

# San Antonio Express-News

## Commentary: Texas lawmakers fail the courage test on guns

By Robert Mueller

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I am the pastor of a West Side San Antonio congregation. I own six guns: four rifles and two handguns. When my father gave me my first weapon, a .243-caliber deer rifle, he made sure I attended a gun safety education course.

“This right comes with responsibilities,” he said.

Unlike my father, the Texas Legislature has forgotten that basic concept.

Since 2009, the Legislature has loosened gun regulations and tried to constrain mass shootings in our state. The results of their utterly inadequate efforts have only been more mass shootings, more gun purchases, gun thefts and individuals who shoot when they lose their temper.

While gun violence in Texas has mirrored national trends, the incidence of gun violence in Texas is increasing faster than the national average. From 2011 to 2020, gun-related deaths in Texas have increased by 38 percent, and gun-related homicides increased by 90 percent. As of this year, gun violence is the leading cause of death for our children.

I know the effects of irresponsible gun ownership firsthand.

I was a material witness to a murder across the street from my church. I have buried the victims of six suicides; a vibrant 21-year-old woman murdered as she left a bar in her truck; a youth from our program shot while walking a girlfriend home from school. A 15-year-old son of church members was given a firearm and committed a drive-by shooting. He ended up killing someone.

After the slaughter of 21 lives in Uvalde a year ago, I could no longer remain quiet. Working with Texas Impact and the Texas IAF network, I have traveled to the Capitol nearly once a week this session to meet with members of the Community Safety Select Committee, which considers gun safety legislation.

I have waited with the families of those slaughtered in Uvalde until 3:30 a.m. to testify before that committee and to plead with them to pass House Bill 2744, which would have raised the age limit to purchase an assault-style rifle from 18 to 21. I have also advocated for House Bill 298, to require a waiting period after purchasing a firearm, and for House Bill 236, which would require a universal background check for all gun sales.

More than 70 percent of Texans of every political stripe believe that such commonsense gun safety measures should be enacted, according to a study published this year by the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs.

Our state legislators cannot muster the courage to act on the will of the people. Why? They fear the vocal minorities who have made gun possession an idol worthy of greater reverence than the lives of our fellow citizens. This is an abomination before God.

Frustrated by the cowardice and inaction of the state legislators, San Antonio congregations are now working to reduce gun violence. Under the banner of COPS/Metro Alliance, 175 church leaders united to ask city of San Antonio and Bexar County leadership to create a public education campaign emphasizing gun owners' responsibility to store their firearms safely and to provide safe handgun storage boxes for vehicles.

It's past time for lawmakers to come to their senses and listen to the residents they represent.

I cannot stand by and watch my fellow Texans continue to be slaughtered because we cannot find the courage to act responsibly.