

# BILL TOWNSEND

*Our New Voice in Congress*

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

## GUNS & VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

*“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”*

*The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution*

Perhaps there is no more polarizing topic in the news today than “gun control” and the call to ban so-called “assault rifles”, often known as the AR-15. Unfortunately, inaccurate statements on the part of media, gun control advocates, and even gun rights supporters have muddled the facts behind guns and violence in America. These include: Which households own guns, and the deeper, perhaps more troubling and more complicated causes behind mass shootings (e.g. mental health issues, the overuse of anti-psychotic prescription drugs, bullying, fatherless boys, and social media).

In this policy position I will attempt to give you a clear explanation of my views and why some actions on gun ownership need implemented and others, regardless of intent, would have negligible or no effect on reducing violence in America.

**As always, I pledge to give you the verified facts surrounding an issue** and guns and violence are no different.

**You deserve to know where every candidate stands--in detail--well past the convenient sound bite.** I hope to leave you with an understanding that the answer is not a simple ban on “assault rifles”, but is indeed, something much more complex. We’ll examine America’s gun culture, three common sense laws that would help restrict guns from those who should not possess them, the effects of prescription medicines such as Adderall and Ritalin on young people, and the more troubling statistic of what every mass shooter teenager of the past two decades have had in common: they were ostracized by fellow students and lacked of a father figure in their lives.

### **Introduction, background, and context:**

I grew up on a farm in Western Pennsylvania, the fourth generation to be raised there. Safe gun handling was part of that area’s culture. We used to joke that we got two extra days off from school each year: first day of trout season and first day of deer season. That’s how many of us would miss school!

I learned to fire a rifle at age 12 after taking a course presented by the NRA called “Eddie the Eagle”. It taught me to both fear and respect guns and what to do if I found myself around someone with a gun. After the course, I went into one of our fields with my grandfather and we set up tin cans and other targets and spent all afternoon learning about what a gun does and how to handle it safely. We did this weekend after weekend. We went deer hunting together many times until I began hunting with a Pennsylvania State Trooper who lived nearby.

Years later, I took my sons, then 9 and 13, to a professional firearms training class for lessons on gun safety. We have taught our children to respect firearms, what to do if they encounter one, and what to do if a shooter is near them, just like my grandfather taught me and his father taught him. My boys don’t have much interest in hunting. Target shooting is of interest to only one, but at least they understand what to do if a gun is found and who to contact if one of their friends is waving a pistol or rifle around. I told some friends about this and two of them—both anti-gun—took their kids to a gun safety course so they’d know what to do if in the presence of a firearm. Both told me that the experience was very educational and they were glad they did it. One even

purchased a shotgun for home defense and then took lessons on its proper use.

I obtained my first concealed carry permit in Pennsylvania at age 24—almost 30 years ago—and have applied for and held permits in that state, Texas and Nevada. I own firearms and frequent the shooting range to keep my skills honed. My wife is also a concealed carry license holder and we've made shooting one of our favorite hobbies. We own an AR-15 ("AR" stands for Armalite, the original manufacturer and does not stand for Assault Rifle), another rifle, a shotgun, and several handguns, all of which are kept locked in safes, except for the ones we carry.

We try to be responsible firearms owners and train so that if there is danger present where we are, if it is necessary, and life hangs in the balance, we will step up to take action to stop the threat. That's what we believe and that's why we train in safe and effective firearms handling.

**At the same time, I understand that guns are not for everybody.** That is fine, and I respect those who have concerns about gun ownership. I hope by reading this you will gain a broader understanding of what has happened in our country that has made violence increase.

Many years ago I took a friend to a shooting range thinking he'd like learning how to shoot a .38 pistol, what was once the most common gun for police officers to carry and one of the easiest to shoot. Within twenty minutes I could see he was not enjoying the experience. He didn't like the noise. He hated the smell of gunpowder. He didn't see what was so fun about putting holes in a paper target 20 feet away. He simply didn't feel a connection to shooting. I was thrilled he tried it, but again, just like for many people, shooting is not for everyone. At the same time, I have turned many of my friends on to shooting and have one who now spends her weekends in competitive pistol tournaments. Another began shooting for fun, so I turned him on to Ted Nugent hunting videos, and soon thereafter he became a bow hunter and started taking guitar lessons.

### **The next two paragraphs are important for you to know.**

**Let me be 100% transparent and state that I am a lifetime member of the NRA and I believe wholeheartedly in the 2nd Amendment, as I do in the entire US Constitution.** Every right we have been given has come at the cost of human lives. I'm not willing to let those who have made the ultimate sacrifice die in vain. I believe that with every fiber of my being. Too many of my relatives and friends have died or faced war for me to not recognize their contributions, and those of all service-men and -women, to our nation.

**If you just read that and are ready to stop reading**

**because you're in favor of more gun control, please don't. Read on.** You see, while I have strong opinions regarding the importance of the US Constitution, and I wish everyone could be responsible enough to not commit crimes with guns, I also understand that we live in a world where that is not a reality. I don't always agree with all gun-rights positions and I don't agree with most anti-gun positions, which simply look at slogans and headlines as a way to deflect from the very real issues of mental health, fatherless families, bullying, social media, Hollywood's and videogame manufacturers' glorification of violence, and more. Instead, I believe and support a common sense compromise on three important areas that will please the gun-control groups and be acceptable to the pro-gun groups, including the NRA. I say "common sense" because I looked at the root cause of gun violence and, since most calls for gun control would only hurt Americans seeking to protect themselves and their families, I cannot support efforts that may sound good in the mainstream media but won't have any effect except to make it harder for law-abiding citizens to exercise their 2nd Amendment rights. The three areas I am willing to investigate, test, collect results, and act on those results are:

### **1. Requiring a background check when purchasing a firearm makes sense and closing the so-called "gun show loophole" can help keep guns out of criminals' hands.**

The anti-gun crowds have been calling for this for years. Most of the gun owners I've spoken with don't have strong feelings about this—and the majority would be fine with closing the loophole—so let's fix it.

Known as the "*gun show loophole*," most states do not require background checks for firearms purchased at gun shows from private individuals—federal law only requires licensed dealers to conduct checks. If you walk into Spartan Arms or New Frontier Armory in Las Vegas, and wish to purchase a firearm, you will fill out paperwork and go through a federal background check, unless you already hold a concealed carry license. But if you walk into a gun show at the Las Vegas Convention Center, and find a table of firearms and pick one out, and it is being sold by a private collector, you don't need to go through the background check. It is common sense that the rules on purchasing should be the same regardless of who is selling the firearm. We do it with automobiles and we can do it with firearms. Having private sales go through a licensed dealer would close this loophole without infringing on anyone's 2nd Amendment rights, and, if my hypothesis is correct, will actually strengthen the national FFL dealer network.

As you'll read farther into this policy position when I discuss our **School Training and Readiness (STAR)** program,

this change will financially support enhancing the Federal background check system, educating our youth about safety (including anti-bullying initiatives), and provide for security guards and facilities protection at our schools.

## **2. We should consider raising the age to 21 to purchase a rifle; the same age necessary to purchase a pistol.**

This is a volatile subject with gun owners, but it makes sense given young people's lack of hunting and firearms experience as compared to 30 years ago. Add their **reduced social interaction skills and mental development levels that past generations evolved into and you have a good reason to raise the purchase age.** This does not raise the use age, only the age to which one can legally purchase a firearm. Currently, you must be 21 to purchase a revolver or pistol (handgun), but only 18 to purchase a rifle or shotgun. We can standardize this at 21 for all purchasers.

I have three teenage boys with lots of friends and have seen the negative impact of social media, texting, violence on television and movies, and a numbness to understanding what violence of any kind physically and emotionally does to a person. In addition, recent studies indicate that since the advent of the iPhone, teenagers' minds do not develop as fully as they did 30 years ago. It is now understood that **the brain doesn't reach maturity until around age 25** and the glut of disparate and segmented information teens take in via social media has created emotionally disconnected individuals in greater numbers than ever before.

Some people will object to this idea, saying, "if we can send an 18-year old to war, they can buy a rifle or shotgun." I agree with this and would offer an exception to anyone who is in active duty military service. The big difference is when you are 18, 19, 20 and go into the military, you undergo significant training in handling a firearm, whereas someone who today turns 18, can simply go buy a shotgun or rifle with zero training. And let's be honest here, the level of maturity between 18 and 21 is significant. For all of us over 21, we can attest that at 18 we still made a lot of dumb mistakes that at 21 we probably wouldn't.

## **3. We must ensure states and the Armed Forces provide accurate and full information to the FBI NICS background check system.**

The NRA is in favor of background checks. All gun-control groups are in favor. So what's wrong with making the system work the way it is supposed to? Nothing. Let's fix it.

We have a background check system to protect the public from those who should not purchase a firearm, but if we don't have all states and the Armed Forces feeding information into the system in a full and timely manner, people who

should not be buying firearms will slip through the cracks. An example is the gunman in the Sutherland Springs massacre who had been kicked out of the military for assaulting his wife. By Federal law, that should have prevented him from purchasing a firearm, but the US Air Force later admitted it had not submitted his records to the FBI's background check system, National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).

As your voice in Congress, I will work to ensure these three areas are investigated, tested, and if they work, we'll put these changes in place across America. None of these go against the 2nd Amendment, but just maybe, doing something like fixing NICS will result in a bad guy not getting his hands on a firearm.

Please read on for a closer look at the causes and solutions to the issue of gun legislation in our country.

### **Why do these "assault rifles" get such bad publicity?**

Because they look *"mean"*. *"They're big, black and scary!"* They look like the guns our military personnel use (although they are not functionally the same). They are used in some crimes, (pistols are used in far more crimes), and often they are used in mass shootings, often in combination with handguns. In addition, the media has done a very poor job of explaining what a real assault rifle is—a military-grade, selective fire weapon that can fire multiple rounds of ammunition with one pull of the trigger—and how it differs from what the public can purchase—which is a look-alike semi-auto rifle that is most often used in sporting, hunting, and self-defense and shoots one round of ammunition with each pull of the trigger, the same way a handgun operates. **[To put this into perspective, you can buy a Chevrolet Corvette, but it is not the same Chevrolet Corvette that is used in professional auto racing...it just looks the same. The same is true with guns like the AR-15.]**

The misinformation around *"assault rifles"* is rampant. It is so bad, I recently watched a reporter fire a 12-gauge shotgun at a watermelon, which blew it to smithereens as a shotgun is designed to do, all the while explaining that it was an AR-15. It was not; it was a 12 gauge shotgun, commonly used to hunt ducks or rabbits. For those of you not familiar with firearms, an AR-15 fires a single bullet each time you pull the trigger; a 12-gauge, fires a single shell that may contain 30 steel pellets each time you pull the trigger. Both are, in the case of the video, semi-automatic weapons, meaning, one pull of the trigger results in one bullet or shell fired.

**We've all watched Members of Congress make outlandish, factually incorrect statements about these rifles, that to knowledgeable firearms owners make no sense.** Former

Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi's statistic about the number of mass shootings in 2017 was echoed by former Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, claiming, "There have been more than 270 mass shootings in the United States this year alone. That's where four or more are killed." Had either done their research and looked at the government's own definition of "mass shooting", they would have learned that there were, in fact, only a small fraction, nowhere near 270, in which four or more people died in a single event. How many? Between January 2017 and March 2018, there were 11 mass shootings that fit the government's definition of a mass shooting. Eleven. It's still eleven too many. To put this number into perspective, in 2017, according to Breed, there were 49 dog attack incidents that led to a human fatality. According to dropzone.com, there were 47 incidents of people dying from parachuting. Perspective and facts can be a humbling thing for people who are hell-bent on pushing an agenda for political gain.

### **Here are a couple more you may recall:**

Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-New York) stated, "The Second Amendment only protects the people who want all the guns they can have. The rest of us, we've got no Second Amendment. What are we supposed to do?" Really? The 2nd Amendment and the US Constitution applies to all Americans. Perhaps Ms. Slaughter missed civics class in elementary school.

Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colorado) said, "If you ban them in the future, the number of these high-capacity magazines is going to decrease dramatically over time because the bullets will have been shot and there won't be any more available." This statement left me shaking my head. She doesn't even realize that magazines do not come with ammunition. You buy ammunition separately and load them into the magazines.

These kinds of comments from elected officials, daytime and late-night talk show hosts, and celebrities—the very people most likely to be protected by armed guards—show their lack of understanding of the issues and the US Constitution. It proves their complete ignorance regarding guns, how they operate, what they are intended for, and how law-abiding citizens use them for hunting, sporting, and defense. **It is wrong and it is dangerous because it shapes public discourse via opinions, not facts.** And it needs to stop.

**Even gun shop owners can make statements that are not accurate.** In one case a shop owner told a reporter that with an AR-15 in his hands he could "fire about 300 rounds in 60 seconds". What?! That's 5 pulls of the trigger every second. That's not going to happen with a semi-automatic weapon that requires the trigger to be pulled with each shot fired. That's not even going to happen with a military issued

M16A4 or the lighter M4 in semi-automatic mode. Both of these are standard US military issue rifles capable of single, semi-automatic, or full-automatic firing (aka, machine gun). These rifles carry 30 rounds of ammunition in a magazine which is placed into the rifle in order to be fired. Once the 30 rounds are fired, the magazine must be ejected and replaced with another full magazine. Either this gun shop owner has the world's fastest finger or he is simply dead wrong or perhaps he was trying to impress the reporter. Comments like this from a professional firearms dealer are not helpful to the debate, but worse, they are completely inaccurate.

### **It goes to show you how important it is to get real facts and data when discussing the gun issues to which Americans are concerned.**

Following, we will examine gun ownership, violence in the USA, and what has led to mass shootings and, more recently, bombings.

The NRA's stance that "Guns don't kill people, people kill people" is a slogan that is technically correct but causes great consternation with many people. Of course we know this statement to be true, just as a bottle of whiskey or a car or truck doesn't kill people; it's the drunk or reckless driver behind the wheel that does (although with self-driving cars and the recent tragedy in Phoenix of one killing a pedestrian, we may find that "cars kill people on their own"). But constantly referring to a slogan doesn't solve anything and it appears to drive a bigger wedge between the pro-gun and anti-gun movements. More troubling, young people, most of whom have only known mass shootings since going into school and who never worried about other countries invading or bombing the US, are more likely to want to strip the 2nd Amendment from the US Constitution than any previous generations.

### **Violence in America is, much like homelessness, drug addiction, job creation, and education, a multi-pronged issue that is going to take more than a slogan to fix.**

The first thing that's needed is an honest, level-headed discussion.

A gun locked in a safe is not going to kill anyone, but once it comes out of the safe, and is in the hands of a human being, it can be used to kill someone: just like a baseball bat, hammer, golf club, or knife can kill someone. This leads us to the heart of the issue. **The real cause of violence isn't the gun, it's the person.** As soon as the "pro guns" on one side and the "ban guns" crowd on the other side come together and recognize this, the sooner we move on to enacting laws that reduce violence. I have spent many years, dating back to criminology classes in college, researching and studying crime

and violence, including statistics on gun violence. After the Clinton-era ban it became apparent, and supported by facts and data, that a ban on so-called “*assault rifles*” will have a negligible effect on violent crime if we do not address other areas—some more difficult, some easier—that can have a long-term positive influence on making America safer.

In most cases, excluding suicide, guns don't kill people unless there is an evil person holding the gun. There are accidents, but most crimes involving guns are because someone is trying to threaten, maim or kill someone else on purpose.

### How bad is gun violence in America?

Here is a comparison between two things Americans love: *Guns and Alcohol*. In this exercise, I'm going to exclude suicides as these people will find any way to take their own lives no matter what is available to them. (We should note that teen suicides have increased since 2007 and **each year, 1,266,550 kids attempt suicide, an average of 3,470 attempts by young people grades 9-12 every day. 8,030 take their lives every year. That's 22 a day.** Something is definitely happening with our kids and we must get a handle on what is occurring.)

In 2017, there were **15,590 non-suicide deaths committed with a firearm**; whether a pistol, shotgun or rifle. Every day, about 42 people die from gunshot. This includes those shot by law enforcement. About 1,297 children and teens are killed each year by guns, most by accident, but as we've seen in the case of school shootings, some lives are taken by mentally sick individuals intent on committing violence. Regardless, this is 1,297 children too many.

During this same time period, **85,796 deaths were caused by alcohol**. Every day, 241 people die from alcohol-related deaths and 28 people die as a result of drunk driving. Teenagers are responsible for approximately 2,400,000 episodes of drinking and driving a month. Read that again: *teens are responsible for 2.4 million episodes of drinking and driving every month which means every year, there are almost 29 million episodes*. According to MADD, about 500 kids, ages 1-18 are killed in alcohol-related vehicle crashes each year.

### Here we have the statistics side-by-side:

<u>Alcohol-related deaths</u>	<u>Gun-related deaths</u>
85,796	15,590

To put this into perspective based on our nation's population of 328 million people, **gun-related non-suicide deaths occur to 0.005% of our population, while alcohol-related, non-suicide deaths occur in 0.027% of our population**. Even if we included suicides by gun, the total gun-related death rate would be 0.001%, still well below alcohol-related

deaths. Not to take anything away from the tragedy of gun violence, but gun deaths are equal to just 17% of alcohol-related deaths; and yet, we don't see people protesting in the street to ban alcohol.

**Firearms ownership generally does not lead to more dangerous activities**, and when it does, drugs and mental health issues are usually involved. For instance, owning a sporting rifle doesn't make you want to own a tank or rocket launcher.

**On the other hand, alcohol usage does lead to more dangerous activities**. A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Florida has shown that alcohol is the #1 “gateway drug”, leading to the use of tobacco, heroin, and other illicit substances. Moreover, students who used alcohol exhibited a significantly greater likelihood of using both licit and illicit drugs.

America has 29 million episodes of teens drinking each year and we don't have marches. We don't hear calls to ban alcohol, so there must be something else about guns that causes so much concern.

How do gun-related deaths compare to other death rates in America? Let's take a look at the Center for Disease Control's statistics from two years ago on numbers of deaths that are largely preventable (thus, this list does not include things like cancer, stroke and Alzheimer's).

- Heart Disease: largely self-inflicted and caused by inactivity and diet, causes almost one-quarter, 23.4%, of all deaths in America;
- Lung Disease: largely self-inflicted and mostly caused by tobacco use, causes 5.6% of all deaths;
- Accidents from jobs, household accidents, and other mishaps, cause 5.2%;
- Diabetes: largely attributable to poor diet, causes 2.9%;
- Influenza (aka flu) and pneumonia cause 2.1%;
- Kidney disease, caused largely by alcohol, tobacco use and diet, causes 1.8%;
- Suicides represent 1.6% of all deaths;
- Alcohol represents 0.027% of all deaths;
- Non-suicide gun shots causes 0.005%.

Every death is tragic for the family and loved ones of the victim, however, when death by gun is viewed in the grand scheme of what is killing Americans, it is pretty low down the totem pole. If it weren't for the media splashing it across our television, computer, and smartphone screens every day, we'd hardly know it existed unless we were personally affected.

I hear some people say, “*you're comparing apples to oranges*”

or “*dying of heart disease or diabetes is your choice, not some madman’s choice*,” and you know what? You’re right. They are different, but it is important to first understand just how many people die and of what causes in order to have an intelligent discussion about these topics. Many more people die as the result of someone else’s driving than do gunshot.

By looking at the entire picture, it helps set the stage for more than just discussions on gun control, but discussions on opiate abuse, prescription drug abuse, drunk driving, diseases caused by processed foods, and smoking, which has been proven, over and over again to cause disease and death, yet we see no anti-Fentanyl, anti-smoking, anti-Big Mac, nor anti-deep fried chicken protesting.

### **What are the facts on gun ownership?**

The media likes to trot out the statistic that there are “*as many guns in America as people*”, which are about 300 million firearms of all makes, models and calibers. What they don’t say is that this figure includes firearms such as muskets and non-functioning weapons. They also don’t tell you the fact that **gun ownership by household has actually gone down. That’s right. Down.** The percent of American households owning guns is at a near-40 year low, with about 41-42 percent of U.S. households owning at least one gun. There simply has not been an increase in gun ownership as a percentage of households. General access to guns has not changed significantly in the past 100 years.

**Why the uproar about gun violence?** As I stated, the media is largely to blame for making crimes with guns a big part of what they cover. When is the last time you heard someone on the news talk about “*241 people died yesterday from drinking alcohol*”? You don’t. But you very may very well hear about someone murdered during a crime by a criminal with a gun. Why? Because it is sensationalism at its best and that is what attracts people’s attention, which leads to higher ratings for media networks, which leads to higher advertising revenue. The media doesn’t normally accept advertising from gun makers, but they take hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising from beer and booze makers, fast food restaurants, video game manufacturers and Hollywood movies studios. Guns scare many people. A can of Budweiser does not. A Big Mac does not. Colonel Sanders? He’s no big threat.

Today, the majority of young people have never gone hunting and have a very different view on guns than people born pre-1980. Their view of guns is based largely on what the media, video games, and Hollywood show them. For those of you old enough to remember TV shows in the 1960s and 1970s, you will remember firearms in shows like *The Lone Ranger*, *Ponderosa*, *Wild Wild West*, and my favorite, *Cimar-*

*ron Strip*. What happened when someone was shot? They clutched their heart and fell to the ground. No blood. No guts splashing everywhere. Compare that to television shows of today, like *Stalker*, *CSI*, and *48 Hours* on CBS, *Hannibal* on NBC, *The Walking Dead* on AMC, *Sons of Anarchy* on FX, *Game of Thrones* on HBO and even news outlets that consciously make violence a core part of the programs. With the amount of violence, blood, and gore on television, is it any wonder our last two generations have grown immune to its real-life consequences? No. Can it be changed? Yes.

As a firearms owner who also enrolled and gone through police training to learn more about law and the use of guns in self-defense and crime, I may be able to look at the gun issues with a wider perspective than most. I know fanatical 2nd Amendment people who want nothing more than the outright ability to buy any kind of gun and carry it anywhere with no training required, and I know people who would never pick up a gun, even if you offered them \$100 to do so. Somewhere in between lay the majority of Americans.

I had dinner the other evening with a business partner from Australia and his friend who lives in London, England. When I asked about the consequences of the government’s confiscation and buy-back of guns several years ago the first thing out of his mouth was, “*I wish I had the right like Americans to defend myself.*” Think about that for a second: this is a person whose government said he could not own a gun and he looks upon America, and even with all the violence in our country, he wishes he had the privileges the 2nd Amendment grants you. He then went on to tell me how other forms of violence and murder have increased since the gun ban, with people committed to harming others turning to ramming cars down busy walkways and using knives and swords, often times leaving more grizzly damage than a bullet causes.

The woman from England told me that largely due to the influx of refugees and immigrants, acid attacks—where acid is thrown, splashed or poured on people—and rapes and sexual abuse, have grown exponentially and are at an all-time high. She said London is now the #1 city in the world for acid attacks. She then said, “*I would rather be shot and die than be permanently disfigured by acid poured on my face.*” Both were upset that, unlike Americans, being able to keep and carry firearms as a means of self and family protection is not allowed in their countries.

Again, perspective gives us views we may not normally consider.

I try to evaluate all sides of the conversation and listen to the kids and families affected by school violence; to the Far Right that tries to compare gun deaths with abortion deaths, to members of law enforcement, to the concerns and fears

of the anti-gun groups, to those on the far left who march in protest while being protected by armed security; to those who have never fired a gun; and read as much as I can on the entire debate. When you open your mind to seeing all sides, you learn what works, what doesn't and who are the most hypocritical: the biggest hypocrites are the Hollywood elite (many of whom have made millions of dollars appearing in movies and TV shows that glorify violence) who travel with armed security and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg who is spending millions of dollars to take away your 2nd Amendment rights while he is protected by a heavily armed security detail totaling 17 members,

### **Here is what I've learned.**

**Can we make access to guns more difficult for mentally impaired individuals while keeping and still honoring the intent implied by our Founding Fathers regarding American's 2nd Amendment rights? Absolutely.**

We know that about 18% of crimes committed with a firearm are committed by the owner of the gun. These are people who have legally purchased a firearm. In most cases, the crime they commit is carried out with a pistol or revolver. Both of these weapons, like an AR-15, fire one round of ammunition with each pull of the trigger. Revolvers typically hold six bullets and pistols typically hold anywhere from 5 to 19 bullets.

We know that **78% of all crimes committed with a firearm involve a gun that was stolen** or obtained without the owner's permission. **Criminals generally do not walk into gun shops and fill out forms that result in a Federal background check occurring.** No, criminals obtain the majority of their firearms illegally; however, there are ways to decrease criminals getting their hands on weapons.

This does not explain the mass shootings and other firearms crimes that occur with weapons purchased legally, such as what we witnessed in 2017 in Las Vegas when a lone-gunman with apparent mental issues and hate toward others opened fire on a concert venue. Apparently, even his girlfriend did not know he planned a mass shooting. The hotel where he stayed did not seem to think a person hauling over 20 suitcases and bags into his hotel suite for a one-week stay was cause for concern. Many clues were missed, but most would never have raised concern with people. What it showed is that, over and over again, mass killers seek out and obtain firearms, sometimes through legal means or in states with lax gun purchasing requirements, but often illegally, and then seek out weak targets such as open air concerts and schools. Some take guns from people who purchased them legally, such as was the case with the shooter in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

**The loopholes that allow mentally ill and drug-impaired shooters to get access to weapons are things we can fix without infringing on the 2nd Amendment rights of law abiding individuals. They are fixes pro-gun groups like the National Rifle Association and gun control groups like The Brady Campaign should support.**

**We must all agree that one of the biggest challenges to violence is that criminals, those most likely to commit a violent act against another person, do not obey the law.** Therefore, a fundamental problem with efforts to increase gun control with hopes it will have a measurable impact on violence is that criminals don't obey laws and we cannot expect them to begin doing so in the future.

Did making cocaine, rape, or prostitution illegal stop criminals from dealing drugs, committing acts of aggression against women, or hookers from walking the red light districts? No. Banning all guns will not remove them from society; it will only remove them from law-abiding citizens trying to protect their families or participate in shooting sports or hunting.

**Only law abiding gun owners are going to fall under and adhere to new regulations while criminals continue to obtain guns illegally.** Since criminals don't follow the rules of society, most new regulations proposed on gun ownership only serve to burden lawful owners while doing little to combat crime.

When 4 out of 5 guns used in a crime are stolen or taken without the owner's permission, how do you stop it? Unfortunately, I have not read a single proposed solution from anyone who has served in Congress and, while what I'm about to recommend has not been proven (yet), I do believe a combination of tactics to address ownership, straw purchasers, pharmaceuticals and illegal drugs, and age, can have a positive effect on reducing firearms purchased or obtained under dubious circumstances.

**It's likely that many guns on the black market got there via what's called "straw purchases"**—where a person purchases a gun from a dealer without disclosing that they're buying it for someone else. This is ILLEGAL under federal law. It is illegal for any person not in possession of a Federal Firearms License (FFL) to purchase a firearm for the benefit of someone who would not normally be allowed to purchase, and yet, it continues.

We can reduce straw purchases by enacting legislation that creates co-responsibility, from a financial standpoint, if someone using your firearm commits a crime. If you purchase a firearm and give or sell it to someone and that gifting or sale does not go through a FFL dealer, you should be held liable

if that gun is used in a crime within two years of purchase, unless the gun was stolen and it is reported stolen before the crime occurs. At the same time, we should encourage lawful owners to purchase specific liability insurance to protect against such crimes should they occur. Responsible gun owners likely already have theft insurance on their weapons. Perhaps the best way to push for the adoption of liability insurance, is to pass co-responsibility legislation as part of anti-straw purchase efforts and then the NRA and other groups can create liability insurance programs which should become popular with law-abiding gun owners who worry about theft of their firearms. The NRA and other pro-gun groups already offer some insurance plans for gun owners, so they would theoretically sell more insurance policies and thus approve of requiring liability insurance coverage to increase sales across all gun owners. But...keep in mind, criminals will not purchase liability insurance.

**We must continue to push the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) to crack down on irresponsible firearms dealers.** Past research has demonstrated that a small fraction of gun dealers are responsible for the majority of guns used in crimes in the United States. BATF knows exactly who these gun dealers are, but they're not allowed to share that information with policy makers or researchers due to a law passed by Congress way back in 2003. As a result, solutions for stanching the flow of guns from these dealers to crime scenes remain frustratingly out of reach for public-health researchers. We should immediately call upon Congress to rescind this law so that up-to-date data can be compiled, including the number of people who were on legal and illegal drugs at the time of the murder.

**A broad federal review, conducted by a task force of scientists appointed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, of the nation's gun control laws—including bans on certain weapons and magazine sizes—found no proof such measures reduce firearm violence.** The task force reviewed 51 published studies about the effectiveness of eight types of gun-control laws. The laws included bans on specific firearms or ammunition, measures barring felons from buying guns, and mandatory waiting periods and firearm registration. None of the studies were completed by the federal government. In every case, a CDC task force found *"insufficient evidence to determine effectiveness."* This doesn't mean a waiting period or "cooling off" period can't be a part of sensible firearms regulations as the last thing anyone wants is someone to get mad at their spouse, rush out to buy a handgun, then return home and commit murder.

About two years ago, a young man bought a .45-caliber Glock pistol at a Charleston, S.C.-area gun store despite confessing to drug possession a month earlier. The seller ran a

NICS background check, which was delayed and assigned to an FBI official in West Virginia. The official failed to discover the confession for drug possession before three days had passed, and the sale to the man was completed. *The confession would have disqualified him from buying the gun* he used to murder nine people at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015. Now you see why NICS needs to be updated and made mandatory for all states, US territories, and the Armed Forces to report.

How do we prevent the likelihood of this occurring in the future? Again, we need to take a common sense approach to the issue. Let's discuss enacting a 7 to 10-day waiting period on all gun purchases, whether individual or through a dealer, so the argument that is used in Chicago for instance, that criminals simply cross the state border to Indiana to buy guns because their laws are lax, ends. Let's ask the FBI, which operates the NICS database, to present data on what length of waiting period is most likely to decrease shootings and keep guns out of the hands of those who would choose to commit violence. According to the FBI, roughly 92% of checks render an instant verdict. If a check is clean, the gun is sold. If it's denied, the sale doesn't go through. In about **9% of cases, the verdict is delayed, and the seller has to wait three days. If there is no verdict after three days, the sale can go through.** Do we really want to take a 1 in 10 chance a person checks out? Perhaps the solution is to end this three day period and make it 7 to 10-days, giving the FBI sufficient time to conduct thorough background checks. Before we do this, let's test it. Enact it for a year with an automatic reverting to current law if the results show it is not effective in addressing violence. In no way does this interfere with our 2nd Amendment rights to bear arms.

The firearms industry has a long record of supporting background checks. **The existing background check system must be fixed**, however, and increasing the number of prohibiting records is the best way to keep prohibited individuals from purchasing firearms, without punishing law-abiding retailers and firearms owners.

For the *"gun control"* lobby, this would be seen as a good compromise with them finally getting their long-sought mandatory waiting period. For the NRA and *"pro-gun"* groups, they know this does not interfere with our 2nd Amendment rights and should get behind this modest measure.

Another way to think of this is in regards to immigration. We would never want to limit our immigration policy to include a 3-day timer on an immigrant's application, especially from a terrorist linked state, but with regard to firearms, we expect our government to have all checks completed within 72 hours. We are better off erring on the side of caution and

enacting a 7 to 10-day waiting period.

Implementing a 7-10 day “cooling off” period provides a logical approach for those who may need to have additional screening completed.

In Nevada, if you are a concealed carry weapon license holder, you can walk into a gun shop and purchase a firearm at that moment. After speaking with dozens of CCW holders, most of whom are also NRA members, the vast majority agree that a 7 to 10-day waiting period for those who have not gone through the rigors of applying for and being granted a concealed carry license is reasonable. For concealed carry license holders, the ability to instantly purchase a firearm upon presentation of their CCW recognizes their additional training, testing, and background checks. Interestingly, of the 44 people I spoke with on this topic, 35 (79%) said they’d have no problem with a 3-day waiting period for CCW holders which goes to show how the majority of legal gun owners want to make gun ownership safer. Personally, I feel if you passed a rigorous concealed carry course like those offered in Nevada and Texas, you should be able to purchase and take home a firearm the same day.

Hunters, sport and competitive shooters, and people who purchase a firearm for home defense generally do not wake up Friday morning and decide to go buy a gun that day. They research their options. They talk to friends and dealers. They usually take several weeks to decide to purchase a firearm. A 7 to 10-day wait for new owners and an instant or 3-day wait for pre-approved concealed carry licensees does not infringe on the 2nd Amendment rights of individuals, nor does it create an undue hurdle for people to jump over.

Let us come together as a nation and apply common sense to our laws and close the “*gun show loophole*” and require all transfers of firearms sold or gifted—pistols, revolvers, rifles and shotguns—be transferred through a federally licensed dealer. This is a minor inconvenience to law-abiding gun owners, but we are also the ones who will understand why this is necessary in today’s environment. This law, accompanied by a 7 to 10-day background check waiting period, would give the Federal government time to complete a comprehensive background check on every purchaser.

I earlier mentioned the idea of raising the purchase age for shotguns and rifles from 18 to 21. I want to delve deeper into this idea and share why it may be time to raise the purchase age. There are those who are adamantly against this idea, even though today, you cannot buy a revolver or pistol until age 21. That’s OK and it is a valid argument. Let’s look at some facts. Persons below 21 years old are not allowed to gamble in any casino in Nevada. You must be 21 to buy alcohol. You

must be 21 to buy a handgun. There are a few benchmarks at 26. You can get certain kinds of insurance and enter into certain contracts (most prominently car rentals), and after 26 years old you can no longer be on your parents’ health plan.

Let’s standardize the age of ownership to 21 years old. This may keep teens, such as the Florida school shooter, who we know are not maturing at the same rate as past generations, from buying guns and make parents more responsible for the actions of their children. Parents who want their kids to learn to shoot can purchase a gun and let their kids use it, but the responsibility and ownership of the firearm must be kept at the parental level until their teen turns 21.

I have found—and **significant research has shown**—most 18 year olds are not at the emotional maturity level as 18 year olds were 30 years ago. I believe this is because of the decay of the family unit, the massive number of fatherless children, the instant gratification they seek through social media, and the fact that they don’t have the hours upon hours of real face time with friends that previous generations had. Add in the fact that **11% of our children are classified as having learning or behavioral issues** and are put on anti-psychotic drugs (compared to just 1% prescription levels in the United Kingdom and Japan), and you can see that being a teenager today is vastly different than it was 30 years ago. Increasing the purchase age an additional 3 years should help prevent recent graduates or drop outs from wanting to exact revenge on their old school and it does not curtail anyone’s 2nd Amendment rights. It will also help keep guns off college campuses. A teen that wants to go hunting or target shooting can do so by using their parent’s firearm, just as many teens who want to drive a car borrow their parent’s automobile.

Psychologist and author Jean Twenge found today’s youth have poorer emotional health thanks to new media. She found that new media, a.k.a. social media, is making teens more lonely, anxious, and depressed, and is undermining their social skills and even their sleep. Research has also shown the prescribing of anti-psychotic drugs for the treatment of ADHD and other behavioral problems increases irritability, depression and thoughts of violence and suicide.

### **How bad is the emotional maturity of teens today?**

***Every 1.1 seconds, a teenager tries to commit suicide and every 80 seconds, one succeeds.***

Homicides among children declined between 2007 and 2014, but suicides rose by 60 percent. **1.2 million kids attempt suicide each year.** The study, taking data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Vital Statistics System database, found that about a third of the children who committed suicide had been depressed, while

about a quarter had been clinically diagnosed with a mental health problem. Teens are getting depressed over things adults never imagined: not getting enough “likes” on their Instagram post, cyber-bullying, keeping up with the Kardashians, the political turmoil in Washington, DC, Hillary Clinton’s defeat and a job market that makes it harder for teens who traditionally filled most slots in fast food restaurants—which are now given to adults—to get jobs. As all of us who had a job as a teen knows, this aids in emotional development.

Intellectually, teens today are exposed to and consume more information than earlier generations. Though they read and view more information, they are less likely to absorb and assimilate the information in useful ways. In many ways they have been forced to grow up too quickly. However, this worldly experience does not always translate to maturity in teens and may even stunt their emotional development.

**Today’s teenagers grew up with cell phones and tablets in an always-on/always-connected society. They had an Instagram page before they started high school and do not remember a time before the Internet. Most only remember two Presidents: Obama and Trump. Most were not alive when 9/11 occurred. None experienced the arms race and the constant fear of nuclear war. None remember the Iran hostage situation or the bombing of the US Embassy in Libya. None grew up when violence on television only occurred after 10pm. Most were not playing the highly popular, yet benign, video games of 30 years ago: Pacman, Asteroids, and Pong.**

Being a young person today is entirely different than previous generations. Teens spend an average of 10 hours a day texting, chatting, gaming, web surfing, streaming and sharing videos, and hanging out online. They play first person shooter games that glorify violence. They listen to music that is violent and demeaning to women. They watch shows that have more gore and graphic violence than at any time in American history. A record number come from fatherless households. Worse, they are essentially addicted to their cell phones, spending an average of 9 hours a day on them. That’s over 1/3 of the day! Those ages 8 to 12 aren’t doing much better, spending 6 hours a day on their devices and parents are increasingly sticking their children in front of tablets and phones as a way to distract them. In fact, parents are putting digital devices into the hands of children at an earlier age than ever before. While some researchers have equivocated about the impact, **one aspect of this new digital life has proven real: More than two hours a day raises the risk for serious mental health problems.**

Regions of the brain that specialize in language, for ex-

ample, grow rapidly until about age 13 and then stop. **The frontal lobes of the brain which are responsible for high level reasoning and decision making aren’t fully mature until the early 20s**, according to Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, a neuroscientist at Harvard’s Brain Imaging Center. This is different than 30 years ago when 18 year olds were more mature. This is another reason to raise the age to purchase a rifle from 18 to the same age to purchase a handgun, 21.

It is provable that the national rise in teen mental health problems mirrors the market penetration of iPhones—both take an upswing around 2012. This is correlational data, but competing explanations like rising academic pressure or the Great Recession don’t seem to explain teens’ mental health issues. And experimental studies suggest that when teens give up social media sites for a period of time as short as one week, or spent time in nature without their phones, for example, they become happier.

**We need to face the fact that today’s young people are simply not at the emotional level as past generations** and probably should not be able to purchase firearms until age 21 (these studies have potential impact on other areas such as determining if teens are emotionally capable to drive at 16, serve in the military at 18, or even start college right after high school.)

Speaking of the military, some will say, *“How can you tell an 18 year old he’s old enough to serve in the military, but not old enough to purchase a rifle?”* The answer is simple: When you join the military, you are thoroughly trained in how to use a firearm: you are proven to be emotionally mature or else you are discharged.

Regarding teenagers, beyond a rise in vision, concentration, and musculoskeletal issues, there are increasingly questions about the tie between the iPhone/Internet and emotional development. The negative influences of social media and cyber-bullying, the dearth of mental health resources, the lack of barriers for access to schools, the impact of fatherless families, the over-prescribing of behavior-altering anti-psychotic meds, plus increased bullying and teen suicide (sadly, now at an all-time high), are all areas that must be investigated. If links exist, then solutions must be brought forth. As someone who has spent years in the technology industry, I know better than most how we can adjust and adapt technologies to lower incidents of cyber-bullying, shaming, and other harmful activities.

As your voice in Congress, I will fight to uphold the 2nd Amendment and to work on common sense approaches to violence eradication, school safety, and social media influence that will not infringe on the rights the Founders of our

country granted each and every one of us.

I believe that legislation to make gun ownership safer should focus on:

- Closing the gun show loophole;
- Raising the age to 21 to purchase a firearm, ammunition or clips/magazines.
- Ensuring states and the Armed Forces provide accurate and full information to the FBI NICS background check system;
- Direct the BATF to close down rogue dealers;
- Pass a national reciprocal right to concealed carry law provided each state increases their requirements for issuance to meet what Texas or Nevada require, plus a few additional requirements. Once a state reaches these requirements, residents of that state may begin national concealed carry upon the re-issuance of their license or permit, under the new guidelines. I propose a person is eligible for a license to carry a concealed handgun if the person:
  - is a legal resident of this state for the six month period preceding the date of application,
  - is at least 21 years of age,
  - has successfully completed an approved firearms course in the county in which the license or permit is issued. Such courses shall be a minimum of 12 hours including 3 hours of range time in which a certified instructor approves the applicant's ability to carefully handle a firearm,
  - is not incapable of exercising sound judgement with respect to the proper use and storage of a handgun,
  - pays the appropriate fees,
  - has not been convicted of a felony,
  - is not currently charged with the commission of a felony, Class A or Class B misdemeanor, or equivalent offense,
  - is not a fugitive from justice for a felony, Class A or Class B misdemeanor, or equivalent offense,
  - has not, in the five years preceding the application, been convicted of a Class A or Class B misdemeanor, or equivalent offense,
  - have not been convicted of a crime involving the use, or threatened use of force or violence, including misdemeanor convictions, within the last three

(3) years.

- have not been convicted of a crime involving domestic violence or stalking, or you are currently subject to a restraining order or other order of protection against violence,
- are currently on parole or probation,
- is not a chemically dependent person (a person with two convictions within the ten year period preceding the date of application for offenses involving the use of alcohol or a controlled substance is ineligible as a chemically dependent person. Other evidence of chemical dependency may also make an individual ineligible, such as a non-alcohol DUI or treatment for alcoholism in the past 5 years),
- has not been judicially declared mentally incompetent or insane,
- has not been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- has not been admitted to a mental health facility within the last 5 years,
- is not currently under the care of a licensed psychiatrist nor have you been prescribed by a psychiatrist the use of an anti-psychoactive prescription drug, and in which the psychiatrist has reported to NICs when as a possible threat to him/herself or the community,
- is fully qualified under applicable federal and state law to purchase a firearm,
- is not currently restricted under a court protective order subject to a restraining order affecting a spousal or dating relationship,
- has not, in the 10 years preceding the date of application, been adjudicated as having engaged in delinquent conduct violating a penal law in the grade of felony,
- has not made any material misrepresentation, or failed to disclose any material fact, in an application,
- has not been dishonorably discharged from the Armed Forces; and,
- has passed the FBI NICS background check.

I would support focused legislation that required completion of a gun safety course before being able to obtain a concealed carry license that was recognized across America and

believe most responsible gun owners will say the same. As one told me, “*we already make people study for and pass a driver’s test, why not require the same for carrying a gun?*” Maybe it is a 16-hour course like Nevada’s; held over 2 days that includes classroom and shooting range lessons and testing. Many gun shops already offer such courses. As a gun owner and concealed carry license holder, I feel safer knowing other CCW licensees will have gone through the same training I have.

I am sure Congress, along with representatives from law enforcement and from states with highly rated concealed carry training requirements can design a course that could be deployed nationwide. This can be done in conjunction with our plan to fund school safety which you can read in the “**12 Big Ideas for Nevada**” section of our website. I don’t say this lightly, but had the ideas presented here, along with our school safety plan been implemented, it likely would have prevented the bloodshed at nearly every school shooting of the past decade.

**Nevada requires everyone requalify for their concealed carry license every 5 years.** Yes, it’s inconvenient to have to spend a day with instructors, but it is good practice to have a trained professional review the laws and watch you handle a firearm every 5 years. If I get to the point where I am at the age where I am unsafe with a firearm, this requirement would hopefully get me to stop carrying and to pay more attention to my skills. Who knows? Maybe when I’m 85 I won’t feel the need to protect myself and my family with a gun. If I don’t pass the 5-year test, an instructor will ensure I don’t get my license renewed. I can still own a gun and keep it in my home for protection, but if I barely pass or the instructor sees things I need to work on, it may be enough for me to decide that due to declining physical and mental abilities, I probably shouldn’t carry a firearm anymore.

**The beauty of this approach is it is still an individual choice** and that is what most people want—to make their own choices about the way they live.

A difficult element of this plan would be requiring psychiatrists who prescribe anti-psychotic prescriptions to inform Federal authorities of the patient’s information when they believe the patient may be a threat to him/herself or the community so that this could be logged into the Federal background database used for firearms purchases. HIPPA laws may prevent this and would need to be changed. Again, using common sense, any person under the care of a licensed psychiatrist and who is prescribed anti-psychotic medications and under the advisement of the doctor believes the person to be a risk to the community or themselves, should not be allowed to possess a firearm while on the medication and certainly should not be allowed to obtain a concealed carry license or permit. This requirement must be expanded to the

purchase of firearms, thus helping to keep firearms out of the hands of those individuals who are taking psychotropic drugs.

Vermont recently passed legislation, largely supported by pro- and anti-gun groups, that addresses how to deal with mentally ill firearms owners. Under the bill, families and law enforcement can seek an extreme risk protection order. If a judge approves it, firearms could initially be seized for fourteen days. After a court hearing, the seizure could extend to 60 days and be renewed with another hearing. This is an interesting bill and it should be studied over the next 5 years to see if 1) it works, and 2) if it works, can it be expanded nationwide while still protecting the rights of Americans.

**Improving and filling the gaps in the FBI NICS program is vitally important to increasing safety.** A background check is only as good as the records in the database. FBI NICS databases are currently incomplete because many states have not provided all records that establish someone as prohibited from owning a firearm under current law, especially including mental health adjudications and involuntary commitments orders. Including these missing records will help ensure more accurate and complete background checks. States and the Armed Forces must improve the NICS database by submitting any and all records establishing an individual is a prohibited person, such as mental health records showing someone is an “adjudicated mental defective” or involuntarily committed to a mental institute, as well as official government records showing someone is the subject of a domestic violence protective order, a drug addict or subject to another prohibited category. Why would states do this? We can tie the funding of Federally funded school safety measures such as armed guards, metal detectors, video surveillance systems, and biometric access to buildings to the requirement that states submit all the required data necessary for the FBI to operate a comprehensive NICS database. **An elected official would be a fool to not want safer schools in exchange for providing accurate data to NICS.**

As your voice in Congress, I will propose a new program to further support NICS and improve school safety. It’s called “**School Training And Readiness**” program or “**STAR**”. STAR will fund the expansion of 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 \$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 gun buyers would support such a program. In the previously mentioned group of 44 CCW licensees, 43 said they'd have no problem paying an extra \$10 at renewal if the money went to these three areas. In speaking with 12 other gun owners, 11 said they'd gladly support such a program. The lone dissenter said he'd be happier just paying \$5.

**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 in Parkland, Florida shooting, 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.

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, behavioral 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?

#### **When guns are involved, who are the victims?**

According to GunViolenceArchive.org, there were **15,590 non-suicide deaths from firearms in 2017** (the FBI reports 11,008, but for the sake of argument, let's use the larger number).

Of those deaths, 2,395 were related to law enforcement (2,078 subject/suspect and 317 law enforcement personnel). This leaves 13,195 gun related deaths.

2,040 deaths were of perpetrators breaking into homes and the homeowner/resident shooting the intruder. This is called self-defense. This leaves 11,155 deaths.

2,020 deaths were caused by unintentional discharge of a firearm: someone not paying attention, playing with a gun they don't know is loaded, or in other words, not being a knowledgeable and responsible gun owner. Most children who lose their lives to guns do so in this manner. Educating parents on the need to keep guns out of the hands of their

children is something we will address with our proposed firearms safety education program.

If you take away police shootings, self-defense, and accidents, it means there are around **9,000 intended killings with a gun each year**, about 24 per day, with the vast majority committed with guns that did not belong to the shooter, and a large percentage committed by gang members or drug sellers. (Recall, too, that 22 kids a day commit suicide.)

Now we identify where the real opportunity to control violence rests: Cracking down on criminals, gang members, and drug dealers. Early identification of teens at risk. These are things the NRA and like-minded organizations have been calling for decades and gun-control advocates should support because it gets to the root causes of the issue of violence.

**Of all the gun deaths in 2017, only 374 homicides were committed with a rifle, including AR-15s: just over 3 percent of the total firearms deaths. That's 0.0001% of the percentage of annual deaths in America.** This represents a very small number of deaths—all tragic, no doubt—that gets blown out of proportion by the media that is clamoring for ways to boost their viewership ratings and ad revenue.

Chicago had 681 homicides last year and already nearly 500 shootings in 2018. The vast majority of these crimes are related to gangs and drugs, two things our federal, state and local governments have been fighting for years. The majority of guns used these crimes are stolen. **The guns most used are not AR-15s**, but common pistols and handguns, which are used in the majority of all gun violence.

As with alcohol, there is no call to ban semi-automatic pistols and revolvers. It will never happen in America because the 2nd Amendment is a right conferred on all of us and rights should never be taken away. The calls to ban so-called “assault rifles” will accomplish nothing if we don't address mental health, bullying and ostracizing, fatherless kids, the glorification of violence, and increasing school safety.

For those that say the Founding Fathers never imagined semi-automatic weapons or large capacity magazines in their age of flintlocks, the Bill of Rights was written and approved on September 25, 1789, a full seventy-one years after the semi-automatic Puckle gun was introduced. The Puckle gun was one of the earliest weapons to be referred to as a “*machine gun*”, being called such in a 1722 shipping manifest. Certainly, the authors of the Bill of Rights knew about this and they still wrote the 2nd Amendment as they did, not excluding the Puckle gun.

Part of the miserable ritual that follows mass shootings is the cry that nothing can be done unless we get rid of the 2nd Amendment. Like most rights, the right secured by

the Second Amendment is not unlimited. From Blackstone through the 19th-century cases, commentators and courts routinely explained that the right was not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose. For instance, one cannot simply drive down the road to GunMart and buy an F-18 fighter jet or a M982 Excalibur 155 mm extended range guided artillery Howitzer. Today, it is exceptionally difficult and restrictive to purchase a fully automatic rifle, commonly known as a machine gun. This is not something new; it was enacted as part of the National Firearms Act of 1934.

For all intents and purposes, people do not go out and buy machines guns. It's too difficult.

**The point is there are limits already in place as to what you can purchase, who can purchase, and what can be done with a firearm.** By law, it is illegal to kill someone unless in self-defense. By law, you cannot carry a firearm into a commercial airport or on a commercial jetliner. By law, you cannot buy a firearm and then sell or give it to a person you bought it for. These are all laws that have been on the books for years and still, it is worth repeating, people who commit crimes, do not follow the law.

Laws are not meant to be selectively enforced and are not meant to apply to only one segment of the citizenry. A 17-year-old recently told me that he knows that driving while texting is against the law but he and his “*friends do it all the time*”. Another teen told me he knows it is illegal to smoke marijuana, but since his parents do it, he figures it is OK for him to do so. Two high school seniors told me that they know its illegal for them to drink and drive, but they do it anyway, saying “*we're careful. Nobody will get hurt,*” to which I responded, “*tell that to my cousin whose father was killed by a drunk driver.*”

**Most Americans understand the law and why they are enacted. Many choose to follow only those laws they wish. Don't believe me?**

- Have you ever gone over the speed limit?
- Have you ever parked in a handicapped space?
- Have you ever driven with an expired license plate or driver's license?
- Have you ever run a stop sign?
- Have you ever driven under the influence?
- Have you ever eaten a piece of fruit in your shopping basket before paying for it?
- Have you lied about your finances during a divorce?
- Have you given a panhandler on the ramp of a highway

in Nevada some change or a few dollars?

**You've broken the law.** These offenses happens all the time. The point is, laws are on the books and in most cases, they lead to an orderly society, but when they are broken, they can have a detrimental impact on individuals, families, and communities. Gun laws are no different.

### Summary

For those calling for more laws banning guns, statistically, the facts don't suggest that more gun control laws will do much of anything to stop a person who is intent on killing. This begs the question, "*What has happened in the past 30 years that may be contributing to gun violence?*" Here are some indisputable facts:

#### 1. Access to mental health treatment and care in America has been decimated.

It's not Nevada, but it's a good indicator of what has happened in the USA. **In 1959, California had 37,000 mental health patients in state hospitals.** In the 60s and 70s, politicians—looking to cut state expenditures—believed that with the advent of psychoactive medications, people could be released out of mental hospitals.

By 2018, mental illness cases have risen in California, while treatment and funding have not kept up. **California's Department of State Hospitals operates just five state facilities with a combined patient population of around 5,000.** Since 1995, California's population has increased by more than 7 million people, but the facilities and beds for acute psychiatric care have decreased by 30%. Twenty-five counties no longer have a single psychiatric hospital bed. Meanwhile, the California Health Care Foundation states, "*Nearly 1 in 6 California adults has a mental health need, and approximately 1 in 20 suffers from a serious mental illness that makes it difficult to carry out major life activities. The rate among children is even higher: 1 in 13 suffers from a mental illness that limits participation in daily activities.*" That's a lot of people dealing with mental issues.

The point of highlighting this is mental illness has been increasing since about 1980. Interestingly, there is a correlation that I've uncovered that should be investigated by the National Institutes of Health and CDC and, if elected, I will fight for this to occur. While mental illnesses were increasing, care options were decreasing: thus, more people went undiagnosed and untreated, with many ending up homeless. By the time 1980 rolled around, the number of psychiatric beds in America was at a 100-year low with huge drops seen throughout the 60s and 70s. This is also around the time that psychoactive drugs like LSD and magic mushrooms were becoming the recreational drugs of choice. The result was

more mentally ill people and fewer getting treatment.

What else occurred around this time period? For much of the 20th century there were, on average, a handful of mass killings per decade. But that number spiked in 1980, and kept rising thereafter.

Viewed over a multi-year period, the introduction of Ritalin in 1959, the massive reduction in mental treatment facilities between 1960 and 1980, coupled with the statistically valid increase in mental illness starting between 1970 and 1980, plus an increase in fatherless families, all leads up to the year 1980 which coincides with an increase in mass shootings. [Are these connected? It's time to find out.](#)

#### 2. Today's children and teens are over-medicated and the results are just now being seen.

Anti-psychotic drug use today is out of control when it is estimated that 11% of children and teens take drugs for behavioral problems. Compare this to just 1% in the United Kingdom and Japan.

Often, because parents learned little Jimmy was on Ritalin to help him focus, sweet Suzy's parents also run to the doctor and got a prescription for her so she could keep up with Jimmy. It's true. Physicians have told me that in about one-third of the cases they see, parents ask to have drugs prescribed because they can't deal with their own children. Most doctors won't say "*no*" so the parent's get their wish and drug the kid up, send him off to school and let teachers deal with him. Parents often choose prescribing over parenting and discipline and outside influences such as social media are having a detrimental effect on the mental health of many young people. Statistics prove this: according to new analysis from the CDC, suicide among teen girls recently reached a 40-year high and **22 kids kill themselves every day.**

#### 3. Violence on television, movies, and online has paraded the glorification of the so-called "assault rifle".

Action must be taken to convince Hollywood to tone down such violence, first on their own, but if they refuse, through legislation, and enforcement of access to certain rated movies and television shows based on age. We can begin by addressing those celebrities who are outspoken advocates for gun control yet who earn their livings making movies, music, and television shows that glorify violence. Let's challenge actors, directors, and producers to make recommendations to protect our children from unnecessary violence, to push back on those who wish to add violence to a storyline just for effect, and to demand their co-workers in television and movie production become more aware of the normalization of death that these productions are spreading.

#### **4. Video games push the glorification of death.**

There's a big difference between the video games of the 70s Pac-Man, Centipede, and Tron, and today's games such as Call of Duty, Far Cry, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Halo, Bulletstorm and Battlefield. While research suggests that video games don't contribute to crime, in fact, most of the mass shooters were not into video games which have become online social settings and we know most mass shooters are not social, but instead, loners. It has been proven that the brain normalizes violence, so in order to decrease normalization, we need to find ways to decrease violence in video games and lessen the likelihood that children have access to these games without parental permission.

Video games have ratings and we should--and can--hold retailers accountable for selling mature-themed games to underage purchasers.

#### **5. Social media must stop providing anonymous outlets for people who wish to do harm to others.**

Bullying is at an all-time high. Young girls today feel more stressed and self-defamed than at any time in history and are committing suicide at growing rates. Over 1.2 million kids attempt suicide each year. Mentally ill individuals use social media to brag about their intentions to harm. Even our President uses social media in ways that many would consider cyber-bullying. We must get a handle on this.

**We have learned that social media companies purposefully alter the content a person views to make them more addicted to the experience:** just as tobacco companies at one time altered the contents of cigarettes to make them more addicting.

I pledge to work to enact legislation ensuring that identification be required for every social media account, and especially for those under the age of 21. It's very easy to upload a photo of your ID and for a company such as facebook or YouTube to verify your address and be able to keep a record in case law enforcement has a question about a user and needs to interview said user, under court order. I will push for hearings to learn what social media networks are doing to combat cyber-bullying and enact legislation that holds these networks at least partially responsible for content that falls under hate crimes or cyber-bullying definitions. I will also push for the technology industry to build privacy controls that parents control, not for-profit companies, and that will empower parents to gain control over the viewing habits, friends lists, and other information their children may be giving or receiving via social media, mobile phones, and other communications platforms.

#### **6. Schools are ill-prepared to deal with troublesome at-**

#### **risk students and even less prepared to deal with violence.**

Funding for at-risk youth programs must be increased and results-based analysis must be completed to ensure taxpayer funds are being spent effectively.

We must restrict willy-nilly prescribing of anti-psychotic drugs for minor or unneeded cases of ADHD or behavioral problems. Most kids who are wound up, disruptive, or unruly, are either hungry, bored, have not had any recess or physical education in which to release stress, and often have parents who are non-disciplinarian. Many parents, upon learning that their child's friend is taking a drug like Adderall or Ritalin, rush to the doctor to make sure their kids get it, too, so their kids have an advantage in ability to focus and study. Adderall, and its competitors, is a central nervous system stimulant. It is typically prescribed to help people focus and be less impulsive.

College students abuse Adderall and similar drugs at higher rates than any time in history. I've met a couple professional gamblers that take it before tournaments because of these effects. The drug contains amphetamine and dextroamphetamine and can be habit-forming when used by a person who does not have ADHD.

**The common side effects of taking Adderall include feelings of hostility, irritability, and paranoia. Most experience changes in personality, depression, and sometimes suicidal thoughts.** How can it be a good idea to give a drug like this to children when their emotional maturity hasn't even begun to peak? The rational part of a teen's brain isn't fully developed and won't be until age 25! How can they be expected to deal with feelings of hostility, worthiness, self-esteem, love and lust, academic pressures, and life in general when these drugs increase their paranoia and can lead to increased risk of depression and suicide. Congress must begin investigating the effects of these drugs, and others, on our society.

#### **7. We must recognize that children who do not have a father in their life are at greater risk for committing acts of violence than those that have father's present.**

Writer Mark Meckler of Patheos pointed out in a February 27, 2018 article "*Of 27 Deadliest Mass Shooters, 26 of Them Were Fatherless,*" fatherlessness is a serious problem. America's boys have been under stress for decades. It's not toxic masculinity hurting them; it's the fact that when they come home there are no fathers there. Of CNN's list of the "*27 Deadliest Mass Shootings In US History,*" only one was raised by his biological father since childhood.

**Psychologists have now identified a direct correlation between boys who grow up with absent fathers and boys**

**who drop out of school, who drink, who do drugs, who become delinquent, who wind up in prison, and who kill their classmates.** This problem can't be solved by any policy, or any sort of gun control. Stating we have a problem is not a slam against single mothers, who are faced with the very difficult task of raising children, often without any direct involvement from the father.

To point out that boys need their fathers is to point to divorce and single mothers; and that is, uncomfortable. But there's no other way to address fatherlessness and its impact on children. **The fact is, divorce and family breakdown is proving to be catastrophic for many children.** Kids are deprived of their father through divorce, death, or out-of-wedlock births. More often than not, children lose contact with their fathers because mothers remain the default custodial parent in the average American divorce and/or it is usually women who consider themselves the aggrieved party, as evidenced by the fact that wives initiate 70 percent of divorces. The result is that some divorced mothers use any opportunity to undermine their children's relationship with their father or, if not that, dismiss the significance of a father's role.

Girls who grow up deprived of their father are more likely to become depressed, commit self-harm, and more likely to be promiscuous. But they still have their mothers, with whom they identify. Boys do not have a comparable identification and thus suffer more from absence of their father. They also tend to act out in a manner that's harmful to others, which girls typically do not. It's being proven when boys don't have their father in their lives, they suffer. They suffer in school. They suffer in the ability to create true friendships. They become outcasts. They are often bullied or ostracized by their classmates. They sometimes find the only place to feel connected to the world is in a gang or in a fantasy world.

The fact remains, a majority of school shooters come from fatherless homes; and a study of older male shooters (such as the 2017 Las Vegas massacre shooter) produces similar results.

We need to have a serious discussion about the degradation of our cultural norms, the staggering cost of lives ended by these individuals, the ease of no-fault divorce, and changing the custody rules in divorce to give both parents equal time with their children.

**8. We must provide children, the same levels of safety that we afford judges, pilots, government workers, and Members of Congress.**

Our a comprehensive plan for school safety that includes armed security, IDs, metal detectors, door jams, biometric access to facilities, could increase the safety of our children to

a point it would be exponentially difficult for a mass killer to gain access to a school building without immediately notifying the police, thus the killer would likely never attempt an act of violence in a school.

Do you ever wonder why crazy people and criminals don't attack the Senate building or police headquarters? It's because it is too difficult. Mentally ill people and criminals look for easy targets and, historically, schools, with their lack of security and high student to adult ratios, have been one of the easiest targets these people identify.

**9. Commonsense measures must be enacted to improve our laws while retaining our 2nd Amendment rights.**

The good news is I believe the NRA, gun groups, gun control groups, and most Americans can reach a common understanding if we focus on the items outlined herein.

The free markets have responded. Some retailers are taking action with the removal of so-called "assault rifles" from their stores. They will likely lose more customers than they expected, but choosing not to sell an item is their prerogative.

Gun dealers are taking action by spending more time evaluating potential buyers and reporting those they feel are not mentally capable to be responsible owners. Training courses like those offered by Discount Firearms in Las Vegas, are being expanded to include elements that go above and beyond what state laws require.

Students are speaking up and demanding the adults do something about school violence and other young people's easy access to guns. (Sadly, they are being misled by the anti-gun lobby and people like George Soros and Michael Bloomberg.)

These activities are positive movements that we should applaud. But more importantly, we need to take action and do something about the root causes of these problems. **It's not the guns. It's the people.**



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