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English IV

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### Triggering Change: Aiming for Safer Schools

"[The shooter] came in and said, 'You're all gonna die,' and just started shooting," 10-year-old survivor of the 2022 Uvalde shooting, Salinas said, in an interview with ABC news ("Said").

Sadly, these situations are more and more common with every year that passes. Since 1970, students have become 6 times more likely to die in a school shooting today, and the rate of school shootings in general has doubled thirteen times over since then, according to the American College of Surgeons("Hosseinpour").

As of December 10, there have been over 81 school shootings in 2024 alone, 54 of which were in schools k-12 leaving 36 dead, according to CNN ("School shootings in the US"). School shootings have grown at an alarming rate within the past 20 years reaching an all time high of 82 in 2023, just 316 days into the year.

How can we keep letting this happen? An endless cycle that creates tragedy, devastation, and chaos.

Politicians must stop being cowards. Scared of the idea of sticking up for children, in fear that they will lose their power? It's pathetic.

Our country's leaders need to recognize the issue and make changes now before another massacre happens. All members of our government must take Action, whether they are a school

board member or the president of the United States, to prevent and protect from school shootings. We first must address the context and reason behind why gun control is hard to implement and we also need to create legislation that gives counseling and resources for students, creates gun control measures that are accepted by both sides of congress, and provides additional security measures like armed security and teachers.

When looking at this issue, I first looked at those who oppose protecting children in the name of “liberty”. Because of the traditional conservative beliefs that protecting the 2nd amendment,” Right to Bear Arms,” justifies continuing to let maniacs get a hold of assault rifles, little to no progress has been made towards protecting our schools. Funny enough, Ben and Jerrys, the ice cream company, is a big supporter of gun control, citing some reasons legislation has not been passed. These include corruption amongst politicians who accept money from pro gun organizations, the National Rifle Association which’s main purpose is to influence pro gun ideas, and most of all the second amendment, which they infer is being misinterpreted (“4 Reasons Gun-Control Legislation Hasn’t Gone Anywhere”). When written, the second amendment was centralized around protecting the individual freedom of each citizen from a tyrannical government. Then, the weapon was a musket, which had a maximum of two shots. Nowadays, people have access to assault weapons which can shoot north of 60 rounds per minute. Secondly, the Declaration of Independence states that citizens have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness(“Jefferson”).” What some argue is that the second amendment is the right to protect us from tyranny, and yet those rights and the right of life are both stated by our founding fathers. Do those rights which virtually haven’t been threatened since the founding of our nation take precedence over the lives of fifth graders trying to learn

history in class? I don't understand how we keep letting these weapons of mass destruction get into the hands of civilians, much less mentally unstable people.

Even so, the vast majority of America believes in legitimate gun control. A small percentage of people stand in the way of the wants and needs of hundreds of millions of people. That is elitism. According to ABC News, 89% of Americans support universal background checks, 86% of Americans support red flag laws, which essentially allow restraining orders of weapons on people who are deemed a threat to themselves or others, and 56% of Americans support banning assault rifles altogether (Deliso). It is evident that America has spoken. It is up to the people who have been elected to serve these people who fulfill their duty.

What makes it so difficult is the bipartisanship makeup of congress which favors large amounts of cooperation. This makes it very hard to convince conservative members of both the house and the senate to pass any bills. It has become a gridlock, with little being done to make change. Within the past 20 years, Republicans in Congress have defeated bills including those of which would have tightened regulations on assault rifles, tightened background checks, prevented domestic abusers from purchasing firearms, and even making gun trafficking a federal crime, to name a few(Brown). Once again, work is not being done for two main reasons. One, the beliefs of the conservative people in power. And two, the ability that they have to not let bills get passed.

Although it is a shame to continue to drag this problem down the road, if we aren't able to get large amounts of legislation through, we need to find solutions now that are accepted by both sides.

In many cases, the argument over school shootings is about whether the gun is at fault or whether the person who commits the crime is at fault. The answer to this question is, they are both at fault. To address this, we need laws that will fix both sides of the problem.

Starting with the human who is controlling the weapon. In the case of general gun violence in school, EveryTown Research found that 75% of the shooters were either active students or former students (“How Can We Prevent Gun Violence in American Schools?”). Additionally, according to the Sandy Hook Promise, 93% of school shooters planned the attack, while 75% raised concern from others prior to the attack (17 Facts About Gun Violence And School Shootings). These are clear patterns of signs being shown before the act. We must address these signs and learn when to recognize them. Laws must be made to provide counseling and support for students per a certain amount of students. Students and teachers should also be trained on how to recognize when there may be a potential threat before and be able to report it. Signs include bullying, loneliness, aggressiveness, disconnect, bragging of access to guns, obsession with online violent content, and withdrawn from family and friends. Recognizing, reporting, and preventing these situations are examples of non-violent actions that can be taken to deescalate a situation.

Limiting overall access to firearms is also a crucial part of the problem. According to the Sandy Hook Promise, 68% of shooters got their guns from family members, friends, or other people close in their lives (17 Facts About Gun Violence And School Shootings). Additionally, according to EveryTown Research, 4.6 million kids live in a home where there is a loaded and unlocked firearm (“How can we prevent school gun violence?”) The point is, for many kids whose brains aren’t fully developed, who’s going through a lot of changes, who can be lonely and isolated, they can access a firearm. A weapon of mass destruction. There also must be a removal of unnecessary weapons in our nation. For example, going back to an article published by USA Today by California Representative, Eric Swalwell he talks about an experience he faced as an DA. “Gary was 28 and working as a security guard at a taco truck in Oakland, Calif., in

2009 when he saw Dreshawn Lee carrying a sawed-off shotgun and reported it to police. Three months later, Lee took his revenge by shooting and killing Jackson with an AK-47-style semi automatic assault rifle(“Swalwell”).”

This is just one example of thousands and thousands that happen each year. The only use for these types of weapons is for harm not good. The 2nd Amendment stands, and it should protect weapons for self defense and sport, but anything beyond that is out of its interpretation. Only bad things can come from allowing them to stay. A solution to this is allowing the US government to forcefully buy back these types of weapons, fairly compensating those who legally purchased them.

Of course, this is a stretch for many key conservative senators and representatives, so what can we do right now to meet in the middle.

A solution to the lack of proper safety in our schools is by giving the option to teachers to possess a firearm in an extremely controlled fashion. Completely voluntary, these teachers should remain anonymous and their weapons shall remain in locked safes until there is an imminent danger. Following after rules and procedures placed in the Mad River school district as seen in this CBS News report, teachers are trained and tested before being offered a weapon to keep in their class. The Superintendent of the district, who is also the sole non-anonymous person on staff who is armed, said that parents are grateful for the extra layer of protection(“Hastey”).”

Adding on, one of the anonymous teachers who is armed said that she recognizes the concerns of having firearms in the classroom, even having them herself initially, but once she was trained, she thought it was a good implementation.

This method acts as both insurance of security if something were to happen, but also as a deterrent. If it is known that there are armed persons who can defend an active shooter on campus, it could very well scare someone from doing something they may have done without that presence.

Putting in security officers and cameras are also active solutions that serve as a temporary solution. Of course there is the argument that having these physical measures that can be seen may distress students. That is where the advantage of having anonymously armed teachers, out of sight, could benefit. An example of this is from an article in the New York Times, Joel Myrick, a former assistant principal at a high school used his weapon that he had in his car to scare off a student who had shot some students (“Saul”). His story has gone on to inspire groups and teachers all over the country.

In the end, we must work to find both temporary short term and permanent long term solutions to the issue of school shootings. Too many lives have been lost already. Now it is up to the politicians who control this country to make change, protecting the place where students go to learn.

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