



Americans Against Gun Violence
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Statement by Dr. Bill Durston, President of Americans Against Gun Violence, at the California State Teachers Retirement System Board Meeting on November 1, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Treasurer Chiang, and Members of the Board:

I'm Dr. Bill Durston. I'm a combat veteran of the Vietnam War, a former expert marksman in the U.S. Marines, and a retired emergency physician. I'm here today in my position as the president of Americans Against Gun Violence and the vice president of the Sacramento Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility to speak on behalf of both of these organizations in support of Treasurer Chiang's recommendation that the California State Teacher's Retirement System divest completely from any involvement in the manufacture, sale, or distribution of firearms or firearm paraphernalia that are illegal in California. To do so would be an important symbolic gesture.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that such divestment, while it would be an important gesture, would be unlikely to have any measurable effect in preventing future mass shootings such as the one that occurred in Las Vegas exactly one month ago, or in reducing the daily toll of gun violence, which claims 99 lives on an average day in our country.

If we are to reduce the rate of gun related deaths and injuries in our state and in our country to levels comparable to those in the other high income democratic countries of the world – countries in which mass shootings are rare or non-existent and in which overall rates of gun deaths are, on average, one tenth the rate in the United States – we must heed the words of the senator from Connecticut who said:

“Pious condolences will no longer suffice....Quarter measures and half measures will no longer suffice....The time has now come that we must enact stringent gun control legislation comparable to the legislation in force in virtually every civilized country in the world.”¹

The trouble is, this statement was made almost 50 years ago, by the late Senator Thomas Dodd, following the assassinations of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Since 1968, we have not adopted the kind of stringent gun control legislation that Senator Dodd called for, and as a result, since 1968, more U.S. civilians have died of gunshot wounds than all the U.S. soldiers killed in all the wars in which the United States has ever been involved.²

In order to significantly reduce rates of firearm related deaths and injuries in our country, we must adopt stringent regulation, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns, which account for approximately 80% of all firearm related deaths in our country,³ and which have no net protective value.⁴ And of course, we should ban all

automatic and semi-automatic rifles, which are specifically designed to kill and maim large numbers of people in a short period of time. In order to stringently regulate handguns, we must overturn the radical 2008 Heller decision⁵ in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court reversed over 200 years of legal precedent in ruling for the first time in U.S. history that the Second Amendment confers any kind of individual right to own a gun⁶ – an interpretation that the late Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger called “one of the greatest pieces of fraud on the American people” that he had seen in his lifetime.⁷

Some people claim that we’ll never be able to stop the epidemic of gun violence that afflicts our state and our country. We’re confident that some day we will. The only question is, how many more innocent people will be killed and wounded by guns before that day arrives. We hope that you’ll help us make that day come sooner rather than later by going beyond divesting in the gun industry and by joining us in working toward the adoption of definitive gun control laws comparable to the laws that have long been effect in every other high income democratic country of the world.

Thankyou.

References

¹ Thomas Dodd, “Press Release: Pious Condolences Will No Longer Suffice” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 10, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#; Thomas Dodd, “Text of Speech by Senator Thomas Dodd on Floor of U.S. Senate: The Sickness of Violence and the Need for Gun Control Legislation” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 11, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#.

² Louis Jacobson, “More Americans Killed by Guns since 1968 than in All U.S. Wars, Columnist Nicholas Kristof Writes,” @politifact, August 27, 2015, <http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/aug/27/nicholas-kristof/more-americans-killed-guns-1968-all-wars-says-colu/>.

³ Criminal Justice Information Services Division, “2014 Crime in the United States: Expanded Homicide Data Table 8,” FBI Uniform Crime Reports, accessed November 3, 2017, https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/expanded-homicide-data/expanded_homicide_data_table_8_murder_victims_by_weapon_2010-2014.xls; Charles H. Browning, “Epedemiology of Suicide: Firearms,” *Comprehensive Psychology* 15, no. 6 (1974): 549–53.

⁴ Arthur L. Kellermann and Donald T. Reay, “Protection or Peril?,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 314, no. 24 (June 12, 1986): 1557–60, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJM198606123142406>; Arthur L. Kellermann et al., “Injuries and Deaths Due to Firearms in the Home,” *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 45, no. 2 (1998): 263–67; Deborah Azrael and David Hemenway, “‘In the Safety of Your Own Home’: Results from a National Survey on Gun Use at Home,” *Social Science & Medicine* 50, no. 2 (January 2000): 285–91; Michael R. Rand, “Guns and Crime: Handgun Victimization, Firearm Self-Defense, and Firearm Theft,” Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief (U.S. Department of Justice, April 1994); Charles C. Branas et al., “Investigating the Link Between Gun Possession and Gun Assault,” *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 11 (November 1, 2009): 2034–40, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.143099>.

⁵ District of Columbia v. Heller, No. 07-290 (U.S. June 26, 2008).

⁶ Michael Waldman, “How the NRA Rewrote the Second Amendment,” POLITICO Magazine, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/nra-guns-second-amendment-106856.html>; Dennis A. Henigan The Conversation July 29 and 2008, “The Heller Majority: Wrong and Unprincipled,” Cato Unbound, accessed October 31, 2016, <https://www.cato-unbound.org/2008/07/29/dennis-henigan/heller-majority-wrong-unprincipled>.

⁷ Warren Burger, PBS News Hour, December 16, 1991, <https://vimeo.com/157433062>.