Headline: Are Students Sitting Ducks?

Deck: The Gun Control Debate Needs to Be Less Political

By Parker Jones – xxxx HS

Recently, my school had one of its many routine lockdown drills; my class sat huddled in a closet full of musical instruments, waiting for an announcement to come over the loudspeaker that would dismiss us back to class. Students were playing games on their phones, texting their boyfriends and girlfriends, and listening to the new Eminem album.

I’ve been doing these drills my entire life. I didn’t think much of it, and my classmates obviously didn’t either, until my teacher said that if a shooter were to break into the room, our only way to defend ourselves would be to hit the psychopath with a golf club kept by the door.

This was a huge moment of realization, as it suddenly struck me that the only thing protecting us from an insane person with a semi-automatic rifle was a *golf club*. We were basically sitting ducks.

During Capitol Hill Press Day, it became more clear to me than ever that the solution to this evident lack of protocol does not lie strictly within one party’s viewpoint or extreme. After hearing various Democrats and Republicans speak on the matter, I have come to the conclusion that many changes need to be made across partisan borders, ranging from better background checks to better school defense systems, that could prevent another shooting like Parkland.

While at the Capitol, I had the opportunity to speak with Senator Tim Neville, who recently sponsored a bill that would allow concealed carry in public schools. Neville’s son, Representative Patrick Neville, is another sponsor of the bill and a survivor of the 1999 Columbine school shooting. Just six days before the recent Parkland school shooting, the bill was postponed indefinitely, blocking the bill from any future it may have.

“The idea of a bill [allowing teachers to carry guns] being passed makes me angry,” Layla Smith, a junior at Conifer High, said. “You may think that a teacher is mentally stable, but it only takes one student or one bad day to really make a teacher snap. Bringing the problem directly into the classrooms won’t help anyone.”

That, to me, seems absolutely ridiculous. There is not evidence that backs up the idea of a teacher randomly snapping and unleashing their anger on their students by open fire. This kind of logic shows the way that the polarized politics of today’s age wrap people up in one unalterable mindset. Some kind of additional security could absolutely help prevent mass school shootings, such as a metal detector at the school entrance, or the implementation of guns in classrooms or on security guards. As House Representative Jim Wilson pointed out, if that kind of security is already protecting government members in the Capitol, then it absolutely should also be protecting students, regardless of the funding concerns.

“I started in the 60s,” Wilson said. “All during that time, education was the first to be cut and the last to be funded… But we always find dollars to fund what’s most important, whether that’s local effort or state effort. If I go to your parents and say, ‘we need to raise X amount of dollars to make sure that your children are safe,’ they’d say, ‘what do we need to do?’ We would raise the money if I convinced your parents that this is what you need.”

Above all else, the gun debate needs to stop being about the Democrats getting a legislative win or the Republicans getting a legislative win. Policies need to be looked at for what they are, and the partisan nature of how government is run needs to be set aside when the value of children’s lives is being considered.

“Our society is sick,” Wilson said. “We are so off track on the value of human life that we allow these things to happen. It’s a societal issue...How do Republicans and Democrats work together? Through friendship. That’s the way you get along; you have to actually build a relationship.”