

THE TENNESSEAN

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As a retired Tennessee state trooper, I know stricter gun regulations save lives | Opinion

Government restricts access to many items that can kill. Gun violence in Tennessee is not inevitable; it's preventable.

Mark Proctor Guest columnist

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It is difficult to accept that tragedies as a result of firearms continue to occur across America. My heart aches for the families and friends of the children and those murdered at [The Covenant School](#).

As a retired member of the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDOSHS), I applaud the Metro Police officers for their quick response and bravery. Tennesseans across our state can rest assured that all officers, deputies, and troopers are trained to respond to situations like this and will, if another senseless and unfortunate event occurs.

Countless politicians, on social and news media sites, say their prayers and thoughts are with the family members, which is great; however, I have seen politicians run from questions regarding gun control and cower in their offices only to respond on social media with sometimes-hateful rhetoric.

These elected officials come across weak and cowardly when they jump in elevators to avoid tough questions that Tennesseans have a right to know. It's ironic that they run from questions when they expect officers to run toward gunfire, which the officers bravely do.

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Strict permitting process should be enacted

I had the privilege to serve as major and then lieutenant colonel with the Tennessee Highway Patrol during Gov. Haslam's administration and worked with many great leaders. To the current leaders at both the federal and state level who say nothing can be done to prevent mass shootings, you are a disgrace and failure to the citizens of this state. It is time for you to come together to find a solution that will end this ever-occurring violence that Americans have unfortunately come to expect.

As a former law enforcement administrator, we faced many challenges and came up with tough solutions. One of the divisions under my purview was the Handgun Permit Unit and the members in this unit worked tirelessly to ensure the permit process (at the time) was thorough, quick, and meaningful.

Legislators should quickly enact a strict permitting process to carry and purchase firearms. Many former members of TDOSHS, including myself, provided training to citizens through classes like "Response to Violent Intruder Events" to help minimize the deaths and injuries when violence occurs. Training like this should be implemented for all citizens. There are many things like red flag laws and work to treat mental health issues that our state and federal officials should address to help reduce these tragedies.

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Keep guns away from the wrong people

While serving in the command staff with THP, I knew of no one in the Patrol that wished to do away with the rights of citizens to carry firearms. We simply wanted those carrying to do so safely and correctly with a permitting process like those who are allowed to drive on our roadways.

Gov. Bill Lee and various other elected officials wish to allow citizens easier access to firearms with little restrictions on carrying and they are simply wrong in their reasoning, which portends to be at the direction of the NRA and gun manufacturers.

Research has shown that restrictions on firearm purchases and a stringent permitting process helps to minimize firearms from reaching the hands of those who should not be carrying firearms. I would ask our legislators, did a stringent permitting process ever cause a death? No. Did a permitting process ever prevent a death? Highly probable based on common sense reasoning. Did a background check ever prevent a dangerous felon from obtaining a firearm or permit? Yes.

Government restricts access to many items that can kill. Including: controlled drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, flights, etc., and restrictions and checks should be in place to purchase and carry firearms. This in no way infringes upon the rights of those wishing to purchase and carry a firearm, just as requiring a driver's license does not infringe upon those who wish to drive. Gun violence in Tennessee is not inevitable; it's preventable. By implementing stringent requirements to purchase and carry firearms, you are reducing the possibility of horrific firearm violence and loss of life in the future.

Mark Proctor retired as a captain from the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDOSHS).