

Statement to Senate Judiciary Committee on Gun Control

By J. Kenneth Blackwell, former Mayor of Cincinnati and Ohio Secretary of State

January 26, 2013

The Second Amendment is a fundamental right, enshrined in that sacred list of liberties in our Constitution that we call the Bill of Rights. It is set right alongside the freedom of speech, the freedom of religious faith, the right that no person can ever make you a slave, the right that no state can deprive us of our rights or equal protection of the law, and the right to vote. It is a right of self-defense.

In 1791 that right was adopted as the Second Amendment, as a right of the people to band together to collectively defend oneself against public violence, meaning government tyranny. In 1868 that right was extended through the Fourteenth Amendment to also defend against government oppression by state or local governments. And from 1791, through 1868, to 2013, it was and is also the right to defend oneself against private violence, the violence perpetrated by criminals.

Yes, the Framers of the Constitution wanted people to be able to hunt. And that is an essential part of our cultural fabric as a people. It is a rich part of our heritage, part of self-reliance, a way of passing down our values, and it also provides precious time to spend time together for fathers and sons, and increasingly mothers and daughters, too. The right to bear arms is also for competition—for sporting, and it is also for collectors.

But as the Supreme Court recognized just five years ago, it was for the right of self-defense against some future government that would refuse to stand for reelection and would hold onto power by military might, and against lawless and heartless folks who would victimize others, that those who founded our nation made this right part of the Supreme Law of the Land, forever trumping every president, Congress, and court that would ever hold office in the United States. This right to protect one's life and liberty is a God-given right. It is a gift from God, not a grant from government.

The government does not give us this right, just as the Declaration of Independence makes clear government does not give us any of our inalienable rights. Instead it is the role of government to recognize the rights God has given to each of us, to respect those rights, and to secure those rights. That's what the Second Amendment does, and it is an essential right for every American citizen who is law-abiding and peaceable, regardless of skin color, geography, education, or socioeconomic status.

It is easy to understand how the Second Amendment relates to the culture of a Norman Rockwell painting of a rural father with his son walking through the woods with shotguns or rifles, hunting ducks or deer. But as important as that cultural heritage is, the core rights protected by the Second Amendment—to protect oneself against public and private violence—is just as real for Americans of all races and ethnic groups.

We thank God that we no longer are in days where we have to fear government violence, where the Second Amendment right to resist a tyrannical government would be the right of a black man in the Deep South in 1870 having to protect himself against a local lynch-mob posse regarding which the local

sheriff would look the other way—or worse yet—would sometimes be led by a local sheriff's deputy. But the right against private violence is even more important for so many black Americans today.

A black man or woman in his or her twenties should be safe and secure in their apartment or going to work. A black father has a right to protect his family and his home. Or too often—and this is sad because it is harming too many black children—it is a single mother. She has every right to demand that she be able to protect herself and her family. The only clear equalizer between a striving young mother, or grandmother, and a full-grown man breaking into her home is a firearm that she knows how to responsibly store and use.

I submit this testimony today to urge the protection of our Second Amendment rights.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Blackwell

Board Chairman, Center for Urban Renewal and Education; Board member, NRA

Statement by Star Parker, President, Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE)

February 22, 2013

Good morning. My name is Star Parker and I am the founder and president of CURE, the Center for Urban Renewal and Education, a non-profit think tank that promotes market-based solutions to fight poverty.

CURE is submitting this statement today to bring attention to the importance of defending the right of all Americans, guaranteed under the 2nd Amendment of our Constitution, to bear arms.

CURE is a nationwide coalition of conservative black leaders from the world of politics and public policy in Washington, from the business community, from academia, and from the clergy, and we want to express our deep concern about efforts currently underway to limit our God-given and constitutional right of self-defense.

Although CURE is based in Washington DC, I am a resident of California, thus Senator Diane Feinstein, the author of one of the proposals to advance government control over gun ownership, is my representative.

I am submitting this statement with the hope that it will serve as a reminder to Ms. Feinstein and all other U.S. Senators that Black History is rife with government demands to strip away our constitutional rights.

CURE believes that it is our duty as African American citizens to challenge the gun control proposals currently being considered on Capitol Hill.

Number one: The call for universal background checks as qualifiers for constitutional rights invokes painful memories of Jim Crow laws and black codes.

A substantial body of research already shows that gun controls empower criminals and weaken law-abiding citizens.

Regarding black reality, blacks are the least armed, least protected and defended, and the most assaulted citizens in our country.

According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 42 percent of whites and 16 percent of blacks say that they have a pistol or rifle at home.

Does anyone actually think that universal background checks, in which some past legal infraction might nullify a gun application, will not result in even fewer law abiding black men from obtaining a weapon to protect their family?

And what about black women?

According to research published in the British journal of Psychiatry, Dr. Pricilla Coleman, professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Bowling Green State University, Meta Analysis studies show an 81 percent higher risk for mental health problems with women who have had an abortion.

Will abortion be one of the questions on the "universal background check" application?

Number two: The call for banning specific guns as Senator Feinstein has proposed is also problematic as it puts too much power in the hands of politicians and a law enforcement establishment which cannot always be trusted.

In a Pew Research Center survey in 2009, 46 percent of whites compared to only 24 percent of blacks said they have a "great deal" of confidence in the local police to enforce the law.

Law abiding black citizens live under siege in crime ridden communities. Yet somehow they are supposed to buy the logic that giving more power to those in law enforcement already charged with maintaining order but don't, while stripping down the freedoms of those that do obey the law, will make them better off?

One question the gun-control advocates are never challenged to answer for the most vulnerable in our country when they move to promote gun control is how do you take the gun from the underground? The criminal? A racist cop or tyrannical government?

Taking arms from the law abiding many puts too much power in hands of a perhaps ill-intending few.

This Black History Month testimony is dedicated to the tradition of Black History Legend Frederick Douglass - a runaway slave and great American orator - who stated on this issue that "A man's rights rest in three boxes: the ballot box, the jury box, and the cartridge box."

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CURE is a 501c3 non-profit think tank which promotes market-based solutions to fight poverty.

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The Fallacy of Gun Free School Zones

by Officer Rob Young

January 17th, 1989. Cleveland Elementary School. Stockton, CA. A day that forever changed my life and the lives of many others. That morning, as a 7 year old boy, I lost part of my innocence. I learned the cold, harsh reality that your life can be taken within a moment's notice.

I remember waking up to get ready for school that morning. It was cold and foggy. Unlike most kids, I looked forward to going to school. I looked forward to playing with my friend at recess. I looked forward to one of the best games a first grader could play at that age. Kickball!!! This day was no different.

The time came for morning recess, and I was ready! We started our game on the painted kickball diamond that laid across our blacktop. I remember being so excited. In a matter of seconds our fun came to an abrupt end when my classmates and I noticed a burning car parked a few dozen yards from where we were playing our game.



Rob Young, recovering from wounds inflicted by a school-yard gunman in 1989

The flames drew many of the kids like a porch light attracts moths. Children often run towards things that look exciting, not realizing the danger that something like a car fire poses.

I didn't run towards the car, like many of the others. I didn't have a chance. The driver of that car, the coward who set the fire, began to open fire on my classmates and me. Patrick Purdy was able to walk onto our campus with a Chinese version of the AK-47.

What was supposed to be a fun game of kickball, turned to sheer panic. I did what I thought I was supposed to do, and ran towards my classroom. I still did not comprehend the evil that was taking place as I tried to get back to a place of safety.

I remember what it sounded like, as the bullets flew past my body. I remember the feeling of my feet literally being swept out from under me as a round traveled through my right foot. I

remember the slap of the round that hit the pavement an inch or so in front of me, prior to lodging itself in the left side of my chest.

I remember the difficulty of standing to my feet, and making it to the wooden handball wall that stood in the middle of our blacktop. I still remember the wood exploding above my head as more rounds pierced the wall, inches from my face. I'll never forget the cold-eerie silence after making it back to my classroom, hearing the last gunshot, a self-inflicted shot to the head which ended Patrick Purdy's life.

The realization of what just occurred set in, and that was when I lost it. I've never felt so afraid in my life. The cops could not get there fast enough. It felt like hours before the first officers arrived, and we knew that we were finally safe. No child should ever feel what I felt that day. No one should ever feel the pure terror of what took place that January morning. Five kids were killed, 27 were injured, and an entire nation lost the sense of security of being able to send their children to school and having them be safe.

You may be hearing my story, and thinking to yourself that "more gun-control" is what needs to happen. You are not alone in that belief. It seems like that is all we hear after incidents like these. But let me be the one to tell you. Gun control is NOT the answer. Gun control would not of saved me or any of my classmates that dreadful day.

What happened to us on that schoolyard is horrific, we can all agree on that. However, what the psychopath wanted that day, the need to hurt and kill, could and probably would have happened whether he was armed or not. A firearm is just the avenue that he chose to go down.

If you look at past incidents -- such as the Oklahoma City Bombing, the attacks of Ted Kaczynski, etc. -- the results were horrific. When you take tragedies such as these, the common denominator is never the weapons used. We miss the mark when we, the outsiders, begin to dissect the incident in question. In all of these attacks, the common denominator is the attacker, not the weapon.

Going through what I went through as a kid, most would think that I would blame the weapon. I guess I differ than some of you. I HAVE NEVER BLAMED THE FIREARM! I guess I got it, even as a youngster. My attacker was the only person to blame. He chose to do what he did that day, and he would of merely chosen another way to do it if he was not armed. The possibilities are endless.

Let me ask you a question: Is it the vehicle's fault when a drunk gets behind the wheel and takes out an innocent person? Should we now place a ban on vehicles? That would be nonsense! So why call for more gun control? I will tell you now that this is not the answer. There is nothing good that will come of it. To strip Americans of a fundamental right to bear arms, or even the types of weapons we choose is absurd. The only people who will be affected are the many law abiding citizens who choose to protect themselves against evildoers.

In early 2004, I raised my right hand and swore an oath to uphold and enforce the laws of the Great State of California, and the rights stated in the United States Constitution. I take my responsibility seriously, and I have always served with pride.

In the nine years of active law enforcement I have made several arrests of people who stray from the law and choose to unlawfully carry a firearm. Many of the suspects that we deal with on the street are already convicted felons, and are prohibited by law to possess firearms. I can tell you from years of experience, that these folks do not care about the laws that prohibit them from carrying. Most will not think twice before using those weapons to victimize people like you, especially if they know that you are unarmed and unable to defend yourself. And by us passing more gun restrictions, the bad guys WILL know for sure.

What makes you think that a single gun ban would change this? Why not make it easier for our law-abiding citizens to obtain a carry permit if they choose? Make it easier for them to legally possess a firearm on their person or in their homes, which would give them the ability to adequately protect themselves. We as a nation, have instead taken several steps backwards, and have made it absolutely harder to arm ourselves accordingly.

In most of the country, law-abiding citizens are able to carry firearms concealed. In Vermont, citizens can even carry without getting permission and, not surprisingly, Vermont has often been dubbed the Safest State in the nation. But in some states, officials make it very difficult for good people to obtain a permit to carry firearms. They also limit magazines capacities, require "bullet buttons" and have state-approved rosters which restrict the types of weapons we can legally own. I challenge you to give me the name of one crook who would take them time to "check the list" prior to using the gun of their choice while committing an act of violence.

I can also tell you from my training and experience, that we as police officers cannot provide the services that we should be able to. Most departments are understaffed and/or operate at

minimum staffing levels because of budget cuts, and poor money management at the municipal level. This has created a “reactive police force” rather than a “proactive police force.”

Does that mean that we are not proactive as police officers? Of course not. We do what we can and act when we need to. However, we cannot be everywhere at once. Although we do what we can to get to an emergency as quickly as possible, it is very likely the officers will arrive *after* the incident has taken place. God forbid you are ever faced with needing a weapon to defend yourself or a loved one. You will be wishing that you had the means to not only defend yourself, but to defend yourself properly against a person who will be better armed than you.

I have never met Nick Meli of Portland Oregon. However, I am sure he was glad to be armed on December 11, 2012. Nick, who was walking through the Clackamas Town Center mall with a friend, was able to draw his pistol and protect himself against a heavily-armed suspect who had just killed two other people in the mall. Mr. Meli was not a police officer, however, he had a CCW. He was able to take cover, draw his pistol, and point it at the gunman. When the gunman noticed Nick, he chose to end his own life rather than carry on his killing spree. It is my belief that Nick saved many others that day because he was afforded the right to carry.

In ending, I ask of you to not act out of fear. Do not have a “knee jerk” reaction in this. Do not take my right as a husband and as a father to protect my family against sick individuals who choose to cause us harm. Do not place unfair limits on my ability to protect myself and my loved ones, and make us play on an uneven playing field. Do not take away my Second Amendment right that our forefathers set forth in the Constitution. A man or woman should have the right to protect themselves and their families. Our forefathers knew this then, and I know this now.

Thank you for your time.

Officer Rob Young is employed in the state of California. His testimony is provided courtesy of Gun Owners of America, 8001 Forbes Place, Suite 102, Springfield, VA, www.gunowners.org.