

Why We Can't Give Up on Preventing Gun Violence

by Sandy Sorensen
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I am not writing this in the immediate aftermath of another horrific mass shooting. I am not marking the anniversary of a prominent gun violence tragedy, although given the estimated 30,000 deaths from gun violence annually; it is likely the anniversary of a gun tragedy in some American community somewhere. And although legislation to strengthen background checks on gun purchases is still before Congress, most political observers give it little chance of moving in a midterm congressional election year. But perhaps it is just such a time as this when we need to redouble our efforts to prevent gun violence from continuing to take its tragic toll in our nation. Truly our silence will not protect us.

The fact is that gun violence is preventable. We have the means to reduce gun violence, and we have the knowledge to implement prevention approaches. We have studies that give us insight into the factors contributing to gun violence and insight into effective strategies for preventing it. We certainly know the cost of failing to prevent further gun violence, although we may not ultimately be able to fully measure the cost of trauma, despair, hopelessness and grief that is left in its wake. It is striking and sobering that 14 months after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school, charities that helped to provide funds for mental health care in the Newtown community have nearly exhausted those funds, and it is unclear how long into the future the need for such services will remain.

What we seem not to have is the political will to take action. An overwhelming majority of the American public, including a majority of gun owners, supports strengthening the background check system on gun purchases in response to gun violence, but such legislation remains mired in the fear of alienating special interests in an election year. These same special interests have even gone on the offensive to derail the nomination of Dr. Vivek Hallegere Murthy for Surgeon General, because he has identified gun violence as a public health crisis.

Faiths United Against Gun Violence, a diverse, interfaith coalition of faith-based groups united by the call to confront our nation’s gun violence epidemic, just concluded its Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath observance. As part of the Sabbath, thousands of people of faith around the country engaged in prayer and action to address gun violence in our communities through public policy advocacy, participation in community prevention programs and education. Faiths United rests on a core belief that is reflected across faith traditions, the belief that violence and death cannot and will not have the final word. That is reason enough to continue our efforts to prevent further gun violence.

It is time to reclaim our streets, schools, and workplaces from the threat of gun violence, and it is time to reclaim the power of our vote from narrow special interests that seek to block even modest, common-sense measures to prevent gun violence. Our culture has a heavy investment in death; isn’t it time we invested in hope and change?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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