

## Can We Make Our Schools Safer?

Robert Childers

With the end of the summer vacation season and arrival of autumn, American schools are again open. But, instead of the cooler fall temperatures and football games, the April 16th attack at Virginia Tech and the Amish school shootings of October 2nd, 2006 are on the minds of many parents. Also on their minds - as well as the minds of school and police officials on campuses around the nation - is the question of how can attacks like these be prevented in the future. Larry Pratt, of Gun Owners of America, recently said the shootings at Virginia Tech showed gun bans are part of the problem, not the solution to the violence. Meanwhile, advocates of stricter gun control believe that imposing greater restrictions on the ownership of firearms will keep us safe in the future. Who are we to believe?



Personally, I believe there are enough regulations already. While law-abiding citizens obey the current laws and would undoubtedly obey any new ones, the problem is with the criminals the laws are written to protect us from. Can anyone really believe that criminals would obey any NEW laws when they don't obey the old ones! It's obvious the idea of "Gun Free" zones around our schools only makes them killing fields for the psychopaths who look upon them as "Free Fire" zones. Instead, one answer would be to allow legally qualified individuals to carry firearms on our university campuses. The truth is, only one policy has been shown to consistently deter mass murder... concealed-carry laws.

In a comprehensive study of public, multiple-shooting incidents in America between 1977 and 1999, economists John Lott and Bill Lands found that concealed-carry laws were the ONLY laws that had any positive, lasting effect in preventing such tragedies. For an example, just look at Israel. In 1974 a PLO attack took place in Ma'alot, Israel during which nearly 100 kids and their teachers were taken hostage. During the rescue attempt, the gunmen sprayed machine-gun fire and detonated explosives, resulting in 25 dead and 66 wounded. Following this, a debate broke out in Israel regarding guns and self-defense. When the debate was over, it was decided that teachers, parents and army reservists with no criminal record would be issued concealed-weapon permits.

By 1984 the situation in Israel had changed dramatically. Israeli criminologist Abraham Tennenbaum describes an incident in Israel just prior to the July, 1984 massacre at a McDonald's in San Ysidro, California..."Three terrorists who attempted to machine-gun the throng managed to kill only one victim before being shot down by handgun-carrying Israelis. Presented to the press the next day, the surviving terrorist complained that his group had not realized that Israeli civilians were armed. The terrorists had planned to machine-gun a succession of crowd spots, thinking that they would be able to escape before the police or army could arrive to deal with them."

While police and private security guards (with guns) are certainly helpful, there simply aren't enough on any given campus to ensure that an officer will be there if and when the shooting starts. Also, though police are important in preventing and solving crime, they almost always arrive AFTER a crime has been committed. On the

other hand, citizens - which includes both teachers and adult students - who legally carry weapons can be of great help because they could stop a shooting BEFORE it happens. Annual surveys of crime victims in America by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics continually show that when confronted by a criminal, people are safest if they have a gun. Multiple studies have shown that while the threat of discovery is the greatest deterrent to criminals, a close second is the fact that armed victims can and will defend themselves. Incarcerated criminals even tell criminologists that they actually consider local gun laws when they decide what sort of crime they will commit and where they will do it!

From the Virginia Tech murders, to the 1991 Luby's Cafeteria massacre in Texas which left 23 people dead, to the shootings at the California McDonald's in 1984 where 21 people were killed, all these attacks shared something in common: citizens were already banned from having guns in those areas. The sad truth is, every multiple-victim public shooting of any significant size in the United States has occurred in a "gun-free" zone. Meanwhile, after a lengthy study the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported they found "insufficient evidence to determine the effectiveness of ANY of the firearms laws reviewed for preventing violence". Statistics from the CDC also show that civilians use firearms to prevent at least a half million crimes annually.

For what it's worth, mass killings are not unique to the United States. In January, 1996 seven people were killed in a Brisbane, Australia suburb and four months later Martin Bryant killed 35 people at Port Arthur in Tasmania, Australia. Soon after these tragedies, Australia literally banned the private possession of guns, including pump-action shotguns and all semi-automatic firearms. Sadly for Australian's, armed robbery has increased by 73 percent, unarmed robberies by 28 percent, kidnappings by 38 percent, assaults by 17 percent and manslaughter by 29 percent according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the last ten years, many European countries - including England, France and Germany - have experienced multiple-victim shootings. Ironically, all this has happened despite these countries having some of the most restrictive gun control laws in the world. Yet Switzerland, which requires all male citizens between the ages of 20 and 42 to keep fully-automatic firearms at home in case of a military call-up, has one of the lowest violent crime rates in the world. Is this mere coincidence?

Only a generation ago, the laws of Australia and Great Britain weren't much different from our own when it came to owning and carrying a firearm. Now, it's virtually impossible to own ANY kind of gun in either country! In Britain, even their Olympic shooting team is forced to practice in a foreign country due to the harshness of England's gun ban. As for the United States, all it would take is an amendment to the Constitution to change everything. It's happened before (remember prohibition during the 1920's) and could easily happen again. The anti-gun lobby has tried every possible approach to attack guns and gun owners over the past several decades and will use tragic events like Virginia Tech or Columbine to further their agenda.

Politicians like Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif) and Ted Kennedy (D-Mass) regularly propose and support stricter gun laws for Americans. Those who believe in our Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms need to constantly monitor the voting policies of our elected officials - and voice our opinions on how they vote, whether we agree or not - if we are to prevent gun control advocates like Nancy

Pelosi, Ted Kennedy and Chuck Schumer from using the phrase, " It's for the safety of the children" to push through their agenda's in the current, Democrat controlled congress.

We must not allow gun control fanatics in Congress and elsewhere to use the violence of the past and the love of children to coerce us into passing more laws on top of those that have already proven to be ineffective in preventing these tragedies. While we all pray that another event like those at Columbine or Virginia Tech never happens again, we must allow the teachers, security personnel and (at colleges and universities) qualified adult students the ability to defend themselves if and when the need should arise.

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