

Gun violence in America: It's time to turn our tears into action

Written by Marc Morial, NNPA Columnist
Wednesday, 26 December 2012 11:49

"These neighborhoods are our neighborhoods and these children are our children. We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this..." President Barack Obama

A movie theater in Aurora, Col. A Sikh Temple in Wisconsin. A shopping mall in Oregon. A political event in Tucson, Arizona. The weekend streets of big cities like Chicago. And now a first grade class in Newtown, Conn. When will the madness stop? When will we take "meaningful action" to end gun violence in America? These are just the latest high-profile mass shootings that have taken the lives of too many innocent victims. And when those victims are small school children and their teachers, the weight of grief is almost too much to bear.

A weight of responsibility also falls on our shoulders. Immediately after one of these mass killings, someone always says it is too soon to talk about sensible gun control measures. We must take time to grieve first. But after the flying of flags at half-staff and the tearful memorial services, we invariably go back to business as usual. I say, not this time. As a father, a former mayor and a life-long advocate of a safe and quality education for every child, I too am in mourning. But at the same time, I call on our leaders in Washington and in states across this nation, to take immediate action to protect our children and prevent the kind of senseless carnage we saw last week.

Even before this latest tragedy, for years, the National Urban League has been calling for sensible gun control. In fact, on the day after the recent presidential election, I sent a letter to President Obama and the leaders in the House of Representatives, saying in part. "The scourge of gun violence cries out for a comprehensive approach to community safety and crime reduction. This requires stronger enforcement of existing gun laws and re-enactment of the assault weapons ban..." We asked the president and the Congress to make this a top priority for the next four years.

Gun violence has often been associated with poor, urban neighborhoods, and it is true that urban violence is much too prevalent. But most of these mass shootings have occurred in quiet, suburban towns where crime is typically low and gun ownership is high. The point is, gun violence can happen anywhere. The one common denominator is easy access to guns. In a nation of 314 million, there are 270 million privately held firearms. It is no coincidence that America has the highest gun-related murder rate of any developed country. And it's not just criminal gun violence. There are a substantial number of gun-related suicides and accidental deaths. Just last week, a 3-year-old Oklahoma boy found a gun in a relative's home, shot himself in the head and died. Clearly, fewer guns in America and none in the wrong hands must be part of the solution.

We are pleased that two weeks ago on "Meet the Press" Senator Dianne Feinstein [D-Calif.] pledged to introduce a gun control bill on the first day of the next Congress that would limit the sale, transfer and possession of assault weapons, along with high capacity magazines. She expects the president to offer his support for the law. We hope so. It's time to turn our tears into action.

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