



P E R S P E C T I V E S

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Parental Anxiety

Greed knows no boundaries

Almost every parent of a K-12 school age child is really concerned about the incessant school shootings that plague our nation. These have been escalating in violence and complexity over the 23 years since the Columbine massacre in 1999, and it is past time for a national conversation on gun violence and young people. If you haven't seen the incredible documentary by Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine*, you need to. It "sets the table" for the substantive intervention we must have. Why?

Yet another unspeakably tragic school shooting occurred last month in Oxford, Michigan when a disturbed 15-year-old killed four students and injured seven more. That makes 89 school shootings since May 2018, and the deadliest one since that date. The statistics for this year alone are troubling beyond words: 31 shootings with injuries or deaths; 65 people killed or injured; 12 people killed outright including nine children and three school employees; with 53 people injured.

These gruesome statistics are compiled by Education Week, which is providing a clear accounting of only K-12 shootings. Colleges and other post-secondary schools are another category of gore all to themselves—as are parking lot killings like the one that ended the political career of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords where 19 were shot, resulting in six deaths including a federal judge and a 9-year-old girl.

No wonder parents are anxious about sending their children off to school! Or even to the parking lot at the local shopping mall. This situation is absolutely crazy!

We were all, rightly, shocked and outraged when 20-year-old Adam Lanza killed 26 people, including 20 children between the ages of six and seven, plus six adult staff members at the Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut on December 12, 2012. That massacre prompted a short-lived debate on better gun regulations including proposals to make the background-check system universal and for new legislation to outlaw the manufacture and sale of semi-automatic weapons. All to no avail. That conversation fizzled out, as all conversations about gun control seem to do.

In the Oxford tragedy, it was once again a semi-automatic weapon that did the horrific damage.

It seems no tragedy has the power to counteract the powerful gun lobby that serves gun manufacturers rather than the safety of the public at large. Amazingly, more than 70 percent of National Rifle Association ("NRA") members thought the proposed Sandy Hook reforms were a reasonable beginning for "weapons of war," and background-check regulation. And still, nothing happened.

As tomorrow dawns, parents of school-age children will again face the dilemma of what to do about the fact that their child very well might not come back alive from school.

Our collective memories were also stirred by the Marjory Stoneham Douglas school in Parkland, Florida when another teenager, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz used his AR-15 assault rifle meant only for military

purposes to kill 17 students and staff on Valentine's Day, 2018. That slaughter raised media eyebrows as it surpassed even Columbine in number of deaths. Remarkably, even then President Trump, at that time the recipient of over \$30,000,000 in NRA contributions, in a nationwide speech observed "...no child, no teacher, should ever be in danger in an American school. No parent should ever have to fear for their sons and daughters when they kiss them goodbye in the morning...". Yet, the slaughter of the innocent continues.

As of December 13, 2021, 42,409 Americans have died from guns in 2021. This rate, about 122 per day, is slightly up from the 120 gun deaths per day in 2020, and about 13 more per day than 2019. We Americans have an inherently violent culture.

Perhaps we all need to follow the advice of the Watergate Hearings which admonished us to "follow the money" to understand what Nixon did that cost him the Presidency. The "money" here is the profits gun manufacturers are making by stirring up our love of firearms and our unwillingness to take even modest steps to reduce gun deaths.

Everyone still reading this column is aware of these incredibly grim statistics, so why repeat them here? Because when an informed public realizes that gun sales are less about the Second Amendment than they are about the gun lobby's profits, they will begin to look for even small steps, to bring sanity to our national gun policies. A tiny number of gun manufacturers are making enormous profits despite the 90 percent of us wanting sensible gun reform. In the US, we have the best legislation that money can buy—and right now the sustained money influencing our politics are those few gun manufacturers.

There are two positive developments that occurred this past week that just might, bring some sliver of sanity to our gun laws. First is the decision by California Governor Gavin Newsom to pass legislation patterned after the Texas statute the Supreme Court left intact that permits individuals to sue anyone for up to \$10,000 who in any way aids an abortion. Paraphrasing Newsom, if Texas can allow private suits to put a woman's body at risk, then California can pass a law that will give individuals the right to sue gun manufacturers for product liability if someone is injured by gun violence.

Now, that is a fascinating approach since it sets up the Supreme Court to strike down the Texas-style vigilante law for anti-abortion folks or suffer similar suits to be brought in California to provide a "bounty" to anyone willing to sue a gun manufacturer.

Another creative, and courageous, approach to stem gun violence by children is to hold the legal owners of the gun responsible for the deaths it causes. That's what Karen D. McDonald recently did when she charged the parents of shooter Ethan Crumbley for purchasing, as a "Christmas gift", the semi-automatic weapon he used in the Oxford attack. Ethan's parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, knew they illegally purchased a firearm for their underage son, they knew he was exhibiting signs of troubled behavior, they knew he was attempting to surreptitiously purchase quantities of ammunition, they knew the weapon they purchased was not secured for safety, and they knew Ethan had drawn macabre, violent images on a test paper. They knew all this before refusing to take him out of school the day of the massacre. In McDonald's view, their actions were sufficient to charge the parents with four counts of involuntary manslaughter.

That's a modest start, but a start towards reducing parental anxiety.

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