

Forbes

The Best Gun Control Measure Is Always A Job

By: Thomas J. Basile – February 27, 2013

The President is in full campaign mode crisscrossing the nation talking about the need to curb gun violence through a host of new gun control measures. Characteristically he's using children and families as props, and in homage to public employee unions no doubt, is throwing first responders into the mix at his events as well. Meanwhile, Organizing for Action, the successor organization to the President's campaign machine, Obama for America (OFA), announced last week that it will be fully engaged in using social media and other grassroots tactics to pressure officials across the nation.

OFA plans to host 100 events in 80 congressional districts aimed at urging lawmakers to back Obama's gun proposals. They are also using their financial and human capital to go after state officials. There is much talk of great urgency and touching stories about victims, families, and heroes. But then there's the politics and the sad reality that again many of the real causes of gun violence are being ignored.

When it comes to the gun control debate, as is so often the case, Washington politicians either have their heads in the sand or are opting to do what is easier rather than what is effective. Is the increase in gun violence really about a lack of effective gun laws? Of course it's not. It's more about a stubborn economic crisis, poor business environment and the culture of dependency that has had a tenacious grip on America's inner cities for generations.

Statistics about gun violence must be examined in context. Government typically doesn't connect the dots sufficiently to understand the real causes of gun crime because they are swept up in the news of the day. Economic conditions create springboards for changes in a host of human behaviors. Crime, including gun crime, goes up during economic downturns. So do divorces and domestic violence.

Keeping urban populations, particularly minority communities, locked in a circle of dependency on government programs, in failing schools, in substandard housing and in neighborhoods where opportunity for gainful employment is scarce will only lead to more deaths. The President's gun measures, like so much of his agenda, won't help change that dynamic.

Following last year's dismal Economic Freedom Report, the CATO Institute's Richard W. Rahn pointed out that the President is characteristically ignoring the facts and Republicans are also not saying or doing much about reversing the downward trend. The results here aren't just about slower economic growth and less freedom. There are other consequences to consider like gun violence.

Harry Moroz over at Next American City and Richard Florida of The Atlantic, having both analyzed data provided by the Centers for Disease Control from 2006-2008, came to similar conclusions when looking at the impact of inner cities on gun deaths.

Florida wrote, "...the consistency of our findings across metro and state levels strongly suggest that gun violence is not just the product of troubled or deranged individuals, as is commonly portrayed, but is both associated with and embedded within the economic and social context of places... we find strikingly consistent associations between gun violence and key markers of socio-economic disadvantage — poverty, income, education, class, and race. Of course, center cities bear the heaviest concentrations of such socio-economic disadvantage and we are likely to find even stronger associations and more magnified patterns there, as Moroz does for unemployment."

The CDC's statistics show clearly that when examining gun violence at the more micro level of the inner city, there is a close correlation between unemployment rates and homicides by gun. This shouldn't be shocking to anyone — except the politicians who are looking for some proposed quick fix that sounds good in a press conference. Unfortunately, Americans still aren't hearing about any real plan to get to the heart of the problem. Intractably bad socio-economic circumstances can and will lead good people to do bad things.

We see this in other parts of the world, but refuse to appreciate that the same rules apply here. A random Congressman on Fox News is quick to point out that a lack of personal and economic freedom leads to young men in the Middle East being easily indoctrinated into terror groups. One wonders why leaders of both parties can't stand up for the countless young men and women in the United States who join gangs, deal drugs, steal and murder because they live in an environment where they believe they have nothing to lose.

This culture of hopelessness that leads to violence took decades to create and it will take political will and precious time to change.

And no, throwing money at the problem in the form of more government assistance isn't what is needed. An education system that devolves power away from Washington, teaches basic skills, and trains kids to be competitive in the marketplace is what is needed. A growing and vibrant economy, with a tax code that encourages entrepreneurship and that creates jobs is what is needed.

Unfortunately for the President, tax hikes, more government "investment," more Executive Orders to control access to guns and universal pre-K are not viable solutions to the real problem.

Republicans are busy talking about immigration and the sequester. They're mired in a host of fights with the Administration over the fiscal crisis that has them shooting in every direction hoping to hit something. They're making favorable noises about immigration reform, despite the fact that we are still experiencing negative growth and have more than 20 million people out of work. Instead of simply hitting back hard on gun control measures, they should be making the critical link between surges in gun violence and unemployment particularly in the inner city.

It's far easier to sign Executive Orders or bludgeon weak-kneed politicians at the state and federal level to enact more gun measures than it is to do something about multi-generational dependency, unemployment, and poverty. One would think that Obama as the first black president would understand that gun violence in a place like Chicago or Detroit or Newark is often the byproduct of a myriad of social and economic factors that have gone unaddressed for decades.

We need to have an intelligent conversation about how to deter gun violence and it must begin with addressing the plight of inner city youth. It must begin with igniting American free enterprise and innovation. It must begin with working to put people back to work because the best gun control measure is actually a job.