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Bishop Blaire: Senate inaction on gun control 'a failure in moral leadership'

by Brian Roewe

Gun Violence

A day after the U.S. Senate failed to garner the support necessary to pass amendment to a gun control bill, the Catholic bishops joined others in voicing their disappointment that the high chamber rejected legislation that "builds a culture of life."

"I write to express my deep disappointment in the Senate's failure to support reasonable regulations to reduce gun violence in our nation," said Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, Calif., who chairs the U.S. bishops' conference committee on domestic justice and human development, in a letter dated April 18.

On Wednesday, numerous amendments — among them a bipartisan measure limiting extended background checks to gun shows and online sales — fell short of gaining the necessary 60 votes for inclusion in a gun control bill brought to the floor by Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev.

"In the wake of tragic events such as the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, the failure to support even modest regulations on firearms is a failure in moral leadership to promote policies that protect and defend the common good," Blaire wrote, addressing his letter to the legislative body's leadership, Majority Leader Reid, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

"Many of the provisions contained within S. 649 [the Reid bill] were a positive step in the right direction and enjoyed bipartisan support. We applaud those Senators who demonstrated the virtues of courage and leadership by taking steps to reduce gun violence in the service of the good of society and for the protection of human life," he said.

In an interview with *NCR* hours before the Senate began to vote, Blaire said he had spoken with two

legislators before the vote, reaffirming the bishops' support for universal background checks, bans on assault rifles and high-capacity magazines, and harsher penalties for gun traffickers.

The conversation reflected realistic expectations, Blaire said, but that the legislators were most optimistic about extended background checks.

He told *NCR* that the bishops' position wasn't opposed to citizens' Second Amendment rights, but reflected their intentions of protecting the common good for all.

'I don't think we're trying here to say a private party who passes a background check should not have a gun. I mean, a lot of people have guns for hunting and their own protection, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't regulate the accessibility to guns.'

The bishops' ultimate goal remains 'a peaceful world in which there is no war and in which there is no violence,' Blaire said, 'but we live in a very real world.'

'We do have to be realistic, but we still have to work for that which promotes a peaceful society,' he told *NCR*.

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In his letter to the Senate leaders, Blaire reiterated that he and his fellow bishops would continue to work with Congress and others to advocate for policies 'that promote a culture of life' and reduce gun violence.

'We are resolute in urging Congress to act,' he wrote.

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Full text of Bishop Blaire's letter:

Bishop Blaire's letter to Senate leaders on gun control

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