

editorial

Senate approval of gun bill is a crime

What do John Lennon, Marvin Gaye, George Moscone and 45,000 additional people in the years 1979-83 have in common? They were all killed in the United States with bullets shot from handguns.

According to FBI crime reports, over 18,000 people were murdered in the United States in 1983. Of those, 44 percent of the murders that involved a weapon were committed with a handgun. Numerically, that amounts to over 8,000 people who lost their lives to handguns. And this doesn't include the multitude of accidental deaths or people injured by handguns.

But, despite the United States' appalling statistics on handgun murder, the highest of any developed nation, the Senate voted last Tuesday to loosen laws restricting gun ownership. The Senate, in a move that represents the largest approval of changes in federal gun control legislation since the 1968 Gun Control Act was passed, voted 79-15 to lift the ban on the interstate sale of guns and to eradicate surprise federal inspections of gun dealers' sales records. The Senate also voted down a proposal to require a 14-day waiting period for handgun purchases in order to allow police to check a buyer's background.

The bill could have some damaging effects if it becomes law. Allowing the interstate sale of guns would undermine state gun control laws. For instance, residents of Oregon, California, and Washington, who now must fill out an application and undergo a waiting period, would be able to purchase a firearm in Idaho and Nevada without waiting. The lack of a waiting period is particularly detrimental in cases of suicide or passion crimes.

Rather than ease gun control laws, the federal government and state governments should tighten controls, particularly for handguns. In order to purchase a handgun, people should be required to register their gun, obtain a license, allow police officers to check their records for criminal behavior, and demonstrate that they can use a gun proficiently. In other words, they should have to meet many of the same requirements needed to drive a car.

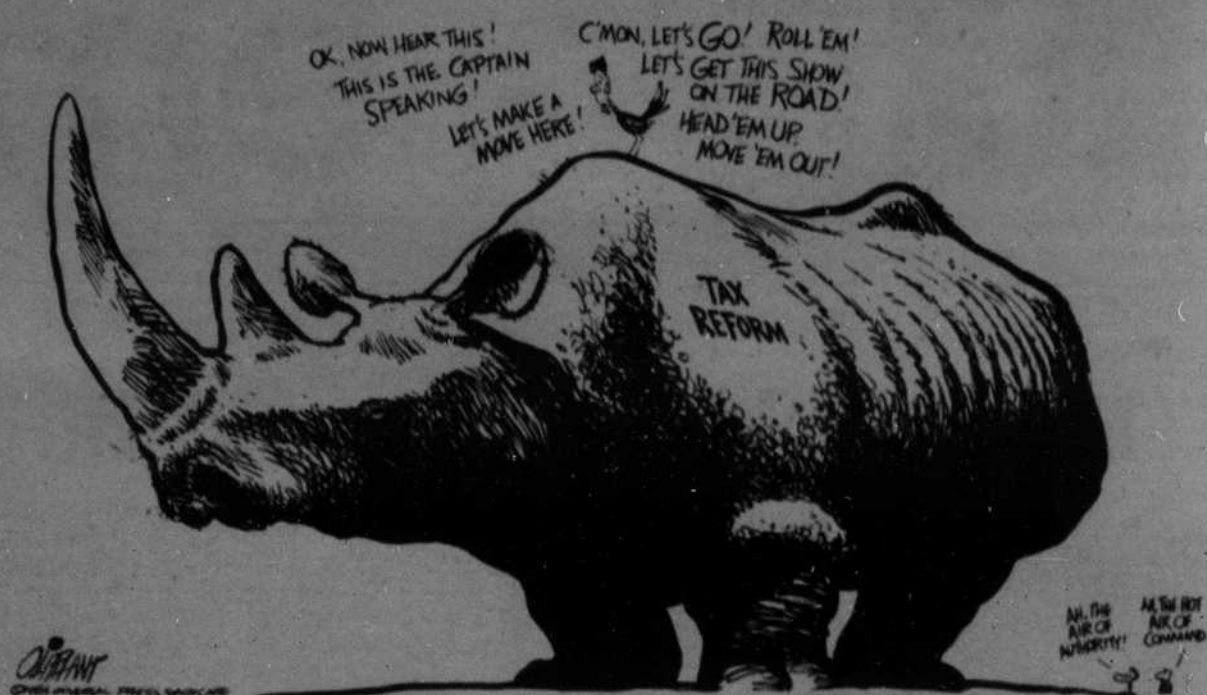
Requirements such as these would not keep responsible people from obtaining a handgun. It would reduce the number of guns available to people who cannot demonstrate that they are responsible, law-abiding citizens. Criminals will still get guns, but they will generally only be able to obtain guns of inferior quality at inflated prices. It makes sense, as it does with narcotics, to limit the availability of handguns as much as possible.

Those opposed to gun control cry, "Guns don't kill people, people kill people!" But handguns are making it all too easy for people to kill people. With killing as impersonal as pulling a trigger, it's no wonder that handguns are the weapon of choice for America's killers. Clearly, if the availability of handguns were limited, the murder rate would go down.

Handgun enthusiasts also argue that they need handguns for protection. But in an estimated 90 percent of the cases, burglars raid houses in which the occupants are not home. Handguns in the home are used more frequently to commit suicide or injure or kill another family member as they ever are in preventing a crime.

In addition, senators may not be doing their homework. A 1981 survey conducted by the Department of Justice revealed that 71 percent of Americans were in favor of requiring permits for handgun purchases, 91 percent were in favor of a waiting period, and 65 percent said that they thought that federal laws covering the sale of handguns should be more strict.

It's time that the handgun business quits making a killing.



Live Aid rock bash entertains but doesn't help world hunger

I spent Saturday evening like millions of people worldwide did, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. I sat in a bar with a couple of friends and watched Live Aid on big-screen television, and tolerated M-TV's Mark Goodman questioning millionaire rock stars about how it felt to sacrifice 10 minutes of their time for the prevention of starvation in Ethiopia.

I'm also not embarrassed to admit (unlike many who gave in to the emotion of the event) the reason why I watched. I didn't tune in to pledge \$5 to save the world's children or to view a barrage of rock stars singing "We Are the World" for the grand finale. I watched the program because I wanted to see the much-touted Beatles reunion, Phil Collins drum with Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, and a Tina Turner-Mick Jagger duet. I was there for the show itself. I thought everyone was.

But when I realized that many people watching really believed that this concert was doing something for world hunger, I became miffed.

Hundreds of singers sacrificing one day (or less) to take part in the world's biggest rock concert of all time, and millions of fans donating hard-earned dollars for a souvenir Live Aid T-shirt failed to warm my heart.

It reminded me of a day last February when hundreds of fraternity and sorority members promised to skip lunch for a day

and donate the proceeds to OXFAM America, a world organization that raises money for the elimination of world hunger. I remember Interfraternity Council President Jay Halverson telling me that more than just raising money for these poor, emaciated people, fraternity members also were learning what it was like to be hungry. Ha!

The fact is, both the fraternity/sorority members and Live Aid groupies gave up their lunches and allowances not for the purpose of feeding the world, but to vacuum their consciences of guilt.

Solving the world hunger problem, or just the Ethiopian hunger problem, takes a lot more than a one-day telethon — even one that raises \$70

to be aware that complex problems never have easy solutions.

Two elements essential to global change were missing from Saturday's 15-hour Live Aid concert — sacrifice and commitment.

Singing at a significant world event that was an honor for even the biggies of the music business is not a sacrifice. Singing for only 10-30 minutes at that significant world event is not a commitment. If Live Aid performers really want to make an impact, why not set up a committee to organize the event as an annual affair, or is that too much to ask?

It was almost comical when viewers raved about how touching it was for members of Led Zeppelin to agree to reunite for this event — no simple gesture, they said.

But I have yet to see millions of people celebrate the contributions of the Peace Corps that for more than 20 years has been dedicated to helping the people of impoverished nations. These people don't send a few dollars and then drive off into the sunset in fancy cars. Members commit themselves to at least two years. And during that time they don't impose their American lifestyles, but work together with the people who have radically different cultural perspectives.

More importantly, Peace Corps members don't concentrate merely on areas that are featured on the nightly news, but go to many places throughout the world, offering skills, training and education.

If the millions of American Live Aid fans really care about helping Ethiopians, they should write their national legislators and plead for a policy that would establish generous, annual budget allocations to all the Ethiopias of the world. World hunger demands institutional change, not stop-gap measures from people who think of helping Ethiopians as a trendy sport.

Reporter's notebook

million. Let's say every penny of the \$70 million somehow did manage to get to Ethiopia. That amount is trivial matched with the millions of starving people that are dying there everyday.

Simplifying issues as complex as world hunger by kidding ourselves into believing that a rock concert will make everything peachy-keen does more harm than good. I've heard the argument that "\$70 million is better than nothing," but I'm not so sure that's true.

I think it's dangerous for people to believe that their small contributions have made life more pleasant for Ethiopians. They haven't. Stop-gap measures such as telethon-style concerts do not solve problems in Ethiopia or in any other country where people are starving by the millions.

It's also naive to portray Ethiopia as the only place in the world where people are suffering. Let's not forget war-torn Central American and Middle Eastern countries as well as the homeless right here in America.

People need to be aware of the problem all the time, not just when rock stars are singing poignant tunes. And they have

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