Commentary by Jonathan Silva, Palmer Ridge High School junior and *Bear Truth* editor/reporter

Republican Colorado State Representative, and state senator of Colorado’s Senate District 9, Paul Lundeen, recently gave my group of Bear Truth reporters the honor and privilege of interviewing him in light of recent nationwide debate on school security after the mass shooting in Stoneman Douglas High School. “We need to protect the students in our schools. That is our primary responsibility. We need to make sure we are educating the students who are in our schools as well,” says Rep. Lundeen. While I applaud Lundeen’s priorities and goals for our education system, I disagree with his view on the main source of gun violence, particularly mass shootings in the school environment. “I think the debate about taking away guns, about restricting guns, misses the point,” says Lundeen. Later, he says, “[Mental health] is the bigger issue.”

While mental health issues are definitely one of the causes of gun violence in America, it is gun availability which ultimately leads to this unsafe epidemic. A 2015 analysis by Michael Stone, Columbia University psychiatrist, concluded that only 22% of mass shooters in the US had mental illness. In emotional argument, one can understandably state that any person who creates such a massive amount of harm to others is surely mentally ill. But to remain objective, this is not the case.

According to *the Guardian* and United Nations data, the US has six times the gun homicide rate of Canada, seven times the gun homicide rate of Sweden, and sixteen times the gun homicide rate of Germany. The United States has more gun deaths than other developed nations, and more guns than any other country in the world, with an estimated 88.8 privately owned guns per 100 people in America in 2007, according to *Vox*. Overall research and data, such as a study from the Harvard School of Public Health’s Injury Control Research Center, clearly shows that areas with private gun ownership correlate with higher gun violence.

The US could take an example from Australia. In the seven years after Australia banned many types of firearms (e.g. semi-automatic and automatic rifles, shotguns), created a gun registry, and required gun permits (in response to the 1996 mass shooting in Port Arthur), *Vox* reports that the firearm homicide rate in Australia dropped by 42% and firearm suicide rate dropped by 57%. Research finds that these rates are still dropping in Australia.

Yet, for now, we could take baby steps, work with our representatives like Lundeen, to push for better background checks on private gun owners, and perhaps define and ban assault weapons like the AR-15. USA Today reports that a 2013 poll suggested that 73% of NRA members support background checks for gun purchases.

Regardless, this issue requires action. *The Guardian* reports that there have been 8 school shootings since the start of 2018. “As long as we are talking, we are making progress,” says Rep. Lundeen. We can all agree.