

Cato Institute scholar: Gun control proposals Biden resurfaced following Des Moines shooting won't help much

Mary Stroka

March 9, 2022

(The Center Square) – A member of the libertarian Cato Institute is pushing back on the president's recent remarks on gun control.

Cato Institute Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies Research Fellow Trevor Burrus said President Joe Biden's suggested remedies won't make a recognizable improvement in reducing U.S. gun violence.

Biden seized the opportunity of a drive-by shooting that occurred Monday outside a Des Moines high school **to make a statement about gun control**.

A 15-year-old boy was targeted and killed in the shooting, and two girls who were not intended targets have been hospitalized with life-threatening injuries, the Des Moines Police Department said Tuesday in a statement on Facebook. The suspects were in custody within hours, and detectives executed warrants and recovered firearms that night, the post said. Six teenagers have each been charged with murder in the first degree and attempted murder.

Biden said the arrests “cannot obscure the reality that too many families have had to bury a piece of their soul after yet another tragic shooting.” Biden added he has taken more executive action to reduce gun violence than any other president in his first year of office.

“Now, Congress must do its job,” he said. “As I reiterated in my State of the Union address last week, it is up to Congress to pass proven measures to reduce gun violence –including universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and a repeal of the liability shield protecting gun manufacturers who knowingly put weapons of war on our streets. These laws don't infringe on the Second Amendment, but they will save lives.”

Problem is, those three measures won't make much of a difference, Burrus told The Center Square in a phone interview. Universal background checks – if enforced effectively – could have a small impact on gun violence, Burrus said. While gun stores watch out for straw purchases, police don't tend to track down people who try to purchase guns illegally, he said.

Furthermore, the liability shield Biden is challenging doesn't stop people from suing gun manufacturers for making defective guns, but rather opens the tort system for cases that could mirror 1990s' **lawsuits against Smith & Wesson**. Pistols tend to be used in gun violence, Burrus said.

“What really needs to be happening is a conversation about modern social reasons that people are shooting each other because there's always been a lot of guns in America. ... The simple truth is – and I've never had anyone really say that they thought I was wrong – ending the drug war would do more to curb gun violence than any gun policy you could possibly imagine,” he said.

Addressing mental health and suicides, which account for about 60% of gun deaths, is also necessary, he said. The current conversation about which guns should be made illegal is mostly about political signaling – from both gun rights and gun control advocates, he said.

Iowa Firearms Coalition President Dave Funk told The Center Square in a statement sent via Facebook Wednesday that the organization joins Biden in praying for those impacted by the violence.

“We do, however, disagree with his proposal that somehow violating the civil rights of all Americans is an appropriate response to addressing an isolated incident where all of the relevant facts are still not known,” Funk said.