

AMERICAN ADVERSITY

Our country is suffering from a “death by a thousand shots,” an adversity caused by the plethora of guns in our society.

The world population is now about eight billion, which includes the relatively small United States population of 335 million. It is estimated there are about a billion guns in the world, or one for every eight people. *Half of these guns*, or about 500 million, are located within the United States; that’s one-and-a-half guns for every man, woman, and child in this country. Stated another way, Americans, with only 4% of the world’s population, own 50% of the world’s guns.

Something is clearly wrong with this picture. In no other country is there a greater chance of dying due to gunfire. In the United States, gunfire is the major killer of young people – greater than car accidents; greater than disease. Each and every year there are forty-five thousand deaths from bullet wounds.

Meanwhile, the United States arms manufacturers in the United States produce about *eleven million* new guns each year. Unlike cars, old guns do not wear out, so the total number of guns in America keeps rising. Gun companies have refocused their message away from the sport of hunting toward selling military-style weapons to young men and handguns to everyone else for “personal safety.” This pitch, based on machismo and self-defense, has resulted in a surge of firearm sales.

The arms manufacturers continue to make innovations and improvements in both guns and ammunition, so that their guns will fire faster, more accurately, and with increased deadly force. Yet these companies make no innovations or improvements that would make their guns *safer*. Such safety improvements are made by independent inventors but the gun companies do not adopt them.

Unlike the case with motor vehicles which are also capable of inflicting grave bodily harm, there is no national organization or agency devoted to making guns safer. For motor vehicles, Congress established the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which has significantly reduced traffic deaths and injuries over the years. For guns, Congress has done nothing of the sort to reduce gun deaths and injuries.

The problem of gun violence is correctable with new technology. With an agency similar to NHTSA, perhaps called the Firearms Safety Administration or “NFSA,” national statistics could be assembled, research could be conducted, and Federal rules could be established with an aim toward reducing gun violence.

Why doesn’t Congress act to make guns safer, or at least establish an agency, similar to NHTSA, that will do so? While most Democratic members of Congress would like to move forward in matters of gun safety, most Republicans do not. Notwithstanding that the vast majority of the American people want Federal action to curtail the violence, their Republican representatives continue to block all reasonable solutions to the gun problem. Finally, in 2022, after 30 years of

stalling, and arguing the Second Amendment does not permit “gun control,” they threw Americans a very small bone – and acted like it was a big deal that would save lives. It wasn’t.

Consequently, the American people are saddled with a severe problem that is unique among all nations. This problem can be called the “American Adversity” – “American” because nowhere else in the world is this problem so prevalent, and “Adversity” because the problem is surely fixable with technology, yet there are those who oppose reasonable attempts to make guns safer.

Here are just a few examples of the consequences of American Adversity:

The Columbine High School Massacre

Two seniors at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, planted two homemade bombs in the school, also two others at remote locations which they hoped would serve as a diversion. On April 20, 1999, they entered the school with their guns and attempted to set off the four bombs. Only one bomb, one of the two at a remote location, exploded. They then launched a shooting attack, murdering twelve fellow students and one teacher, and injuring twenty-one more before committing suicide in the school library. A police investigation failed to identify their motive, but it was determined the perpetrators planned the attack for at least a year in hopes of killing a large number of students and teachers.

The Virginia Tech School Massacre

An undergraduate senior student at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, went on a shooting spree killing thirty-two people and wounding seventeen others with two semi-automatic pistols. Six more people were injured while jumping out of windows trying to escape. The shooting occurred on April 16, 2007, during two separate attacks on the campus. The perpetrator, who had a long history of mental illness, killed two people in his own dormitory. He later ran into the school’s main classroom building, chained the main entrance doors shut, and fired into four classrooms and a stairwell killing thirty more people. As police stormed this building, he fatally shot himself in the head.

The Sandy Hook School Massacre

On December 14, 2012, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, a gunman killed twenty first graders and six school employees before turning a gun on himself. Earlier that day, he had killed his mother at the home they shared. She owned the weapons her son used in his deadly rampage. Shortly after 9:30am, the 20-year-old perpetrator shot through a plate-glass window next to Sandy Hook’s locked front entrance in order to gain access to the school. Hearing the noise, the school principal and school psychologist went to investigate and were shot and killed by the man who was armed with a semiautomatic rifle, two semiautomatic pistols and multiple rounds of ammunition. The perpetrator also shot and wounded two other Sandy Hook staff members.

He then entered two first-grade classrooms, where he gunned down two teachers and 15 students in one room and two teachers and five students in the other room. The children he murdered, 12 girls and 8 boys, were 6 and 7 years old. Twelve first-graders from the two classrooms survived. When he heard the police closing in on

him, he killed himself in a classroom at approximately 9:40 a.m. The rampage had lasted less than ten minutes.

Investigators determined that the perpetrator, who had attended Sandy Hook as a boy, acted alone in planning and carrying out the attack, but they were unable to find a motive for his actions. Mental-health professionals who had previously known him “did not see anything that would have predicted his future behavior.”

The Orlando Nightclub Shooting

On June 12, 2016, a 29-year-old man killed 49 people and wounded 53 more in a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Orlando Police officers shot and killed him after a three-hour standoff. In a 9-1-1 call he made shortly after the shooting began, the perpetrator swore allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and said the U.S. killing of Abu Waheeb in Iraq the previous month "triggered" the shooting. He later told a negotiator he was "out here right now" because of the American-led interventions in Iraq and in Syria and asked the negotiator to stop the U.S. bombing. The incident was deemed a terrorist attack by FBI investigators.

The Las Vegas Mass Shooting

On October 1, 2017, a 64-year-old man from Mesquite, Nevada, opened fire on the crowd attending a music festival on the Las Vegas Strip in Nevada. From his 32nd-floor suite in the Mandalay Bay hotel, he fired more than 1,000 bullets, killing 60 people and wounding 411. The perpetrator used a rifle with a “bump stock,” enabling it to fire automatically in rapid succession. The ensuing panic brought the total number of injured to 867. About an hour later, he was found dead in his room from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The motive for the mass shooting has not been determined.

The incident is the deadliest mass shooting committed by an individual in United States history. It focused attention on the lack of firearms laws in the United States. Absent any action by Congress, bump stocks were banned by the U.S. Justice Department in December 2018.

The Uvalde, Texas, School Shooting

On May 24, 2022, an 18-year-old fatally shot nineteen students and two teachers and wounded seventeen other people at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Earlier in the day, he shot his grandmother in the forehead at home, severely wounding her. Outside the school, he fired shots for approximately five minutes before entering unobstructed with an AR-15 style rifle through an unlocked side-entrance door. He then shut himself inside two adjoining classrooms, killed nineteen students and two teachers, and remained in the school for more than an hour before he was shot and killed by members of the United States Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC).

Technological Solutions

Even in the wake of these and many other mass shootings, as well as the almost daily killings of adults and children by the misuse of guns, Congress has failed to act reasonably. This failure is

almost unbelievable in this day and age when, with modern technology, it is possible to produce a *Safe Gun*; that is, a *gun that won't fire when it could cause harm to innocent people*.

By pairing a *smartphone* with a gun, one can use the amazing capability of the smartphone to prevent misuse of the gun. The smartphone can determine and store *when, where and by whom* the gun was fired, and can prevent the gun from firing in certain potentially dangerous situations. For example:

The Safe Gun will fire only when in the hands of the gun owner, or a person authorized by the gun owner, and no one else. The gun will not fire when used by an unauthorized member of a household (a child, for instance) or a thief.

The Safe Gun will fire only if the user is competent to shoot the firearm. The gun will not fire if the user is under the influence of liquor, drugs or some other mind-altering stimulus (such as anger or rage), or is psychologically disturbed in some way.

The Safe Gun will not fire when in a public area, such as a school, a place of worship, a transportation hub or an entertainment venue. The locations and perimeters of these “safe areas” can be kept current, as they change over time, by updating the smartphone at periodic intervals.

The Safe Gun will not fire when aimed at the gun owner, the gun owner's family member or a gun owner's friend. The gun owner can select the persons who are protected from such gunfire.

The Safe Gun can monitor its own use by storing and, if desired, transmitting firing data (user identification, time stamps and location of shots fired) to a remote computer.

The Safe Gun will not fire if any of its safety features have been tampered with or circumvented in any way, and can transmit an alert to the gun owner and/or authorities if such tampering is attempted.

The Safe Gun can be provided with a video camera to view the scene at which the gun is aimed. Such a Safe Gun can stream live video that can be analyzed, using facial recognition and other image processing techniques, to prevent shooting innocent people.

When provided with such a camera, the Safe Gun, especially a handgun, can “peer around corners” without exposing the gun user to hostile fire, thereby enabling the user to see a potential hostile target displayed on the smartphone and/or a remote device.

Conclusion:

Strong congressional action is long overdue. Instead of legislating piecemeal, it would seem logical to create an agency that oversees the gun manufacturers, the way this was done with the auto industry; that is, an agency that develops expertise and makes rules for gun safety. Call it the National Firearm Safety Administration (NFSA) or whatever you want, but Congress must *do something*, and soon.