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Ongoing gun violence strikes at the conscience of our nation

Pat Perriello | Jul. 15, 2013 NCR Today

The conversation around gun violence has diminished a great deal since the time of the tragic incident in Newtown, Conn. Unfortunately, gun violence itself has not subsided. We have recently been reading about escalating gun violence in Chicago [1].

Now the city of Baltimore has experienced a spate of tragic gun violence [2] that has yet to subside. The city has seen a total of 40 shootings and 16 deaths in a short period of time. More specifically, there were a total of 27 shootings and nine deaths [3] over a period of just five days.

Daniel Webster, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, has written an important article [4] analyzing the causes and the possible efforts that could be employed to significantly alter these regrettable statistics. He reviews strategies the data suggest could reduce the level of gun violence even without solving all inner-city problems such as poverty, unemployment and addiction.

Initially, Baltimore's response was to target drugs as the cause of violence and to attempt to arrest everyone involved. The effort didn't work. While drugs represent an important concern, Webster said there was no way to get around the role guns play in the staggering rise and in the lethality of the violent incidents that kept occurring.

Webster points out that the greatest reduction in gun violence came when illegal guns were targeted. Frederick Bealefeld, former Baltimore city police commissioner, put it this way: We are "going after bad guys with guns."

It is sad that we are condemned to continue to see so many of our young people lose their lives because of politicians committed to a distorted notion of the Second Amendment. Congress needs to craft legislation that can assist law enforcement in its efforts to reduce gun violence while still protecting the individual rights of gun owners.

After Newtown and the continued violence in our cities, one wonders what it will take to move Congress to act. Even though 90 percent of Americans [5] would vote for a measure requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales, politicians bound by special interests still would not move.

Surely these politicians must possess sufficient concern for the welfare of all of our citizens to get this legislation passed.

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