

The time for better gun laws is now

GUEST OPINION

By Rep. Deb Andraca

If you've never been in a classroom during a lockdown drill, you're lucky. Huddling in a closet or a corner, away from doors and windows, in a classroom full of silent, scared students is a situation none of us should have to experience. But this is just one example of how our gun violence epidemic has a negative impact on entire communities, including children, families, and people who don't even own a gun. That's why I am proud to introduce two bills that can make our communities safer while respecting our Second Amendment rights. Since mass shootings and homicides grab all the headlines, many are surprised to learn that in Wisconsin 70% of gun deaths are suicides. Guns are exceptionally effective at killing people and, as a result, are also a particularly devastating means of suicide. Only 4% of nonfirearm suicide attempts result in death, but by using a gun suicide is fatal 90% of the time. More law enforcement officers die by gun suicide than in the line of duty. With the right intervention and response, these are preventable deaths.

For years our state legislative leaders have not only failed to meaningfully respond to these tragedies, but they have even refused to discuss the crisis at hand. In November of 2019, Gov. Tony Evers called a special session of the Legislature to address gun violence, but Republican leaders gaveled the session in and out in a matter of seconds. I introduced an Assembly Joint Resolution about Gun Violence Awareness Day, AJR 55, on May 14 of this year, but it was never added to the legislative calendar. We must be able to talk about gun violence without being accused of violating the Second Amendment. The Supreme Court has upheld that the right to bear arms does not extend to those who pose a threat to the safety of themselves or others.

This week my colleagues and I introduced legislation to eliminate the private-sale loophole and ensure a background check is conducted on every gun sale. If you buy a gun at a licensed firearms dealer, you must pass a background check. But if you buy a gun online, or at your neighbor's garage sale, not only is this legal but there is no background check required. This loophole

in state law was exploited by the Brookfield Azana spa shooter, who had a criminal history of domestic violence, but was still able to get a gun and kill four people in a hair salon.

We also proposed a bill to establish an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO). Already in place in red and blue states across the country, ERPO laws allow a judge to order guns to be removed from a situation where there is evidence of someone in crisis or an individual planning a mass shooting. Without an ERPO, if a parent or friend suspects someone has a gun and is at imminent risk for suicide or violence against others, there is no recourse to help prevent such a tragedy before it's too late.

None of these measures restrict the rights of gun owners, but they will save lives and prevent the trauma that ripples from every tragic shooting. Polls consistently show that 80% of Wisconsinites support background checks and ERPO laws — so why can't we even get a hearing on bills that can help save lives? Call your elected officials. Tell them that instead of hiding our students in the corners of our classrooms, we must discuss ways we can prevent gun violence and pass these proven, constitutional measures to help protect the safety of every community in our state.

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