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OPINION

No Immunity to Gun Violence Threat

Acting together to stop the plague

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Last week marked one year since 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by a gun wielded by self-appointed neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman after he saw Trayvon walking home from a 7-Eleven with a bag of Skittles and bottle of Arizona iced tea.

Black children, youths, and families know first-hand that the killing of black children by gun violence is not new but a relentlessly unreported and under-reported plague that has been disproportionately snuffing out black child lives for a very long time.

Fifteen percent of children and teens are black but 45 percent of all children and youths killed by guns in 2010 were black. Black males 15 to 19 years old were 28 times more likely than white males



the same age to be killed in a gun homicide.

Shortly after President Kennedy's assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that it was time for our nation to do some soul-searching, and while the question "Who killed President Kennedy?" was important, answering the question "What killed President Kennedy?" was even more critical.

Dr. King believed the answer was that "our late President was assassinated by a morally inclement climate."

"It is a climate filled with heavy torrents of false accusation, jostling winds of hatred, and raging storms of violence," King said. "It is a climate where men cannot disagree without being disagreeable, and where they express dis-

sent through violence and murder. It is the same climate that murdered Medgar Evers in Mississippi and six innocent Negro children in Birmingham, Alabama."

Dr. King further noted that the undercurrents of hatred and violence that made up this morally inclement climate were fueled by our cultural embrace of guns.

"By our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim, by allowing our movie and television screens to teach our children that the hero is one who masters the art of shooting and the technique of killing, by allowing all these developments, we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes," he said.

The same winds of hatred, storms of violence, and easy access to and glorification of guns that Dr. King believed killed President Kennedy would soon also kill Dr. King.

Fifty years after Dr. King described our morally inclement climate, the outward signs of racial intolerance and hatred have undoubtedly diminished but there are still far too many reminders of the dangers lurking everywhere that devastate us all — like Trayvon's senseless death for walking home while black.

Between 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and 2010, nearly 60,000 black children and teens were killed by guns, over 1,200 every year for 48 years. This is 17 times the number of reported lynchings of black Americans of all ages since 1882 but we have not had an equivalent black community anti-lynching movement to save our children from gun violence.

While there are troubling undertones of racial suspicion and fear in Trayvon Martin's killing which must be addressed as justice is sought, the fact is that most

black young people murdered by guns are killed by black shooters — just as most white children and teens murdered by guns are killed by white shooters.

Sadly the tragedies of Tucson, Aurora, Newtown and elsewhere made clear that none of us are safe anywhere or immune to the pervasive threat of gun violence.

We are all in the same boat and must act together to stop the plague of violence. Gun safety laws that only apply in one city or state can't fully stop our national epidemic of gun proliferation and violence any better than we can stop a flu epidemic by vaccinating one family.

We must struggle together to stop gun violence and to change the morally inclement climate that Dr. King warned about if we are going to protect all of our nation's children everywhere.

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

Defending Oregon's Working Families

Preserving the credit workers have earned

BY CHUCK SHEKETOFF

They've earned it. Working families with low incomes have earned the Earned Income Tax Credit, and



the Oregon Legislature should act quickly to make sure they keep it.

Many Oregonians toil in jobs that pay too little, so they struggle to make ends meet.

That's not right. Oregonians believe that families who work and play by the rules should be able to provide for their children and get out of poverty. That's why the Oregon Earned Income Tax Credit exists.

The Oregon Earned Income Tax Credit complements the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. The federal credit is the single most effective anti-poverty program for working families with children. In 2010, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit lifted about 6.3 million people across the country out of poverty, including about 3.3 million chil-

dren.

The Oregon credit works with the federal credit to open the door to economic opportunity for families who work and have modest incomes.

Who are these families? Picture a family of a returning veteran, a single mother supporting two children or two young parents working part-time while they go to college. The families helped by the Oregon Earned Income Tax Credit are as varied as our communities.

In all, the Oregon credit helps about a quarter-million working families -- about one out of every seven families in the state -- make ends meet.

Oregon's Earned Income Tax Credit is currently scheduled to expire at the end of 2013. If lawmakers do not renew it, those quarter-million low-income working families will have less net income. A two-parent family of four earning poverty wages, for example, would see its net income fall by about \$300 due to the additional taxes.

Many of Oregon's working families saw their wages or hours cut back or lost a wage earner

during the recession. Many are still struggling. To ensure that working families who've earned the Earned Income Tax Credit receive it, lawmakers should, at a minimum, extend the expiration date of the current credit.

But lawmakers should go beyond just renewing the Earned Income Tax Credit; they should heed Gov. Kitzhaber's call to increase it. The governor's proposed modest increase would enhance the ability of Oregon's Earned Income Tax Credit to reduce poverty for working families and their children. Over 700,000 Oregonians would immediately benefit from more net income from the work their families do.

Lawmakers can and should make renewal and improvement a priority and move swiftly to protect the working families who rely on the credit. There's widespread support for renewing and strengthening the credit, and no organization has publicly voiced opposition.

Delay only risks putting low-income families in harm's way. In 2013, the Legislature's joint tax credit committee will have a limited amount of money to spend. Other tax credits, some backed

by corporate and wealthy interests, will vie for funding. The longer the Legislature waits to renew and strengthen the credit, the greater the risk that working families will come up short and lose out on what they've earned.

The Oregon Earned Income Tax credit is a small investment

that can make a large difference in the lives of working families. These families have earned the credit through work. Lawmakers should renew and strengthen the credit now, not later.

Chuck Sheketoff is executive director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

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