



## Regulations are preventing self-protection

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Ten people, including a Boulder police officer, were killed in a shooting at the King Soopers supermarket in Boulder on March 22. One of the victims was Denny Stong.

I knew Denny. I was planning to attend an event with him at the beginning of May. He was 20, and his life was tragically cut short. His death is a catastrophic loss for his family, his friends and his community.

This young man was also looking to obtain a concealed-carry permit from the state of Colorado. Unfortunately, Denny was too young: Colorado requires people to be 21 years of age to be issued a concealed handgun carry permit.

I blame the gunman for Denny's death. But I also blame the government and Kroger Company for leaving him defenseless.

Denny and I recently connected through our mutual love of history. Our joint fascination with the American Civil War led us to working toward historical preservation in Colorado and the Southwest together, and we had plans to make a presentation to the public at a museum event in May.

An ardent supporter of the Second Amendment, one of his last public Facebook posts was his birthday fundraiser for the National Foundation for Gun Rights, an advocacy group that works to expand pro-gun precedents and defend gun owners.

Americans want to be able to defend themselves. In fact, first-time gun ownership is on the rise. Coupled with a study from the Cato Institute with the conclusion that crime rates decrease when concealed carry laws are enacted, Americans have proven they can defend themselves responsibly.

Policies and discrimination stand in their way. Our laws and Kroger Co. employment regulations disarmed Denny.

The 21-year age requirement not only serves no purpose, but also it has been costly, as with the case of Denny. Plenty of military men and women train with firearms every day, and many of those personnel are under 21. The Defense Manpower Data Center, responsible for Department of Defense data management, reports that over 19% of active-duty military personnel are

between 18 and 21 years old. Why is 21 an appropriate cutoff-age for concealed-carry permits if you can own a firearm at 18?

King Soopers is a Colorado subsidiary of the Kroger supermarket chain. It operates more than 150 stores in Wyoming and Colorado, while Kroger is based in Cincinnati.

Kroger has recently changed its gun policies and sales practices. In 2019, Kroger asked shoppers to leave their firearms at home. The change in policy came a day after grocery rival Walmart made a similar change. The previous policy had been to defer to state or local gun regulations.

Even if Denny could not apply for a concealed-carry permit because of his age, he could not have exercised his right to open-carry a firearm in Colorado because of his employer's strict anti-gun policies.

Around the country, there are many reports of concealed-carry permit-holders stopping crimes, including mass murderers.

On Jan. 17, 2019, Jay Brown, an IHOP employee in Huntsville, Alabama, stopped a gunman, potentially saving many lives. Another restaurant patron was proud he took action, "It's amazing that he was able to think so quickly on his feet in that situation, because I think I probably just would've panicked," Sierra Seay said. What if Denny could have been a Jay Brown?

Concealed-carry permit-holders can stop crime and save lives. Denny Stong was wrongfully deprived of his right to carry a concealed handgun by the government for no logical reason, and it probably cost him his life. I mourn his loss.

Government failed Denny Stong and robbed America of a hero. If Denny had been allowed to carry a concealed firearm, lives could have been saved. The outcome of Monday's shooting should have been radically different.

"The right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."