



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2018 National High School Essay Contest
Third Place Winner (\$2,000 Award)**

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“The time has now come that we must adopt stringent gun control legislation comparable to the legislation in force in virtually every civilized country in the world.”

The Late Senator Thomas Dodd, June 11, 1968

There's no visual component to this essay, but oh, wow, I wish you could've seen it. The thousands of footsteps that squeaked on those dilapidated bleachers. The hundreds of solemn faces, the energy in the air, the anger and the empowerment and the burning desire for change. I still have the speech I wrote for the walkout, but it seems less powerful in my iPhone notes than it was delivered through the microphone that bellowed my trembling voice.

It's scary to hear about the man down the street who "doesn't feel safe" without multiple rifles in his house. It's depressing to never be able to turn on the radio without hearing about 17 innocent children who should have been safe. It's sickening to practice active shooter drills and hear my teacher proudly announce he has rocks for us to throw. Most of all, it's downright terrifying to hear that the kid who sat next to me in band was suspended for planning to shoot up the school, and that despite being suspended, his guns weren't taken away.

So, we're fed up - my friends, my classmates, and the youth all across America. Living in a country that neglects the safety of its citizens by denying even the most basic, common sense gun laws is something we can no longer tolerate.

What's incredible is how embarrassingly backwards America is in this regard. For a country that claims to be so progressive, whose very name is thought to be synonymous with democracy, we have yet to instill practical laws that other countries have implemented ages ago. Compared to other developed countries, the US gun homicide rate is 25 times higher, and

proportionate with this, we have the most guns per capita in the world - even compared to poor and violent countries such as Yemen or Iraq.

Perhaps what contributes most to this lapse in common sense legislation, and what NRA members use as the basis of every argument, is the 2nd Amendment. Pro-gun lobbyists claim that it is their constitutional right, that this gun-ravaged country is what the founding fathers would have wanted, but this is a dangerous false narrative. "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state" does not mean that any age lunatic should be allowed to buy a rifle. It is also worth considering that the 2nd Amendment was written in 1791 and hasn't changed while technology has rapidly. I, personally, do not have a problem with the 2nd Amendment if it means we have the right to flintlock pistol that takes 2 minutes to reload.

So this is why we're walking out. We're scared, we're angry, and we want change. Despite being studious and introverted, I left class to hand out posters I wrote and delivered a speech in front of hundreds of students, because this means so much to me.

1,077 people have died in mass shootings since the University of Texas mass shooting in 1966. Legislation hasn't changed since that fateful day, and now, we're demanding that it does.