

Information published on pages 6-7 of the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's June-July 2013 newsletter (issue #246) and some additional information:



# Guns

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

Washington Ceasefire works for sensible gun laws and policies in Washington State. Contact them at (206) 972-1952, [info@WashingtonCeasefire.org](mailto:info@WashingtonCeasefire.org), [www.WashingtonCeasefire.org](http://www.WashingtonCeasefire.org)

**People in the greater Olympia area need a local grassroots group to organize for sensible gun reforms:** In early 2013 a number of local people came together to start working on sensible gun reforms. The group has not persisted, but the need still exists. Who wants to revive the group and start organizing?

**Background checks are more popular than chocolate:** On March 14, 2013, [www.stuffthatmattersblog.com](http://www.stuffthatmattersblog.com) reported that surveys show that 71% of Americans like chocolate, but **91% of Americans are in favor of a comprehensive background check policy for purchasing guns. It's hard to find anything that 91% of Americans agree on**, but public support for background checks is overwhelmingly popular, and even majorities of Republican voters, majorities of gun owners, and majorities of NRA members favor background checks! Nevertheless, on March 13, 2013, when the Senate Judiciary Committee passed a universal background check bill, absolutely none of the Republicans on that committee voted for it. Laws already prohibit buying a gun if you are a fugitive or extremely mentally ill, or if you've been convicted of domestic violence or other serious crimes. But even if the law prohibits you from buying a gun, you can buy one easily simply by going to a gun show, or responding to a print ad. The National Rifle Association's claim that background checks would be a burden on private sales is bogus. You have to transfer the registration and title when you sell a car, and you have to get a credit check before you borrow money. A background check is a simple matter that would be good for public safety, and 91% of Americans agree.

**On April 17, 2013, most US Senators (55) voted for common sense gun reform, but a minority of Senators prevented the majority – and the vast majority of public opinion – from prevailing.** This was the biggest majority voting for serious gun reform in 17 years, but under the Senate's dysfunctional rules that let a minority dominate a majority, this was not enough. See several related articles below.

**Will the US House vote for background checks?** Although most US Senators support background checks, the Senate's current rules allow a minority block the will of the majority, so the Senate let itself be bullied by the NRA and the bill lost, despite majority support. Now some members of the House of Representatives are pushing ahead. Representatives Pete King (R-NY) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) have introduced a new bill that will extend background checks and help keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. This bill is identical to the life-saving Manchin-Toomey bill that Republicans had recently

blocked in the Senate, and it already has more than 160 co-sponsors in the House, including Denny Heck, who represents our area in the new 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Senator Manchin intends to bring the background checks legislation back to the Senate floor.

**The NRA seems to represent gun manufacturers and sellers more than individuals:** When the National Rifle Association violates the will of a majority of its members (see an item above on this page), what's going on? **Although the NRA claims to speak for individual gun owners, it receives more of its money from manufacturers and sellers than from individual members.** This might explain the item immediately below.

**US Senate yields to NRA's pressure for even more international weapons sales, so the Senate failed to ratify the international Arms Trade Treaty:** On April 2, 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Arms Trade Treaty, which would limit sales and other transfers of small weapons that would likely be used for genocide, terrorism, violation of human rights, and other bad purposes. A great many organizations supporting peace and human rights supported it, and the UN General Assembly adopted it by a vote of 154 to 3 (North Korea, Iran and Syria voted no), and 23 abstentions. The US voted yes. The next step is to urge Obama to sign the Arms Trade Treaty when this opportunity opens up in June 2013. Then the step after that will be to get the US Senate to ratify this treaty by the 2/3 vote required by the Constitution for ratifying treaties. The US government made sure the treaty **explicitly** states that it does **not** limit gun sales or "the right to bear arms" within any country. Nevertheless, the NRA vigorously opposes the treaty. **QUESTION:** Why would the NRA oppose an international treaty that explicitly protects the NRA's version of Second Amendment rights? **ANSWER:** See the item immediately above. The NRA receives more money from gun manufacturers and sellers than from individual members. Terrorism, other countries' civil wars, and other extreme violence are good for gun sales. The NRA has allied itself with North Korea, Iran and Syria in opposing this sensible treaty to reduce gun violence.

**Washington State religious leaders join with statewide movement for background checks:** On April 29, 2013, two statewide organizations – *Faith Action Network* and the *Washington Alliance for Gun Responsibility* – gathered more than 40 interfaith leaders from widely different religions for an event launching a campaign for universal background checks. They call upon Washingtonians to do everything in our power to stop gun violence. The 2013 Washington State Legislature failed to pass the bill for universal background checks, so the **Washington Alliance for Gun Responsibility (WAGR) is developing an initiative to the 2014 State Legislature, and if the legislature does not pass that bill, WAGR will take it to a vote of the people as an initiative on the November 2014 ballot.**

**Congress prohibits federal health agency researching gun injuries:** Should the government deliberately keep itself and the public ignorant about reducing deaths and injuries caused by guns? On February 21, 2013, *In These Times* published Susan J. Douglas's article reporting violence that – although "we need solid scientific research to show what measures work," the NRA has censored the government's research. Over the years, solid research by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and others has shown that having a gun in your home increases your family's risk of injury or death. The NRA has denounced research on the relationship between teens, alcohol consumption and gun use, she reported, and lobbied Congress to suppress such findings. She reports, "Since 1996, according to one estimate, the CDC has slashed firearms safety research by 96 percent. There was actual language in the CDC's budget that said none of its funds could be used to 'advocate or promote gun control,' and similar restrictions were imposed on research supported by other federal health agencies."

**School safety needs fewer guns and real solutions:** Marian Wright Edelman from the Children’s Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)) debunks the notion that arming teachers, adding arms guards, and putting police in charge of school safety and discipline would make schools safer. Instead, she urges schools to adopt proven evidence-based methods that promote a healthy and positive school climate, nonviolent conflict resolution processes, and trained mental health professionals and counselors. On March 28, 2013, the Advancement Project ([www.advancementproject.org](http://www.advancementproject.org)) issued a report *A Real Fix: A Gun-Free Way to School Safety* that debunks the notion that arming adults in schools would reduce school violence. *There is no evidence that armed guards or police officers in schools make children safer.* Marian Wright Edelman writes, “An armed guard at Columbine High School in 1999 and a full campus police force at Virginia Tech in 2007 were unable to stop the massacres that occurred at both schools.” But other nonviolent solutions are proven to work. She also points out that although most of the mass shooters at schools have been white, overreaction and punitive discipline disproportionately target boys of color. She wrote, “Successful models for school safety plans emphasize relationship building among students, between students and educators, and with parents and the community at large; consistent reinforcement of positive norms through rewards or lessons; and individualized approaches to student discipline and intervention that seek to address root causes of misbehavior rather than to punish indiscriminately.”

**States with loose gun laws have higher rates of gun violence:** Do loose laws about guns help you protect yourself? No! Just the opposite! On April 3, 2013, Zack Beauchamp posted an article at [www.thinkprogress.org](http://www.thinkprogress.org), debunking the NRA’s propaganda. He reported that “a new study from the Center for American Progress (CAP) suggests something closer to the opposite is true — the states with laxer gun laws tend to be the ones contributing the highest shares of national gun deaths and injuries.” The report, “America Under the Gun,” considered ten indices of gun violence, compiled state data for each, and compared these data with ratings about how strong or weak each state’s gun laws were. The researchers’ analysis “yielded clear evidence that states with looser gun laws contributed more to the national gun violence epidemic,” Beauchamp wrote. He also wrote, “Across the key indicators of gun violence that we analyzed, **the 10 states with the weakest gun laws collectively have a level of gun violence that is more than twice as high—104 percent higher—than the 10 states with the strongest gun laws.**” Read the report at [www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/AmericaUnderTheGun.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/AmericaUnderTheGun.pdf) or a shorter article at <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2013/04/03/1811311/study-states-with-loose-gun-laws-have-higher-rates-of-gun-violence/>

The following information arrived on April 11, 2013, from the Progress Report issued by “Think Progress,” [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org):

## Your Guide to the Gun Debate:

### Myths & Facts About Background Checks

This morning, the Senate took one of its most bipartisan major votes in years when [senators voted 68-31](#) to begin debating a package of gun violence prevention measures. Despite being supported by more than 90 percent of all Americans and nearly as many gun-owning Americans, the National Rifle Association’s implacable opposition to common sense solutions has rendered expanded background checks controversial in Congress.

Here’s your [ThinkProgress guide to the myths and facts](#) around the policy at the center of the Senate gun violence prevention bill:

**MYTH: Background checks are ineffective and restrictive.** Checks “would significantly restrict the rights of law-abiding Americans while doing little or nothing to protect against further gun violence.” [Sen. Mike Lee, 4/9/2013]

**REALITY: Ninety percent of background checks can be completed in less than two minutes and the Manchin-Toomey proposal would expedite the process.** Under the amendment, if a background check at a gun show does not result in a definitive response within 48 hours, the sale may proceed. After four years, the background check would be required to be conducted in 24 hours. Background checks have [already contributed to violence reduction](#). In the 14 states and Washington D.C. that require background checks for private handgun sales (including Toomey’s home state of Pennsylvania): 38 percent fewer women are shot to death by intimate partners, 17 percent fewer firearms are involved in aggravated assaults, and 48 percent less gun trafficking.

**MYTH: Criminals will avoid background checks.** “My problem with background checks is, you’re never going to get criminals to go through universal background checks.” [Wayne LaPierre, 1/30/2013]

**REALITY:** From 1999 to 2009, [1.8 million people were blocked from purchasing guns](#) after failing a background check because they had criminal records or suffered from mental illness. In fact, Seung Hui Cho, the shooter at Virginia Tech and Jared Loughner, who targeted Gabby Giffords, both obtained their guns legally and [slipped through the cracks](#) of the existing background check system. The Manchin-Toomey bill addresses this by encouraging states to provide their available records into the federal database and directing future grant money towards creating systems to send records into the database. The bill will also reduce federal funds to states that do not comply.

**MYTH: Background checks will lead to a gun registry.** “The Democrats’ proposed legislation would require universal background checks for private sales between law-abiding citizens, which according to DOJ would be effective only if accompanied by a national gun registry.” [Sen. Ted Cruz, 4/9/2013]

**REALITY:** Federally licensed gun dealers have conducted background checks for more than 40 years without ever creating a national gun registry, which federal law [specifically prohibits](#). Under this agreement, federal dealers would conduct screenings for private sellers and keep the record; the federal government would not. When a gun is recovered at a violent crime, law enforcement can use the records to track down the perpetrator. All information identifying the buyer generated by the background check would be destroyed by law enforcement within 24 hours. **The Manchin-Toomey amendment explicitly bans the federal government from creating a registry in three different places and treats the misuse of records for the pursue of creating a registry as a felony punishable by 15 years in prison.**

**MYTH: Background checks wouldn’t have prevented Newtown.** “The reality is, when you look at the tragedy of Newtown, nothing that’s been proposed would have any effect on that at all.” [Sen. John Boozman, 4/10/2013]

**REALITY:** As Toomey admitted during a press conference announcing the measure, background checks will not prevent every gun crime, but they **can keep hundreds of thousands of people who shouldn’t have weapons from obtaining them**. For instance, it’s [estimated](#) that 62 percent of private gun sellers on the Internet and 63 percent of private sellers at gun shows have agreed to sell a firearm to buyers who said they probably couldn’t pass a background check. More than [6.6 million gun sales](#) were transferred in 2012 without a criminal background check and a survey of prisoners who committed crimes with handguns found [nearly 80 percent](#) of them acquired their firearm from a person who was not a licensed dealer.

**MYTH: Obama isn't prosecuting people who fail background checks.** “[T]he Obama Administration has failed to make this a priority — in 2010, out of more than 15,700 fugitives and felons who tried to illegally purchase a firearm, the Obama Justice Department prosecuted only 44.” [Sen. Ted Cruz, 3/28/2013]

**REALITY:** Federal firearm prosecutions has remained steady, varying by no more than 5 percent each year, data from the Department of Justice reveals. Republicans and the NRA specifically cherry pick prosecutions for background checks to imply that the Obama administration has stopped enforcing existing law, though it has gone after gun-related crimes at the same rate as its predecessors. **Law enforcement officials often see these cases as a poor use of resources** because prosecutors must prove that “the person **knew they were lying** when they tried to purchase the firearm” in order to secure a conviction which “usually carries a maximum sentence of just six months.”

**MYTH: Obama isn't enforcing the laws on the books.** “It’s not about new gun laws; it’s about enforcing the ones we have.” [Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC), 4/4/2013]

**REALITY: The laws on the books are inadequate.** Criminals and mentally ill individuals can buy guns at gun shows or online and many who go through a federally licensed dealer often slip through the cracks because states are not putting records into the NICS system. In fact, following the Newtown tragedy, the NRA successfully **attached riders** to the resolution funding the government through September that limited enforcement tools against crooked dealers and interfered with ATF gun trace reports. That’s why the Manchin-Toomey bill expands checks and improves the existing system.

**MYTH: Background checks are an invasion of privacy.** “You just worry that you’re going to see searches of the databases and an expansion for purposes that were not intended when the information was collected.” [ACLU, 4/4/2013]

**REALITY: Federally licensed gun dealers have successfully performed millions of background checks without violating personal privacy** and Americans disclose personal information to the DMV or the IRS and their data is successfully walled off from nefarious uses.