

# The Washington Post

## Giffords tells Congress ‘Too many children are dying’ from gun violence

By: Joann Weiner – January 30, 2013

On Dec. 14, 2012, after having already killed his mother, a gunman shot and killed 20 little kids and six teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. On Dec. 11, 2012, a gunman shot and killed two shoppers and wounded another at the Clackamas Town Center Mall near Portland, Ore.. On Aug. 5, 2012, a gunman shot and killed six worshipers and wounded three others in a Sikh temple near Milwaukee, Wis. On July 20, 2012, a gunman shot and killed 12 people and wounded 58 others in a movie theater in Aurora, Colo. On Jan. 8, 2011, a gunman shot and killed six people and wounded Arizona Representative Gabrielle Giffords and 12 others in a grocery store’s parking lot in Tucson, Ariz.

These places — a school, a shopping mall, a temple, a movie theater, and a parking lot — aren’t dangerous places. Yet, these 53 kids, teens, and adults who were merely going about their daily lives found that on that one day, their safe place wasn’t so safe anymore.

Perhaps that’s why — finally — two years after their colleague was shot, the U.S. Congress began to try to do something about gun violence in America. On Jan. 30, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing to ask the question that so many Americans desperately want answered: “What should America do about gun violence?”

The need to do something about gun violence is imperative. In 2010, 4,097 children and young adults between the ages of 1 and 24 died after being shot by someone else, according to data collected by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In total, 11,078 people died from what the CDC calls an “interpersonal” firearm fatality that year. (It’s often reported that more than 30,000 people die in America each year from firearms. Sadly, more than half of those deaths are suicides.)

The experts offered several solutions: conduct more and better background checks for all gun buyers, including those who buy firearms at gun shows, online, and from friends; limit the number of rounds high-capacity devices can shoot before reloading; ban assault weapons; fix the country’s mental-health system; give guns to schoolteachers and station armed guards at schools.

Former astronaut Mark Kelly, whose wife, Gabby Giffords, was shot in the head by a mentally ill young man, wants to make it harder for the mentally ill to purchase guns. “I can’t think of anything that would make our country safer,” Kelly said.

Kelly, a gun-owner himself, said that he and his wife own guns to “defend ourselves, to defend our families, for hunting, and for target shooting.” We’ll “never give up our guns”

he said, yet after what happened to his wife, he insists that now is the time to act to reduce gun violence. He and Giffords co-founded Americans for Responsible Solutions to try to do exactly that.

Not everyone agreed that guns are the problem. Wayne LaPierre, head of the National Rifle Association, came to “give voice” to the NRA’s 4.5 million active members. After pointing out that the NRA teaches gun safety and responsibility, he said that rather than banning guns, we should “throw a blanket of security” around our school children and enforce “the thousands of gun laws already on the books.” He insisted that background controls won’t work because “criminals will never submit to them.”

LaPierre doesn’t just oppose background checks. He opposes gun restrictions of any type, including the assault weapons ban that Sen. Diane Feinstein, (D-Calif.), introduced earlier this month. “Gun ownership is a fundamental, God-given right,” LaPierre concluded.

David Kopel, adjunct professor of law at the Denver University College of Law and associate policy analyst at the Cato Institute, generally shared LaPierre’s views. Kopel said that “lawful armed self-defense in the schools, not only by armed guards, but also by teachers” is the only way to stop the violence in schools.

Kopel holds up the state of Utah as a model to emulate. In Utah, adults who pass background checks and complete a safety training class can carry guns — including teachers at schools. For those who worry that teachers might shoot each other or threaten students or that kids might wrestle the guns away from their teachers, Kopel reassured us: “We’ve never had an attack on a Utah school.”

While the experts told us what to do about gun violence, it was former Arizona congresswoman Giffords, who told us why.

“Too many children are dying. Too many children,” Giffords almost whispered, speaking slowly and with difficulty the eight most important words that anyone would utter during the entire four-hour hearing.