

Handout I

EDITORIALS: GUN CONTROL AND VIRGINIA

Editorial #1: *Getting Rid of Gun Control*

Virginia finally is poised to repeal its unusual law that prohibits law-abiding citizens from buying more than one gun per month. It's about time, because the red tape has not had the desired effect in lowering crime. There is no academic research by criminologists or economists that shows that one-gun-a-month regulations reduce crime in either the states that pass them or their neighbors. The laws have merely inconvenienced honest Americans who want to buy guns.

Besides Virginia, only Maryland, California and New Jersey still have these laws. South Carolina was the first state to adopt the restrictions in 1976 but repealed the limit in 2004. New Jersey has had the law on the books for less than two months now.

Contrary to the nanny-state notion that gun control is good, gun limitations are actually harmful. The book "The Bias Against Guns" shows that one-gun-a-month rules significantly reduce the number of gun shows, because they reduce the number of sales that can occur. For the same reason, it's likely the regulation reduces the number of gun dealers. The reduction in legal sources to buy guns can raise the cost of law-abiding citizens buying guns relative to criminals, and thus disarm good people relative to criminals. The book "More Guns, Less Crime," the only peer-reviewed research on one-gun-a-month restrictions, from the University of Chicago Press, shows the laws either have no effect or a detrimental effect on violent crime.

The Brady Campaign claims that Virginia's one-gun-a-month law reduced the number of crime guns traced to Virginia dealers, but it provides no link to crime rates, which is ultimately the bottom line. If people around the nation's capital should understand anything, it is how hard it is to keep criminals from getting guns. The District of Columbia banned handguns entirely, and murder rates still soared. Criminals got a hold of guns despite the law, because by nature they don't care about breaking laws, and they can't buy guns legally anyway. The question ought to be focused on whom these laws prevent from getting guns, and the evidence is that law-abiding citizens are the ones who are stopped. One-gun-a-month rules are similar to gun bans and waiting periods, which tend to disarm victims relative to criminals, and therefore, increase crime. If possible, it's a good idea to keep guns from criminals, but laws that make it more difficult for law-abiding citizens to get guns relative to criminals cause more harm than good. In the case of the right to keep and bear arms, safety and freedom go together.

—*Washington Times*, February 19, 2010

Editorial #2: *Firearms Still Easily Available*

Three years have passed since the massacre at Virginia Tech that took the lives of 32 innocent people, including my sister Reema. I look back over the past 1,097 days since my sister died and wonder how it is still legal for criminals and people with serious mental illness to buy guns without passing a background check.

Reema was killed because of a gap in Virginia's gun background check system that allowed a mentally ill man to buy weapons. Even though a court determined that he was mentally ill and therefore prohibited from purchasing and possessing guns, his record of mental illness was not in the background check system.

Thankfully, following recommendations of the Virginia Tech review panel, action was taken at the state and federal level to help get missing mental health and criminal records into the background check system. The number of mental health records submitted to the federal instant background check system has tripled from 298,571 (as of Dec. 31, 2006) prior to the Virginia Tech massacre to 932,559 (as of March 31, 2010).

Unfortunately, the problem doesn't end there. Criminals, the mentally ill, and even terrorists are still able to purchase firearms from gun shows with no background check whatsoever. Federal law requires every licensed gun dealer to conduct criminal background checks on all purchasers. But dealers without licenses are selling guns at gun shows without these checks.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), 30 percent of guns in federal illegal trafficking investigations are connected to gun shows. This Gun Show Loophole is exploited by criminals and those who know they cannot pass a background check.

Last May, I went to a gun show in Richmond to see for myself. I bought 10 guns in less than one hour. No background check. No identification. No questions asked. It was as easy as buying a bag of chips at a grocery store; simple cash and carry. Luckily, I'm not a criminal.

What's clear is that anyone, even criminals, can go to any gun show and buy an unlimited number of guns, without undergoing a background check. It's hard to believe, but it's true. And there's nothing to stop them from doing it over and over again.

Three years have passed and the Gun Show Loophole still remains intact. The solution is simple: Congress should pass legislation to require background checks for all sales at gun shows. Sen. Jim Webb and Sen. Mark Warner, the families of the Virginia Tech victims and survivors are counting on your leadership. Closing the loophole will not affect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding gun owners. But it will help ensure that guns do not end up in the hands of people who, because they are a danger to society, have lost the right to own them.

In May 2009 my father and I, and several other Virginia Tech family members, met with Sen. Webb to ask for his support for legislation to close the Gun Show Loophole. What impressed us was how seriously he took the issue and his promise to work in Congress to fix this problem.

It has been almost 11 months since that meeting, three years since the tragedy at Virginia Tech, and no action has been taken to move this lifesaving legislation forward. I hope that all Virginians will stand with the families of the Virginia Tech victims and survivors in calling on Sens. Webb and Warner to get behind this effort.

Closing the Gun Show Loophole won't bring my sister Reema back, or any of the other victims of the mass shooting at Virginia Tech. But it would save an untold number of innocent lives. It's been three years. The time to act is now. Sen. Webb and Sen. Warner, what are you waiting for?

—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 20, 2010

Editorial #3: *Virginia Handgun Law: Don't Reopen the Pipeline of Guns*

Seventeen years ago, pressured by its neighbors to stem the flow of guns into the Northeast, Virginia enacted a bipartisan bill that limited the purchase of handguns to one every 30 days. Virtually overnight, experts say, the “Iron Pipeline” slowed and the number of guns used in crimes in New Jersey and traced to Virginia fell sharply. But now a Virginia legislator wants to turn his state back into one of New Jersey’s leading arsenals. A bill proposed by L. Scott Lingamfelter, a Republican, has cleared the House of Delegates, with mostly Republican support, and is headed for the state Senate, which is controlled by Democrats. There the bill’s chances are uncertain, but if it passes, Gov. Bob McDonnell intends to sign it. Virginia’s gun-running days could be back again.

Lingamfelter, a retired Army colonel, insists Virginians’ Second Amendment rights are being restricted. The current law “rations constitutional rights,” he says; “It hasn’t reduced crime. It has reduced commerce.” Lingamfelter says the National Instant Check System, which wasn’t around in 1993, can keep felons from purchasing guns. Maybe, but many of the guns that end up in New Jersey are purchased by “straw buyers” — people with valid Virginia drivers licenses who act as purchasing agents for a fee.

New Jersey officials — from U.S. senators to police chiefs — are wondering what Virginia lawmakers are thinking. In a gun-trafficking study of 2008, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives determined that, even with the reduced flow, Virginia still ranked third among outside states providing guns used in New Jersey crimes. Repealing Virginia’s firearm law will mean hundreds more guns on New Jersey streets each year, many married to a violent, criminal intent. To argue that the law is an onerous burden on law-abiding gun buyers is silly. Virginians can buy 12 guns a year. How many do they need?

—*Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ), February 22, 2010

LITERATURE REVIEW WORKSHEET: GUN CONTROL AND VIRGINIA

1) List the strengths and weaknesses of Editorial #1.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

1) _____

1) _____

2) _____

2) _____

3) _____

3) _____

4) _____

4) _____

2) Please do the same for Editorial #2.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

1) _____

1) _____

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3) And please do the same for Editorial #3.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

1) _____

1) _____

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LITERATURE REVIEW WORKSHEET #2: GUN CONTROL AND VIRGINIA

1) To your mind, which of the three articles was the most persuasive? Why?

2) Which of the three articles was the least persuasive? Why?

3) Are there any important issues regarding gun control that are not covered by these three pieces, but that you would write about if you were addressing this topic?
