



GUNS!

Some of the information below was published in the February-March 2013 issue of the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's newsletter (issue #244). In February 2013 and beyond, we will post more information to this new "Guns" page of our website, www.olympiafor.org.

Emotions run high on both sides of this issue. To make effective progress in solving the problems, we need to practice good listening skills and compassion whenever we talk with anyone about guns.

Somebody posted this on the web about the young man who shot and killed 20 students and several teachers at an elementary school in Connecticut in December 2012: "Lanza's mom had an AR-15, Glock 20, Sig 9mm, multiple full ammo clips. My mom had cookies."

Washington Ceasefire works for sensible gun laws & policies in Washington State.

Contact them at (206) 972-1952, info@WashingtonCeasefire.org, (www.WashingtonCeasefire.org)

MASS SHOOTINGS AND BIG MONEY IN POLITICS

There have been **more mass killings in the United States since 1999 than in the rest of the world combined.** (Sources: <http://o.canada.com/2012/12/14/interactive-mass-shootings-around-the-world-since-1996/> and the timeline at www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html)

Yet since 2004, assault weapons like the ones used in Connecticut on December 14, 2012, and elsewhere recently have been legal in the United States, when Congress let expire a law that had banned assault weapons for a number of years.

There were **12 mass shootings in the United States in 2012** alone. (Source: www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html) This was ten more than the number of times the issue was even mentioned in the Presidential debates. (Source: <http://goodquestionproject.com/2012/12/16/how-to-not-ask-about-guns-2012-version/>)

We know that Big Money has been distorting democracy in the U.S. Besides Big Oil, Big Pharma, Big Banks, and other rich "special interests," the National Rifle Association (NRA) gives a lot of money to political candidates and spends a lot of money lobbying those who get elected.

What most people do not know is that the NRA's members provide less than half of its budget, and that **the companies that manufacture and sell guns provide a very large amount of the NRA's budget.** As a result, even though most NRA members support some of the reasonable remedies that have been proposed, the NRA has been opposing virtually every common-sense remedy because **the NRA's corporate donors have a vested financial interest in escalating the sales of guns. It's like the military-industrial complex supporting more wars.** Indeed, the NRA wants to address school shootings by arming teachers, janitors, and others, and assigning armed police officers to every school in the country. This is like funding the nuclear arms race during the Cold War.

So the solution to the problem of gun violence in the U.S. – just like the solutions to so many other problems (war, environment, health, the climate, consumer protection, etc.) must include getting big money out of politics.

We will not get Congress to have a thoughtful conversation about gun safety until raising money stops being the single most important issue for every member of Congress. So long as members spend a majority of their time raising money, and so long as they raise that money from the tiniest slice of the 1% (or more precisely, from the 1/20th of the 1% (Source: www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/an-open-letter-to-the-citizens-against-citizens-united/254902/), the lobbyists working for that 1/20th of the 1% will call the shots. Their views will outweigh our views on almost every important issue that America now faces.

This article is based on information from www.rootstrikers.org and other sources.

VOTERS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN WASHINGTON WANT GUN SAFETY

In January 2013 Washington CeaseFire (www.washingtonceasefire.org) presented the results of a statewide poll. 600 randomly selected registered Washington voters revealed a strong preference for stronger gun safety laws on both Eastern and Western sides of the state. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent - see full details including polling questions and results at this link: <http://washingtonceasefire.s3.amazonaws.com/PollResultsJan2013.pdf>

GUNS, U.S. CULTURE & POLITICS, AND WHAT CONGRESS MUST DO

Increasingly during the past few years, the U.S. is suffering an outrageous epidemic of mass shootings. We can blame deranged individuals, or – since the pattern has become evident – we can examine the systemic (cultural, political, policy-level) roots of this epidemic.

The U.S.'s history of reckless use of guns within our nation (*e.g.*, to steal land from Indians, to glorify in Wild West lore, and in movie plots ending with “the myth of redemptive violence” where good guys emerge victorious by shooting the bad guys in Westerns, cops-and-robbers movies, spy movies, etc.) created and sustains a culture that sees guns as solutions rather than problems. Guns are held sacred by many Americans.

The U.S. prides itself on being “the only remaining superpower” with military bases in more than 170 nations around the world, and with an increasing willingness to attack and bomb other nations, even in blatant defiance international law. This bipartisan political culture enjoys grandstanding to the folks back home. Mainstream news media are fully complicit in failing to challenge this arrogance.

Based on centuries of gun culture and the power of the gun lobby (manufacturers and sellers fund much of the NRA’s budget nowadays, and gun owners fund less than half of it), a corrupt and dysfunctional Congress serves this “special interest” instead of the broad public interest. This is made worse when one of the two big arrogant parties relies on racism, xenophobia, machismo and fear to muster votes from people who are not served from that party’s real goal of serving big business and the 1%.

Congress has failed to pass common-sense laws – and failed to fund mental health and conflict-resolution services – so Congress has blood on its hands.

We need federal laws to:

1. Require a criminal background check for EVERY person buying a gun, including private sales between individuals, sales over the internet, and sales at gun shows.
2. Outlaw high-capacity weapons and high-capacity magazines.
3. Make gun trafficking federal crime.
4. Get big money out of politics. (This might also require a constitutional amendment.)

The vast majority of Americans support these common-sense solutions. We need to make sure the politicians understand that they can vigorously promote these common-sense laws and feel politically safe. (There are not very many right-wing “gun nuts,” and they don’t vote for liberal or middle-of-the-road candidates anyway.)

Glen Anderson wrote this article was written especially for the Olympia FOR’s newsletter and website.

OBAMA URGES CONGRESS TO ACT NOW

This is based on information from the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV), 1424 L Street NW, Suite 2-1, Washington DC 20005 (202) 408-0061 csgv@csgv.org www.csgv.org

In mid-January 2013 President Obama announced a bold new plan to reform our gun laws and urged Americans nationwide to call their Members of Congress to demand immediate action.

The President's bold and ambitious plan includes 23 different executive orders to reduce gun violence and major legislative proposals, including:

- A renewal of the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.
- Universal background checks on all gun purchases.
- The elimination of restrictions on federally-funded research into gun violence.

You can read CSGV's official statement on the press conference at this link:

www.csgv.org/media-web/press-releases/243-csgv-statement-on-todays-press-conference-at-the-white-house

President Obama's message (www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2013/01/16/president-obama-introduces-plan-reduce-gun-violence) about our response to this tragedy was simple and clear: "This time must be different ... If parents and teachers, police officers and pastors, if hunters and sportsmen, if responsible gun owners, if Americans of every background stand up and say, 'Enough; we've suffered too much pain and care too much about our children to allow this to continue' — then change will come. That's what it's going to take."

Obama urged people to call our Members of Congress today, and every day, through the Capitol Hill switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and tell them we demand *immediate* action on the President's proposals to end gun violence.

We've all waited for this moment, and now it has arrived. Don't hold back. Let's move forward, together, and make sure that days like December 14, 2012 are not part of America's future.

This information comes from the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV), 1424 L Street NW, Suite 2-1, Washington DC 20005 (202) 408-0061 www.csgv.org

SHOOTINGS AND MENTAL ILLNESS

On average, 100,000 people are shot each year in the US, and 30,000 of them die. Guns play a role in mass shootings, but also domestic violence, robberies, homicides, and so many other tragedies. (Source: The Brady Campaign's "Facts on Gun Violence" at www.bradycampaign.org/facts/gunviolence)

Under current laws, dangerous people can often buy a gun easily – without submitting to a background check. But getting good quality mental health care is often difficult, if not impossible, even for people who want help or may be a danger to others. And while the majority of people with mental illness are not violent, at least 38 of 61 mass shooters in the last

few decades showed signs of mental illness prior to committing murder. (Source: The *Washington Post*, December 14, 2012, “Why are mass shootings becoming more common?” www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/12/14/why-are-mass-shootings-becoming-more-frequent/)

Solving the epidemic of gun violence must include adequate funding for mental health services nationwide.

GUN NEWS AND INFORMATION

- ▶ **President Obama** announced a series of concrete steps we should take to protect our children and our communities from gun violence including universal background checks, an assault weapons ban, and helping schools hire more resource officers. See his message at www.whitehouse.gov/issues/preventing-gun-violence#what-we-can-do
The progressive organization Think Progress highlights information about these proposals. See <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2013/01/16/1456381/obama-gun-proposals/>
- ▶ More than 20 gun policy experts and government officials met for a two day "**Summit on Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis**" at Johns Hopkins University on January 14 and 15, 2013. You can watch video of the presenters at this link: www.jhsph.edu/events/gun-policy-summit/video-archive The presentations will be published as a book in February. Pre-order at www.amazon.com/Reducing-Gun-Violence-America-Informing/dp/1421411105
- ▶ **Media Matters** (www.MediaMatters.org) posted “Nine Media Myths About Proposals to Strengthen Gun Laws,” and offers facts to dispel the myths and falsehoods being put forth by those against Obama's gun violence prevention proposals. See <http://mediamatters.org/research/2013/01/15/nine-media-myths-about-proposals-to-strengthen/192237>
- ▶ www.Gawker.com compiled list of some of the people either killed or injured by guns on Gun Appreciation Day. After learning of five people shot at gun shows on Saturday, Gawker decided it was time to create this larger list. See <http://gawker.com/5977431/heres-a-list-of-people-injured-or-killed-by-guns-on-gun-appreciation-day>

DRONES AND U.S. FOREIGN Policy LEAD TO DOMESTIC MASS SHOOTINGS

by Glen Anderson

Every time a mass murder occurs in the U.S., politicians, news media, and ordinary Americans express shock and bewilderment.

Obama expressed sorrow about 20 American children shot in Connecticut but has shown no concern for the thousands of persons – including 178 innocent children – the U.S. killed in drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen.

Obama vastly escalated Bush's use of drones (unmanned airplanes controlled remotely from bases in the U.S.). The CIA identifies people who seem suspicious and **assassinate them from the air, without any trial, without any due process whatsoever**. Many of them were completely innocent.

In deciding whom to target for killing, the CIA defines a "militant" as simply "any military-age male in a strike zone."

Most drone attacks are called "signature strikes," in which a drone operator thousands of miles away target unknown individuals based merely on perceived patterns of behavior.

The U.S.'s drone war is blatantly illegal under international law.

It is a foreign policy equivalent of some states' "Stand Your Ground" laws, which allow a person to kill another person if he feels fear, even without any real evidence or any due process.

The U.S. has slaughtered countless children in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries.

The U.S. is the only modern Western democracy that often uses the death penalty.

The government sets a terrible example – a murderous climate that allows troubled people to use guns to vent their fears and frustrations.

Murders and mass shootings will continue until the government renounces killing.