

How to make concrete progress on guns

By David K. Brawley, Joel Mosbacher and Mike Gecan
New York Daily News

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May 28, 2022 at 5:00 am

We are three typical Americans. One of us lost his father when a young man with a gun killed him as he opened his store in Chicago. Another of us is the son of an NYPD officer, who worried every day as his father left for work, and then became a pastor in what once were the “killing fields” of East New York, burying young men gunned down in the surrounding streets. A third grew up in a tough Chicago neighborhood and woke up one morning in 1965 to see the faces of three of his teenage neighbors, 15 and 16 years old, on the front page of the morning paper. They had gone out the night before, high on pep pills, and shot to death an elderly man for the \$17 in his pocket.

We are three very different people, from different places, with different religious traditions, but we are bound together, in part, by the common denominator of gun violence, of sudden and stunning death.

It's clear what *can't* be done about gun violence because of the political protection provided by those who value gun possession over the lives of innocent shoppers

and schoolchildren. They are practicing a modern form of idolatry. The idol is the gun and all the profit made by those who make, sell and distribute guns.

So there's no point in trying to convert the idol worshipers. They have chosen their object of adoration. No massacre, no casualty counts of 9- and 10-year-olds or senior citizen food shoppers will shake their faith. There's also no point in calling for changes that well-funded and entrenched political forces steadfastly refuse to make. They are intractable. They are resistant to any moral or ethical or pragmatic challenge.

So we don't want to waste another minute stuck in the latest cycle of futility. Instead, we are writing to challenge those who *do* value life over gun-delivered death to take the steps that *can* be made in spite of right-wing opposition.

One such step is identifying those gun shops that supply these weapons to killers and would-be killers and forcing them to shut down. A very small fraction of gun dealers, probably less than 5%, supply the overwhelming majority of weapons that show up at crime scenes. The market works at its demonic best, with killers quickly learning which gun dealers are willing to sell the most destructive weapons to the most dangerous individuals. The word spreads fast, as do the guns.

But the same market that enables them to prosper can be used to shut the bad-apple gun dealers down. The nation's police and sheriff departments, as well as federal military and law enforcement agencies, can require that the gun makers who wish to do business with these governmental bodies stop doing business with the bad-apple dealers.

Governments purchase about four out of every 10 guns sold in the U.S. As soon as public-sector gun purchasers announce this policy, key players in the gun industry will be forced to make tough choices. They say they prefer self-regulation to strong laws? Let's see if they're able to weed out the worst actors in their industry. This is something that can be done. And New York City and New York State, Mayor Adams and Gov. Hochul, should be front and center in this effort: Use not only your bully pulpits, but your leverage.

The same thing goes for gun safety innovations. Integrating effective security technology into weapons would stop many of the accidental deaths of children who grab an adult's gun, would make stolen guns unusable, and would reduce or end the harm done to police by those who wrest their weapons away from them and fire. This can be done and should be done. And New York City and New York State should lead the way here as well.

We realize that these are limited measures, given the hundreds of millions of guns already circulating in America. We know that there will be other days of gun-driven violence and death ahead. But if we can prod gun manufacturers into

no longer supplying the worst of the gun dealers with weaponry, and start equipping guns with state-of-the-art safety technologies, then the next violent 18-year-old may not get his hands on a killing machine. The next classroom may not be a scene of carnage. The next community may not be thrown into the living hell that Newtown and Buffalo and Uvalde are experiencing.

Since 1965, the toxic combination of violent young men and guns have scarred our lives — and the lives of our communities. Pragmatic measures to slow and eventually stop this flow are possible to enact. But will those who claim to want real change do something?