



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2018 National High School Essay Contest
Second Place Winner (\$2,500 Award)**

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The Weight of Firearms

The morning of March 14, 2018, over one hundred other students and I walked out of class at our high school to commemorate the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School one month prior. Dedicated to preventing further violence, two of my peers and I coordinated this protest. Students remained silent as seven of us spoke on the need for solutions to the senseless school violence in our society. The only problem with this event was that it barely broadened the conversation beyond school shootings. My speech moved the issue outwards. Beginning with the problem of school shootings, I expanded to the issues of gun violence in my own community and discussed solutions to the national problem....

School shootings are tragedies, and preventing them is one of the most significant challenges my generation faces. Yet nearly two thirds of gun-related deaths are suicides. Many would then conclude the issue of gun violence to be one of mental health. It is not. The only reason so many commit suicide using a gun is the ease of their use. It now takes only a finger to kill. Were devices offering immediate killing not ubiquitous, fewer people would die, period. The simple fact is, reducing the number of guns would reduce gun related deaths, whether suicides, accidents, or children murdered in school. The only way to end this violence is reducing the number of guns in our country. I'm tired of watching the news, seeing sobbing relatives of someone shot to death. I'm tired of knowing that there are thousands more whose sobbing relatives aren't on television. And I know we are all tired of living with the weight on our shoulders of the millions more who will be killed in our lifetimes.

The only way I see to lift this weight off my shoulders, my community, and the shoulders of every American is removing these guns from society. No other developed country has a comparable rate of gun deaths. A study published in 2016 comparing the United States with 22 other economically advanced countries showed that the overall U.S. gun related death rate

was 10 higher than the average for the other countries, including a gun homicide rate that was 25 times higher and a gun suicide rate that was 8 times higher.ⁱ No longer can the United States lead the world in only military spending and gun deaths. Americans must come together to reduce the burden of these deaths by solving the problem.

The solution is not more guns. The solution is not empty words. The solution is action. Whether in Congress, the courtroom, or the classroom, action is needed. We need these guns gone, and without action, they won't be. We must explore banning assault weapons, banning or restricting handguns, and preventing those with histories of violence from getting a gun of any kind. If we fail in these endeavors, the only result will be more death, more heartbreak, and a heavier burden on all our shoulders.

ⁱ Erin Grinshteyn and David Hemenway, "Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010," *The American Journal of Medicine* 129, no. 3 (March 1, 2016): 266–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025>.