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The “Slippery Slope” of Gun Control

A Message from the President of Americans Against Gun Violence
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With winter fully upon us and snow covering many parts of the country, I’m reminded of the gun lobby’s worst fear – the “slippery slope.”

The NRA warns its members that enactment of even the most modest gun control laws will lead the United States down the slippery slope toward the adoption of – perish the thought – stringent gun control laws comparable to the regulations in place in every other high income democratic country of the world.

Even other gun violence prevention organizations are quick to assure legislators and the American public that the limited measures they propose will not lead our country down the slippery slope.¹

Well, I’ve been a skier for most of my adult life. I love slippery slopes. I say, “What are we waiting for? Let’s take the plunge!”

When it comes to gun violence, our country currently stands at the peak, towering far above all other high income democratic countries. Our rate of gun homicide is 25 times higher than in the average rate in the other 22 economically advanced democratic countries of the world, and our gun suicide rate is eight times higher.² When it comes to the strength of our gun control laws, though, we’re far below all other high income democratic countries.³

The roots of gun violence are complex. Among the many factors that are often discussed after high-profile shootings in the United States are socio-economic disparity, substance abuse, mental illness, and a culture of violence. These are definitely factors that need to be addressed, but the United States is not an outlier as compared with other high income democratic countries in any of these areas.⁴ In fact, the rate of physical assault by all means combined in the United States is lower than in most other high income democratic countries.⁵

The final common pathway by which all gun violence is committed in the United States is very simple. It’s the guns. And the laxity of our gun control laws and the correspondingly high rates of civilian gun ownership are the areas in which the United States is an extreme outlier as compared with all other high income democratic countries.⁶ Our extraordinarily high homicide rate is due to the fact that assaults in the United States are committed far more often with guns.⁷ Similarly, if it weren’t for gun suicides, our country would have one of the lowest suicide rates of all high income democratic countries.⁸ Ironically, though, our

extraordinarily lax gun control laws and our extraordinarily high rates of gun ownership are the factors that are discussed the least often after high profile shootings.

There are many non-profit organizations working on the root causes of violence in our country. At the time of this writing, though, Americans Against Gun Violence is the only national gun violence prevention organization that I'm aware of that openly advocates that our country take the plunge down the slippery slope of gun control to get to the point at which our gun regulations - and our rates of gun violence - are comparable to those in other economically advanced democratic countries. Going down the slippery slope does not preclude responsible hunters and target shooters from practicing their sports with traditional sporting rifles and shotguns. It does require, though, stringent regulation, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles. And yes, going down the slippery slope will mean that many current gun owners other than traditional hunters and target shooters will have to surrender their guns.

I mentioned at the beginning of this message that I'm a skier. Skiing is largely an individual sport, though, and many expert skiers love skiing through untracked powder. A better analogy for Americans Against Gun Violence would be bobsledding. Bobsledding is a team sport, and bobsledders race down extremely slippery slopes at high rates of speed on prepared courses.

A bobsled run begins with all members of the team giving the bobsled a starting push. 2018 will be the second full year that Americans Against Gun Violence has been in existence. We've gotten off to a pretty good start already, but we need another good "heave ho" to really get up to speed. If you haven't already joined Americans Against Gun Violence, please do so now, and please consider providing one more push with a year end donation, if you're able.

After the bobsled gets going faster than the team members can run beside it and push, everyone jumps on board as it heads down the bobsled run. The physics governing the relationship between the weight of the crew and the speed of an actual bobsled are complex, but in the case of our metaphorical Americans Against Gun Violence bobsled, there's no doubt that the more people we have on board, the faster we'll get to our goal of reducing rates of gun violence in the United States to rates comparable to other high income democratic countries. So please ask friends, family members, and colleagues to jump on board with us as we gather speed down the slippery slope.

The course is already laid out for us. We have examples of countries like Australia and Great Britain that responded promptly and definitively to mass shootings with bans on all semi-automatic rifles (Australia)⁹ and all handguns (Great Britain),¹⁰ virtually ending mass shootings in those countries and dramatically reducing their overall rates of gun violence. Even though the run is already laid out, though, we need to all lean together in order to negotiate the steeply banked twists and turns without running off course. If you have questions about what you can do right now to help keep our organization both on course and moving swiftly, please refer to the post, "What can I do right now to help stop gun violence," on the Facts and FAQ's page of the Americans Against Gun Violence website.

Finally, it helps to have a bit of reckless abandon when one races down a slippery slope. If your neighbor with an arsenal of assault rifles calls you a "gun grabber" when tell him you support an organization that's working to ban all such weapons; if the "Second Amendment supporter," who knows nothing about the history of the Amendment¹¹ or what

the first half of it says, calls you unpatriotic when you inform him that the Second Amendment was never really intended to guarantee an individual right to own guns; or if a member of another gun violence prevention organization calls you “un-PC” when you point out that handguns, which are used in the vast majority of gun deaths and which confer no net protective value, really should be banned, don’t let it bother you. There are some people even within the gun violence prevention movement who we’ll never be able to recruit to join us in our ride down the slippery slope. On the other hand, I think that you’ll find, as I have, that many other people have been looking for a long time for an organization like Americans Against Gun Violence and will be more than happy to jump on board. There won’t be an Olympic medal waiting for us at the end of the run, but, like the members of the Jamaican bobsled team, we’ll have the thrill of doing something that no one else from our country has ever even dared to try before, and we’ll also have the tremendous satisfaction of knowing that we’re working to save over 35,000 lives a year in our country.

Thanks for having the courage to join us in our wild ride down the slippery slope of gun control. (Please be careful, though, going down your icy driveway.)

With Sincere Wishes for a Happy and Peaceful New Year,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill".

Bill Durston, MD
President, Americans Against Gun Violence

Note: Dr. Durston is a retired emergency physician. He is also a former expert marksman in the U.S. Marine Corps, decorated for “courage under fire” during the Vietnam War.

References

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- ⁸ Grinshteyn and Hemenway.
- ⁹ Philip Alpers, “The Big Melt: How One Democracy Changed after Scrapping a Third of Its Firearms,” in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 205–11; Simon Chapman, Philip Alpers, and Michael Jones, “Association between Gun Law Reforms and Intentional Firearm Deaths in Australia, 1979-2013,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 316, no. 3 (July 19, 2016): 291–99, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.8752>; Rebecca Peters, “Rational Firearm Regulation: Evidence-Based Gun Laws in Australia,” in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 195–204.
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- ¹¹ 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>.