prove they belong there.

Over half of our schools do not have a structured program for reporting threats or dangerous student behavior.

What about armed security?

43 percent of public schools reported the presence of one or more security guards, security personnel, School Resource Officers, or sworn law enforcement officers at their school at least once a week during the school year.

Once a week and unarmed security guards won’t cut it in today’s world. Schools, just like airports, courthouses, and Congress, need full-time armed security personnel on site and in the buildings at all times.

Now, walk into nearly every Federal or state courthouse, the Senate and House of Representatives' buildings, the White House, many concert and sporting events, conventions and conferences, and what do you find? **Tens of thousands of people are required to go through metal detectors each and every day.** It is estimated that eight million people walk through metal detectors every day at US airports. **This is not true for our children's schools.**

In all these facilities, armed guards stand nearby to protect the inhabitants and visitors and to provide rapid response to any risks to those in the building. This is not true for our children's schools.

I've said it before I launched our campaign for Congress and I'll say it over and over again until people begin to wake up: ***"It is time to provide our children the same level of security that judges, courthouses, and Members of Congress receive."***

How many kids have to be injured or die before we take the safety of our children as seriously as we provide safety to judges and government workers and citizens and crew that travel on airplanes? The answer should be, *"none"*.

It's time we got serious about protecting our children, teachers, and school personnel.

The first step in protecting our children is to protect facilities. There are many ways to do this which the Federal government, via the agencies in charge of protecting thousands of federal facilities, the Federal Protective Service, and Department of Education, Department of Justice, and Congress should fund and enact.

In this day and age it is ludicrous that schools do not have armed security and that all visitors and students must pass through a screening process.

It is a sad fact, but one that needs repeated: We live in a new era of violence and our children must be protected.

It's time to install metal detectors and armed security in schools to thwart violence and tragedies from occurring. Can we stop all violence? No. Can we make it much more difficult for someone to cause harm to our kids, teachers and administrators? Absolutely.

As parents, we must demand school districts install secure access systems, like the facial recognition system provided by Kansas-based StoneLock, where kids are enrolled and as they approach doors and are identified, the door opens. If they are not in the system, such as the case of someone who was expelled, the door remains closed. At under \$3,000 a door, these could be integrated across the United States quickly and easily.

All visitors should have to pass through metal detectors. One or two setups in each school will be enough.

An armed security officer should be stationed at every main entrance where people enter and exit the building. Other doors can be secured using an automatic access system like the aforementioned StoneLock biometric access devices.

This is what it comes down to:

1. Just as we do with airports, courthouses and other public buildings, install metal detectors in the main entryways of all schools and have those machines staffed by armed guards.

America has over 50 million children in school at about 98,200 public schools and 34,600 private schools offering kindergarten or higher grades. The average cost for a walk-through metal detector is \$3,500. The typical school would require 2-4 walk-through metal detectors which would cost about \$2-\$2.5 billion to outfit nationwide. We should immediately include this in the budget for infrastructure improvements and set about requiring every school in America to install metal detectors and hire staff to operate these machines or risk losing federal education money.

After speaking with security systems integrators and security training companies, I believe with funding in place, every public elementary, middle, and high school could be outfitted within 24-36 months.

I promise to write legislation that will provide over \$200 million a year in funding support for educational resources (anti-bullying, school safety, early identification of troubled youth) and facilities safety (biometric access, metal detectors). Our program is called **"School Training And Readiness"** program or **"STAR"**. STAR will fund the expansion of the FBI's background check system (NICS), safety education, and facility security programs for schools across America. It will add a \$10 fee per background check payable by every application through NICS. The fees would be split three ways: 15% for supporting the FBI operating budget for NICS, 25% for funding firearms safety, anti-bullying, and at-risk youth identification programs in schools, and 60% for funding a nationwide safety program for schools. (*Please read our policy paper on School Safety at <http://www.TownsendForNevada.com/downloads>)*

In 2017, over 25,200,000 background checks were conducted. **A low \$10 fee could generate \$252 million each year with \$37.8 million for NICS, \$63 million for education, and over \$151 million for metal detectors and security guards in schools.**

Most law-abiding gun buyers will gladly support a program

that directly benefits school safety. In the small sample of 56 gun owners, 54 said they'd have no problem paying an extra \$10 when purchasing a gun if the money went to these three areas.

Why is education and the early identification of at-risk students an important part of this program? If you have watched the passionate speeches given by the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, you have likely seen 18-year-old Emma Gonzalez. She is an outspoken woman who has become a powerful voice for more safety in schools. There is one comment she made that should make all of us stand up and take notice. Ms. Gonzalez said, *"Neighbors and classmates knew he was a big problem. Must always report such instances to authorities again and again. We did, time and time again. Since he was in middle school, it was no surprise to anyone who knew him to hear that he was the shooter. Those talking about how we should have not ostracized him, you didn't know this kid. OK, we did. We know that they are claiming mental health issues, and I am not a psychologist, but we need to pay attention to the fact that this was not just a mental health issue."*

Here's what she said in a nutshell:

- Classmates knew he was a problem since middle school.
- It was no surprise to anyone who knew him.
- We should have not ostracized him.

In this case, there is compelling evidence of not only a system-wide failure by the school and law enforcement to take action, but also failure of students, teachers, and administrators to extend a hand to a very disturbed young man. This statement is made not to shame the students, but to point out that they knew they ostracized the shooter and yet, likely because they are at an age where emotional immaturity is still high, and they were not educated on the risks of bullying and ostracizing a fellow student, this continued. And it continued from at least middle school through high school. Thus, we need to provide educational materials to help all students understand that their actions against fellow students, whether intentional or not, can have severe consequences. The STAR program would provide these needed educational resources.

The Department of Justice should work with the Department of Education, along with input from the FBI, law enforcement associations, and the NRA, to design a video-based educational program that teaches children the dangers of guns, what to do in an emergency, and how to report those suspected of gun crimes. We'll work with the National Institutes of Health, leading psychologists, psychiatrists, behav-

ioral specialists, and celebrities, to cover bullying, safe social media practices, the effects of being excluded and ostracized, and how to talk to teachers and parents about at-risk youth. (My late business partner, Roddy Piper, was an influential spokesperson for anti-bullying's *Stand for the Silent*. I can attest that a celebrity speaking to children leaves a lasting impression that can change their attitude about something very quickly.)

STAR's videos and corresponding print content will be designed once, updated as needed, and distributed via electronic means to schools, parents, and the media networks children and teens watch most. The materials will be highly effective and will cost pennies per student to put in front of the 50+ million students in our United States. I estimate the initial program would cost less than \$18 million, or **about 4 cents per student**. We cannot afford not to do this.

We don't have to debate whether these fixes will work. They will. They're better than any other options on the table. STAR will make our nation safer. STAR will save children's lives. It then becomes not a question of how can we afford this (only \$10 per NICS application), but how can we not afford to take action on such common sense programs with potentially huge impact on the safety of our schools and communities?

2. Stop classifying schools as Gun Free Zones, which simply mark them as easy targets, and hire armed security at each and every school.

We should create a budget as part of the Department of Education that can be used by schools to hire recently retired police officers, retired military police, and other qualified individuals to operate metal detectors and provide security throughout the day. Just as former President Clinton's initiative was to put 100,000 cops on the streets, our Safe Schools initiative could put 250,000 security guards in public and private schools. At an average 9-month salary of \$45,000, the cost of this program would be just under \$12 billion annually or about \$98 for every American who pays federal income tax. The Dept. of Education has a \$68 billion annual budget and I am confident a good part of this funding could come from the existing budget.

Another benefit of this is these security guards could act as a conduit to local, state and Federal law enforcement for reporting of suspected risks. If state and local governments don't want to run the program, the Federal Government could and it could provide consistent and measurable results that could be viewed and analyzed by legislators, administrators, and parents each year to determine what works and what is ineffective.

A rogue teenager is going to think twice before targeting a school that is protected by armed guards, metal detectors, and physical access devices.

3. Require students to wear school IDs while on campus.

IDs are used across the government and corporations to ensure people who are not supposed to be there are quickly identified. It's time we demand the same protections for our children. I have witnessed at my children's schools the ease of walking into a school building without anyone questioning why you are there. IDs may not prevent an attacker from getting in your building, but it would quickly identify someone who doesn't belong there.

4. Utilize biometric access devices with 2-factor authentication to access buildings and high risk areas.

A 2-factor biometric identification system provides access control to doors. 2-factor simply means "*something you are and something you have*". For schools it means a facial biometric (something that is personal and not easily spoofed), along with a pin code and/or swipe card (what could, for example, be a teacher or student ID) to gain access through a door. At a minimum, these should be installed at every entry point to a school building. Without the biometric, you are not gaining entry. An entire wing, floor, or individual classrooms can be quickly closed off to anyone who does not possess the correct credentials to be in the building.

5. Educate children on how to react in cases where people are intent on committing violence.

The STAR program will help educate kids on what to do if they find a gun or hear that a student is acting in inappropriate ways, whether in school or on social media, is a concept whose time has come. We must create additional education for kids to help them prepare for acts of violence, which can be done in a respectful and meaningful way.

A reporting structure for tips on dangerous student behavior must be devised and deployed across all schools with the tips acted upon either internally, or turned over to local police for investigation.

Teach students how to utilize textbooks to provide a barrier between them and a shooter or knife wielding attacker. Three textbooks inside a backpack can stop many bullets and nearly all knife attacks. It's not an ideal last line of defense, but it could prevent deaths.

Just as previous generations held fire drills, had bomb scares, and learned how to prepare in case of nuclear attack, today's students need annual training on how to respond in an emergency.

We can also educate teachers and administrators, and even parents through online courses that can be created once and made available nationwide.

6. Test, and if it passes, provide every classroom with a tool like the JustinKase door block tool.

Somerset High School (Wisconsin) senior Justin Rivard invented the JustinKase tool, made of steel plates and connecting rods, for emergencies such as active shooter situations. His device slips beneath a classroom door and latches to the door's jam. With the device in place, he has yet to find a person who can push a classroom door open, including linemen from his high school football team.

7. We must address the problem of pharmaceuticals and their use in behavior modification.

We have challenges that impact children that are not directly about school access, but certainly must be considered as part of the move to make schools safer. These challenges also affect adults as we've seen with the Las Vegas shooter and others. They are summed up in one word: *pharmaceuticals*.

Medication is becoming almost as much a staple of childhood as Nick, Jr. and McDonald's. Kids pack their pills for school right along with their lunch money. Some are taking drugs for depression and anxiety, others for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Properly prescribed drugs can help those who truly need them, but many kids are given medication to mask the ordinary emotional turmoil of growing up. Our children can go through six or seven different drugs by the time they are old enough to drive; in the United Kingdom, children are usually sent for cognitive behavior therapy first and if that doesn't help, then they turn to medications.

If Johnny is unruly and has pent up energy, his parents, who are both likely working, may not have the patience or time to take Johnny outside to get active and burn off his energy. Instead, they'll find a doctor to prescribe medications such as these anti-psychotic drugs:

- Adderall (amphetamine)
- Ritalin (methylphenidate)
- Concerta (methylphenidate)
- Focalin (dexamethylphenidate)
- Daytrana (methylphenidate patch)
- Metadate (methylphenidate)
- Methylin (methylphenidate)
- Dexedrine (dextroamphetamine)

These medicines include amphetamine and/or methylphenidate, which are stimulants. Stimulants may help improve

the ability to concentrate, plan ahead, and follow through with tasks. They have also been proven to cause side effects which include **irritability, mood swings, depression**, insomnia, and may increase the risk of developing **psychiatric** or heart problems. In some cases, thoughts of suicide occur.

Put this way, with these kinds of side effects, medicating children may not be the best path to preventing thoughts of violence.

Parents are largely to blame. They begin to look at psychiatric diagnosis and treatment with drugs as a viable option for making their children perform better or behave in a more manageable manner. In America, we have parents demanding, *“My child needs a drug to help her focus because all the other children are taking one.”*

Our nation has been purposefully creating addiction for the past 2 or 3 generations of children and it has profound effects during their developmental years. There is also a risk that they will never learn to live without these drugs.

We already know that the effects of these drugs leads to less empathy for others and an increased need to be accepted—or in facebook-speak, “liked”—in order to measure self-worth.

Since the 1980s, corresponding with the introduction of Apple’s iPhone, there has been a rush away from family time, social gatherings, parent-teacher involvement in children, strong church-to-community interaction, to today’s *“always-on, always in the moment”* society. A society that used to be about physical interaction with people to now become a society of non-physical interaction involving fake facebook friendships, Snapchats, access to content 24 hours a day, text messaging and Facetime, bits and pieces of content thrown at you with no links to one another except what is shown on a computer screen, from unknown sources and for unknown reasons. It’s no wonder those raised in the past 20 years have little true understanding of how real relationships are formed or how to grow out of a “stage” they are in.

A related story: I witnessed a friend who had been taking anti-psychotic medications for 9 years stop taking his daily doses because of cost. In the ensuing 2-4 weeks he went from being a pleasant, calm person to a ranting, easily irritated, and animus individual that nobody wanted to be around. He could not afford the cost of his medications, which he told me increased from \$62 a month eight years ago to over \$320 a month last year. Watching his rage, irritability and willingness to get into arguments and, more than once, a physical confrontation, develop without his understanding, **was proof enough for me that the medical community, along with the implicit support of parents,**

over the past 40 years has too quickly turned to drugs to address mental conditions.

This leads back to the need for comprehensive health care reform. Included must be stricter guidelines on prescription drug prescribing for ADHD, bipolar disorder and other ailments commonly reported among children and teens.

The Centers for Disease Control states that **11% of 4 to 17-year-olds in the US have been diagnosed with ADHD, almost 4 times the rate of other countries**, and a label for those who are disruptive in class and unable to concentrate. By contrast, the United Kingdom reports just 3% of children are diagnosed with ADHD and just 1% are on medication. When I was a kid, this wasn’t called ADHD, it was called being rowdy or having too much pent up energy. We went out to recess every day and ran around to burn off this excess energy. We had physical education classes every day. If we were still disruptive we were sent to the Principal’s office and our parents were called in for a conference. What happened then? In most cases, we learned not to be rowdy. Drugs weren’t needed; adult supervision was.

It’s been reported that 20%-25% of students at most universities in the US are on medication, often on multiple prescriptions. Taking your meds is often seen as proof that a young person is dealing with their problems or working to become an exceptional student. The problem is you are not going to learn coping skills if you are taking pills.

Researchers have proven beyond a doubt that the human brain normalizes violence and younger brains, those under 25 years old, are more influenced by this normalization than older brains. The more the brain is subjected to violence, the more it begins to accept it as a societal norm. Over the past 2-3 decades, violence has increased and become readily accessible to children through television, movies, music, social media, video sites like YouTube and Vimeo, and video games.

We used to live in an America where it was accepted that teenagers were confused and would often do stupid things. We lived in communities where children were taught that in life there are “Winners and Losers” and you respect your elders and especially your teachers. We were taught that profanity was not a socially acceptable means to express yourself. We could watch network television during Prime Time and not fear exposing our children to profanity or violence. This version of America has largely disappeared from view because:

- Parents don’t parent;
- Kids no longer have a strong moral compass or the ability to deal with stress as they once did;

- They are not growing emotionally as fast as previous generations;
- They're not taught about "Winners & Losers" and how to deal with losing, and are instead taught that everyone wins and they even get "participation trophies";
- Respect is no longer a part of most children's lives;
- Too many of our nation's parents have drug and alcohol issues of their own; and,
- Schools officials are largely unable to effect change because corporal punishment has disappeared from within the schools, parents are generally not as active in their children's schooling, and administrators put too much emphasis on *teaching to the test* instead of letting teachers teach and bond with students, potentially providing early identification of troubled students.

In addition, during the Obama-era reporting of bullying, abuse, fighting, and other disruptions were under-reported to local law enforcement and many times not reported at all.

Along with sensible changes to our gun laws (please read our policy section on "*Guns & Violence in America*" and "*Education*"), what you just read is what is needed to solve most of the issues of school safety in our country. It's not a big list. It is a list of "*can-do*" items that we should demand Congress to move forward on funding and deploying immediately. It's not a Democrat concept and it's not a Republican concept; **it's an action plan to keep our children safe.**

As your voice in Congress, I will push legislation to fund and support any of these areas that have not been fulfilled by the current Administration, Senate, and House of Representatives.



Bill Townsend is a candidate for United States House of Representatives in Nevada's 4th Congressional District.

What else can we do to address school safety?

E-mail me at **Bill@TownsendForNevada.com**

To learn more about Bill Townsend's policies and our "12 Big Ideas for Nevada," please visit

www.TownsendForNevada.com