

OPINION

What a Difference a Gun Makes

Have we learned anything?

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Our nation suffered its deadliest shooting incident ever by a single gunman on April 16, 2007 when a student killed 32 people and wounded 25 others at Virginia Tech before committing suicide. Five years later, have we learned anything about controlling our national gun and gun violence epidemic?

A look at just a few of the sad headlines across the country so far this year suggests we haven't learned much or anything at all.

In February, a 17-year-old high school senior, who other students described as an outcast who'd been bullied, shot and killed three fellow students and injured two more at Chardon High School in suburban Ohio. Would this have happened without a gun?

In Washington state, three chil-

dren were victims of gun violence during a three-week period in February and March.



A three-year-old died after shooting himself in the head with a gun left under the front seat of the car while his family stopped for gas. The seven-year-old daughter of a police officer was shot and killed by her younger brother after he found one of their father's guns in the glove compartment of the family van. And an eight-year-old girl was critically wounded at school when her nine-year-old classmate brought in a gun he found at home that accidentally went off in his backpack. Would this have happened without a gun?

In Chicago there already has been a rash of shootings this year

including the especially violent weekend in mid-March when 49 people were shot and 10 were killed. One of the victims was a six-year-old girl who was sitting on her front porch with her mother getting her hair brushed before a birthday party when she was killed by shots fired from a passing pickup truck. Would this have happened without a gun?

And in Florida, unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin was shot and killed walking home from the store in February after being followed by self-appointed "neighborhood watch captain" George Zimmerman, who contrary to all generally accepted Neighborhood Watch rules was patrolling his gated community while armed with a gun.

Would Trayvon's death have happened without a gun? Now that George Zimmerman has been arrested and charged with second-degree murder, Trayvon Martin's family is finally moving

forward in their quest for justice.

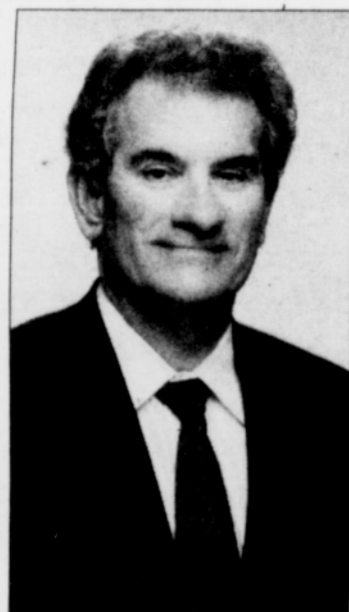
As a nation we can't afford to keep waiting for common-sense gun control laws that would protect our children and all of us from indefensible gun violence. It's time to repeal senseless gun laws like the "Stand Your Ground" laws enacted by 21 states that have grabbed so much attention in Trayvon's case and allow people in Florida to defend themselves with deadly force anytime and anywhere if they feel threatened. More than two million people have signed online petitions saying they want to repeal these laws.

It's time to require consumer safety standards and childproof safety features for all guns and strengthen child access prevention laws that ensure guns are stored safely and securely to prevent unnecessary tragedies like those in Washington state. And in a political environment where the too secretive and powerful advocacy group American Legis-

lative Exchange Council (ALEC) pushed "Stand Your Ground" laws in other states along with other "model bills" that benefit some corporate bottom lines or special interests like the NRA, it's time for all of ALEC's corporate sponsors to walk away from enabling or acquiescing destructive laws that protect guns, not children.

It's a tragedy that five years after Virginia Tech so little has changed. How many years must we wait until tragic headlines about school shootings, children dying, and people using the "shoot first and ask questions later" defense to take the law into their own hands go away? When will we finally get the courage to stand up as a nation and say enough to the deadly proliferation of guns and gun violence that endanger children's and public safety?

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.



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Abusing the Poor with Religious Lip Service

The GOP's food stamp foolishness

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Maybe you thought the lowest possible point of Republican miserliness was reached when Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Agriculture proposed that ketchup be counted as a vegetable in the school lunch program. If so, you've not taken a peek at the GOP's astoundingly penurious budget proposal recently pasted together in a fit of ideological extremism by the party's budget guru, Rep. Paul Ryan.

Of all things, GOP lawmakers hacked \$8 billion from next year's food stamp funds — a well-run, widely popular, and effective program that helps millions of hard-hit American families stave off



some of the pain of poverty. Maybe so, concede Ryan & Company, but the program is out of control, having added some 13 million people in the last three years. Well, gosh, Paul, welcome to the real America — where joblessness is rampant, wages are down, and the middle class is tumbling into poverty. Food stamp use is supposed to increase in such times. It means the program is working.

Still, retorts a Ryan henchman, everyone must sacrifice to lower the deficit, so these cuts are merely "reflecting the budgetary times we're in." Really? Then why does your budget give an average of \$265,000 a year in more tax benefits to millionaires? And why, in

your demand for severe austerity in government, do you not cut a dime from the Pentagon's bloated budget — even handing it an increase?

Finally, Ryan asserts that his food stamp cuts are for poor people's own good. Citing his Catholic religion's doctrine of "social magisterium," Paul the Pious says he's preventing poor families from the moral horror of being "dependent on government."

Just imagine their gratitude! And imagine Ryan's embarrassment that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops dared to contradict his divine rationalization, bluntly calling the cuts "unjustified and wrong."

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker.

Letter to the Editor

Obama's Firm Stand

As chair of the Multnomah County Democrats, a lesbian and a longtime LGBT activist, I am thrilled and proud that our President has taken a firm stand for marriage equality. Especially now, in a political atmosphere that is toxic and sharply di-

vided, President Obama's courage in announcing his support of full equality displays extraordinary statesmanship.

Members of the LGBT community were handed a severe blow from North Carolinians, who the day before rejected

equality and further enshrined discrimination in their state law. The next day, our President buoys not only the LGBT community, but all Americans who believe in equal justice and liberty for every American.

KC Hanson, chair,
Multnomah County Democratic Party