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Who Put the NRA in Charge of National Security?

Gun violence is a public health epidemic

BY MARIAN

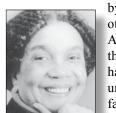
WRIGHT EDELMAN With the echo of gunshots from the San Bernardino massacre ricochet-

ing across the country and another American community reeling with new broken hearts our national discussion of gun violence feels and sounds like a broken record stuck on one horrifying song that never ends.

The President expresses his outrage that these tragedies continue to happen and calls on the public to push Congress and state legislatures to do the right thing. Members of Congress release proposals without a clear timetable for a vote or a path to passage. Public support for gun safety measures swells. The gun lobby pushes back, accusing those who seek reform of politicizing tragedy while continuing their relentless work to loosen restrictions on the deadly weapons that continue the carnage. Broken families and communities struggle to pick up the pieces after the media leaves town. With too few exceptions nothing gets done and nothing seems to change and every day Americans not living in the immediately affected communities grow numb to the tragedy and continue their normal lives until the next mass shooting inevitably occurs and the cycle repeats itself.

These horrible mass shootings that destroy and shake up so many lives with ever-increasing frequency tell only part of the tragic cost of gun violence that pervades our cities and towns every single day across our nation. Violence romps through our children's playgrounds, terrifies them in their schools and child care centers, follows them down the street, and shoots through their bedroom windows. This should be the chief public health issue in America.

Data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control earlier this year show there was a death by a gun every 16 minutes and a child or teen was killed or injured by a gun every 30 minutes in 2013. More than 2,400 children and teens died from guns, enough to fill 122 classrooms of 20 children.



by a gun than children in 25

other high income nations? faith community?

public health history points us to in gun homicides during the first what we can do now to stop the 10 years following the law's encarnage. The public health ap- actment. Another study reported proach to problem solving has in the Journal of the American been credited with a range of Medical Association Internal achievements, including adding Medicine found states with back-25 years to the life expectancy of ground checks on private as well people in the United States in the as online gun sales had 16 per-20th century. One of the great- cent lower gun fatality rates. est victories of this approach has been a massive decline in auto- a vast majority of Americans, mobile deaths. Few today can including a large majority of imagine getting in a car without gun owners, support expanding state legislatures have barred the dren and families everywhere an airbag, a seat belt, or a prop- background checks to cover all CDC from conducting research in America. Only then can we er child safety seat. These safety gun sales-yet Congress has not and sharing the truth about the reclaim our nation's soul and devices and the laws we follow yet demonstrated its capacity to impact of on gun violence on our affirm our commitment to the while on the road were not al- act on such a simple, life-saving nation's public health since the sanctity of life for all. ways in place—and American measure. As a result guns can be mid-1990's and imposed similar roadways were not always as purchased without background restrictions on the National In- President of the Children's De-

vehicle deaths before the 1960s.

Recent gun violence preven-Are we so spiritually dead tion research should help point that the killing of children the way forward. A recent study has become routine and found that a Connecticut law that checks alone will not prevent evunimportant? Where is the expanded background checks to all handgun purchases helped Lessons from America's achieve a 40 percent reduction

Polling consistently shows safe as they are today. It took a checks from unlicensed private stitutes of Health in 2011 due to fense Fund.

reticent to stand up to the pro-gun ers, policymakers, and the public no checks at all. It's way past lobby when American children to identify and address the root time for citizens to retire memare 18 times more likely to die causes of the epidemic of motor bers of Congress and state legisprofits ahead of child, family, and human safety.

> Some say that background ery gun tragedy and they won't, but they are a critically important step forward. We need more research on laws, other policies, and technologies that might save more lives. Proposals to require background checks for ammunition sales, impose a tax on ammunition, require liability insurance for guns, and smart gun technologies all merit immediate the gun lobby, and their cowardly

Why in God's name are we so concentrated effort by research- sellers and over the internet with fears that research might show concrete ways to reduce its deadly impacts.

> Why is the NRA afraid of lators who put gun manufacturer the truth? Is it because they fear the research may show concrete ways to reduce the impact of guns which sapped 33,169 lives in America in 2013 and injured 83,075 yet remain the only unregulated consumer product? It makes no sense to regulate toy guns which kill not a single person and let real guns which should only be in the hands of the military kill tens of thousands annually. We should protect human beings rather than guns. Might not the truth make us all safer?

> It's way past time for the attention. Sadly, the National Ri- American people to retire the fle Association, other members of NRA as our head of national security and public health and allies in Congress and in many assure the safety of our chil-

> > Marian Wright Edelman is

