

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly Bipartisan Committee on Gun Violence and Mental Health

January 28, 2013

The following is my testimony regarding gun violence and mental health and in particular the often-used statement "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." First, this sound bite misses the point. People are indeed ultimately responsible for pulling the trigger, but the national murder rate would surely fall if widespread gun availability didn't make it so incredibly easy to kill another human being. Second, as I said, people are indeed ultimately responsible for pulling the trigger, but because you cannot today effectively know which gun owners are incompetent and therefore will be the most likely to use their gun to kill innocent people or to kill themselves, what choice do you have but to look at the basically unregulated and highly available weapon that many suicidal people and most murderers seem to prefer?

The Center for Disease Control predicts that in two years, deaths from firearms are set to outstrip car fatalities for the first time. Already in 2009, ten states saw a higher number of gun fatalities than motor vehicle fatalities. So let's make the comparison....

One can argue that cars don't kill people, that drivers kill people. Yet I can't drive a car without passing a driving test. And to own a car, current laws require that I periodically re-register the car. Laws require that my car is inspected to ensure that it operates as it was intended, does not pollute and does not pose a safety risk to me or to others. And even if I am found to be competent and law-abiding, current law requires that I have sufficient insurance to protect others in the event my car damages their property, injures or kills them. And right outside this building, there is a sign reminding me that there is a law in place that restricts the speeds at which I can operate my car.

Now these laws are in place for all car owners, including those who would otherwise be law-abiding, safe and responsible and have proven extremely effective at reducing the number of deaths that might otherwise be caused by the comparatively few number of unknown and incompetent drivers among us. 30,000-35,000 deaths by cars and the same number by guns. Yet look at how differently cars and guns are regulated and ask yourself why.

My testimony continues today with the following brief blog by Michael Shammass of The Huffington Post in which he too addresses the same "Guns don't kill people; people kill people" argument by illustrating how guns do kill people where another deadly weapon in the hands of the same killer, does not.

Hours before the 12/14 tragedy in Connecticut, a deranged man in China walked into an elementary school building and began to attack everyone in his vicinity. Before his rampage ended, twenty-two children had been hit.

But while it sounds like Newtown, there were two crucial differences that share a common root. First, the man used a knife. Second, because the man used a knife, none of the twenty-two children were killed. The common root here is gun control. Effective gun laws prevented the

Chinese man from obtaining a gun -- with which he would have doubtless done much more damage.

As Harvard-educated sociologist Ding Xueliang [told CNN](#): "The huge difference between this case and the U.S. is not the suspect, nor the situation, but the simple fact he did not have an effective weapon." For this reason, the "guns don't kill people; people kill people" argument is shortsighted. It ignores the fact that guns make killing much easier.

While guns themselves may not kill people, purveyors of the "guns don't kill people" argument should remember that, by their logic, F16s don't kill people and nuclear missiles don't kill people. Only the person who is "behind" the F16 or nuclear missile kills someone. Yet despite this, we still limit the sale of F16s and nuclear missiles to the common man. Why? Because in the hands of anyone, these weapons have the potential to kill innocent people. Now the example is obviously extreme, but it is extreme to illustrate a point -- like any other weapon, guns do kill people. Like any other weapon, guns are a tool that makes killing more effective and efficient.

Are you afraid to take guns away? Then don't take them away. Allow the guns, allow the ammo. Allow the pistols, the rifles and even allow assault weapons if you think that's a good idea. But regulate gun owners and their weapons as you have regulated me and my car.

Regulate to the point that gun violence begins to ebb and a new downward trajectory is achieved. Whether it be regulating the amount of bullets in a clip, the types of guns that can be owned, when universal background checks are required, the frequency of psychological screening, gun skills and gun inspections, or regulating the amount and types of insurance gun owners must carry to protect themselves and others from damage, injury or death that might be caused by the gun they own... you can regulate, you can protect the second amendment and you can still have an impact on gun violence.

I live in Newtown, and I pray for my neighbors and friends who were killed and injured on 12/14. But my testimony is not about the past. It is about the future. It is about the many thousands and millions of deaths and injuries across this country that will come at the end of gun. 85 people are killed by a gun each and every day.

The 2nd Amendment protects our "right to bear arms" and is worth defending. But unless something courageous and real is done, this entire Connecticut General Assembly cannot deny that some of those "arms" and some of those gun owners who argue the Constitution's 2nd Amendment, will be responsible for tragically denying more school children, more theatre-goers and more Americans the right to life and liberty guaranteed to them by that same Constitution's 5th and 14th Amendments.

This is my testimony
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