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Creating a Peaceful Society by Reducing Gun Violence

By Andre Gobbo

Independent researchers estimate that 100 people are killed daily with guns in the U.S. – and many more are injured. Guns are the second leading cause of death for all children and teens; it is the first for Black children and teens. On average, 52 women are shot to death each month by an intimate partner.

These statistics tell the impact of gun violence in American communities today. Behind each statistic is a mother, a father, a daughter, a teenager, a child. Gun violence could happen anywhere – in schools, in houses of worship, and in theaters. The surge in gun violence should not be underestimated even if, often, it rarely makes national news.

As Quakers, we believe that there is that of God in every person. We seek a society where everyone can fully live to their potential; the scourge of gun violence prevents far too many people from doing so. It is our goal to decrease gun violence by creating and implementing policies that reduce the number of guns and gun use in our communities.

To help reduce gun violence, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is focused on passing legislation that will require universal background checks for all gun purchases, secure funds to research this public health problem, and extreme risk laws to temporarily restrict access to guns. These commonsense goals will not only make our communities less violent, but they also have a lot of momentum in Congress.

Universal background checks are critical in preventing people who should not have guns from buying them in the first place. Under current law, unlicensed dealers like those selling firearms on the internet or at gun shows, can do so without running

a background check. Universal background checks would close such loopholes.

Researchers have shown that background checks prevent gun violence. Up to 80 percent of firearms used in crimes are obtained without a background check. From 1997 to 2017, more than 3 million people legally prohibited from owning a gun were denied the chance to purchase one because of existing background check laws.

More than 90 percent of Americans support background checks for all gun buyers. Up to 80 percent of guns used in crimes are obtained without such checks.

Funding research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the National Institutes of Health will produce data that can be used to address what the American Medical Association calls a public health crisis.

For more than 20 years, Congress has prohibited the CDC from researching the health impacts of gun violence. It's important to note that the research itself isn't political. It's about getting the information we need to help prevent tragedies and make our communities less violent.

Extreme risk laws or extreme risk protection orders allow families, household members, and/or law enforcement officers to petition courts to temporarily restrict an individual's access to guns if they pose a

(continued on p. 6)

Viewpoint

Too Many Guns, Too Many Children Killed

By Peter D. Murchison

Earlier this spring, I went to Hartford, CT, to give testimony on gun violence prevention bills and to support others doing the same. There was a diverse crowd ranging from gun safety advocates to “open carry” groups. I was there to advocate for laws I believe would reduce injuries and death by guns.

What caught my attention was the usual airport-like security checks entering the Capitol. Perhaps no surprise; guns were not actually allowed in the building. This is because those same lawmakers who openly support gun lobbyists know how dangerous it would be to allow guns in their workplace—despite Connecticut being an open carry state.

So, at a time when guns are to blame for countless injuries and deaths at schools, houses of worship, newsrooms, nightclubs, festivals, and movie theaters, those who determine our ability to access and use them can work without the fear of an armed person committing a mass shooting. Our children should be so lucky.

Instead, we the people—especially our children—bear the burden of underregulated guns in America. In fact, we Americans are 25 times more likely to be killed by guns than people in other rich nations.

A recent medical study revealed that eight children are killed by guns in the United States daily and firearms are second only to car accidents as the leading cause of death among young people. Recently, two students in Colorado and North Carolina gave their lives to save their classmates and end further violence. The gun lobby and conservative lawmakers often call for more guns, not fewer, to “ensure our safety.” But for all the talk about the “good guy with the gun,” we are being saved by unarmed children laying down their lives because our legislators are not stepping up to sensible action to prevent the wrong people from having guns. This has to change.

My own nephew, Daniel Barden, bore this same burden in his first grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary. He never saw his eighth birthday.



In June Peter Murchison joined Diane Randall to discuss gun violence prevention at the Quaker Welcome Center.

Gone are the days when seeing atrocities play out on the news could be chalked up to “something horrible that happened far away.” Gun violence in America erupts everywhere from Newtown to Orlando, from Las Vegas to Charleston, from cities to small towns.

I met a mother from Bridgeport, CT, who lost her younger son, 19, to a street shooting. I asked her what the most important issue is to fix. She replied, “Too many guns, there’s just too many guns.” Guns have infiltrated our society. A huge factor is that gun industry groups like the NRA and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) want to normalize that we are surrounded by guns. Well, it is not normal. Nor is it sensible or reasonable.

We need to demand more. It is unacceptable for lawmakers to tweet their prayers and sympathies from the safety of their gun-free, metal detector-equipped, secure offices after each mass tragedy occurs outside their locked doors. This is a

(continued on p. 6)

New Advocacy Corps Plan to Reduce Gun Violence

One of FCNL's signature programs continues to grow with 20 young adults joining the 2019-2020 Advocacy Corps. This diverse group will organize their local communities in 16 states to reduce gun violence.

"I've hoped to join the Advocacy Corps since I first came to Spring Lobby Weekend three years ago. I appreciate the value that storytelling holds at FCNL, and I am excited to work with folks who want to bring their stories into this work and into the halls of Congress," said Fiona Davis-Walsh of Medford, MA.

The new group includes young people studying social work, biomedical engineering, theater, child development, political science, criminal justice, law, film, public policy, environmental policy, and business administration.

The new FCNL Advocacy Corps organizers are:

- » Brenda Martell (NJ)
- » Chad Martin (FL)
- » Clare Carter (VA)
- » Fiona Davis-Walsh (MA)
- » Giselle Lopez Estrada (TX)
- » Grace Anne Gasperson (OH)
- » Grace Green (WA)
- » Hope Davenport (AR)
- » Jameelah Lewis (NV)
- » Jones Willingham (AL)
- » Jordan A. Rozier (NC)
- » Juan Daniel Avila (NM)
- » Justin Marks (UT)
- » Karmiela White (OH)
- » Kessia Andersen (WI)
- » Kynnedi P. Taylor-Henry (MS)
- » Lauren Elain Brown (TX)
- » Natalie Walls (AL)
- » Olivia Bravo (VT)
- » Ormond Derrick (FL)

"Our young organizers are passionate and driven to end gun violence in the country by organizing their local communities," said Katie Breslin, FCNL's young adult program manager.

They will focus on getting the Senate to pass the Background Check Expansion Act (S. 42). The House

of Representatives already passed the companion bill, Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8).

FCNL staff and experts will train the Advocacy Corps on critical organizing skills through the Washington Summer Intensive, July 27-Aug. 3, in DC. From September 2019 to May 2020, they will connect with local activists and leaders to affect long-term change in their communities and nationally.

The FCNL Advocacy Corps is a paid, nine-month program for young adults between 19-30 years old. It was established in 2015 and 76 young adults have worked as organizers for FCNL.

Previous organizers focused on climate change, the militarization of local police, and comprehensive immigration reform.

In the fall, Katie Breslin begins her graduate studies in ministry at the Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, IN. Larissa Gil Sanhuesa is the new Advocacy Corps coordinator. 



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House Appropriations Bills Advance FCNL's Priorities

By Amelia Kegan and Diana Ohlbaum

Each year FCNL lobbyists work hard to bring federal spending decisions in line with Quaker values – but it's a tough job. Invariably, Congress allocates more for the Pentagon and less for domestic and diplomatic programs than we believe is ethical. But this year – thanks to the concerted efforts of advocates like you – FCNL achieved impressive successes in almost every area.

In June, the full House passed 10 of the 12 annual spending bills for Fiscal Year 2020, grouped into two giant packages. One included funding for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-H), Defense (DOD), State Department and Foreign Operations (SFOPs), and Energy and Water (E/W). The second provided funds for Commerce/Justice/Science (CJS), Agriculture, Interior, and Environment, Military Construction and Veterans (Milcon-VA), and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (T-HUD). The Financial Services appropriation passed separately.

The two remaining bills -- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Legislative Branch appropriations -- passed out of committee but proved too controversial to be taken up by the full House at this time.

The appropriations bills that passed the House contained several major victories for FCNL's legislative agenda. While these appropriations bills still need to be acted on by the Senate, these House approvals are huge wins and positions us well as we move forward to ensure that the FY20 appropriations reflect Quaker values.

Here are highlights:

Endless War

» The House passed Rep. Barbara Lee's (CA-13) amendment to repeal the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), which has been used as the basis for endless war. This is the first time that either chamber of Congress has ever approved repealing the 2001 AUMF. The Lee amendment was adopted in the House Appropriations Committee and included in the final defense appropriations bill that passed the House.

passed last year. This will support educational and occupational training in prisons.

» The House increased Second Chance Grants to \$106 million. These grants support programs to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from incarceration.

Census Funding and Citizenship

» The House appropriated funding for the 2020 census and included language to prevent the administration from including a question about citizenship.

Diplomacy and Development

» Congress restored funding for the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development that the president had proposed cutting.

» Twelve specific accounts that support conflict prevention and peacebuilding – including the Complex Crises Fund, Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities, and the U.S. Institute of Peace – were allotted \$1.8 billion more than the president requested.

Criminal Justice Reform

» The CSJ appropriations include \$75 million funding to implement the FIRST STEP Act, which

Energy and Environment

» Funding for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was preserved. No funding was permitted to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement.

- » There was bipartisan support for limiting offshore drilling, protecting the social cost of carbon (used to quantify the benefits of addressing climate change), and protecting Obama-era regulations on methane and other greenhouse gas emissions.

Gun Violence Prevention

- » The Labor-H bill included \$50 million for firearm injury and mortality prevention research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. This research will establish the public health impact of gun violence.
- » The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives received \$1.44 billion that bolsters the existing background check system and assists community-based violence intervention programs.

Immigration

- » The T-HUD appropriations bill included language to prevent the administration's proposed rule to evict mixed-status immigrant families from assisted housing.
- » The Labor-H and DHS bills ensure that unaccompanied children under the care of Health and Human Services (HHS) can be reunited with loved ones without fearing deportation.
- » The DHS bill that passed out of committee lowered detention beds, restricted overspending on detention, ended family detention by the end of December 2019, and prohibited the use of federal funds for border wall construction.

Poverty and Economic Justice

Robust support for anti-poverty measures were included in the Labor-H and T-HUD appropriations bills, including:

- » A 45 percent increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, for a total of \$7.7 billion. Head Start was allocated an additional \$1.5 billion.
- » The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance

Program was increased to \$3.8 billion, a \$150 million increase.

Support for Native American Communities

Funds for many programs supporting Native American communities were increased, including:

- » A 5 percent set-aside of the Crime Victims' Fund for tribes, which supports victim services such as domestic violence shelters, counseling, and court advocacy. It also provides victims compensation to cover medical care, funeral and burial costs, and lost wages.
- » The House doubled funding for the Office on Violence Against Women for tribal governments to \$10 million.
- » Funds for Indian Health Service was increased to \$6.34 billion, an increase of more than \$500 million. The House also increased funding for Urban Indian Health, which now totals \$81 million.

Yemen War

Three provisions were included in the Pentagon spending package that would end U.S. complicity in the Saudi-led war in Yemen:

- » A requirement to enforce the War Powers Act by removing U.S. forces from the conflict. This provision is identical to the Yemen War Powers Resolution (S.J. Res. 7) that was vetoed by President Trump.
- » A halt to a so-called "emergency" arms package to Saudi Arabia, which included weapons of the type used against civilians in Yemen. The amendment, adopted by a vote of 237-191, would stop 22 weapons sales valued at \$8 billion to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries.
- » A provision that prohibits Saudi Arabia from securing International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds. The \$10,000 Saudi Arabia gets through IMET qualifies it to receive nearly \$30 million in military training discounts from the U.S. government.

(continued on p. 6)

Gun Violence (from p. 1)

threat to themselves or to others. Only 17 states and the District of Columbia have such laws. Last year, Florida and Vermont prevented mass murders with the help of extreme risk laws.

In this work, we have partnered with many organizations who have extensive experience in gun violence prevention like the Brady Campaign. FCNL plays a leading role in the Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence coalition.

With this collaboration, we have already seen Congress make more progress on gun violence prevention than in previous decades. In February, the House passed the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8), which would institute universal background checks and close current loopholes.

The House also passed a bill that would strengthen other parts of our current background check system – the Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 1112). It also voted to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 1585) with provisions like one that would close the “boyfriend loophole.”

While these victories show our progress in curbing gun violence, a lot more work needs to be done. The Senate companion bill to H.R. 8, the Background Check Expansion Act (S. 42), has yet to see any action. To pass these bills into law, Congress must hear from advocates like you, their constituents.

In times of increased gun violence, thoughts and prayers are no

longer enough. We need policies and action.

Andre Gobbo is FCNL's domestic policy associate focused on gun violence prevention. 

Too Many Guns (from p. 2)

blatant demonstration of their willingness to sacrifice our children to protect the gun industry. But until more of us hold our lawmakers accountable, our children will not be safe in schools or any public space.

Will lawmakers listen to you? In the most recent elections, we witnessed (and believe me, the politicians saw this, too!) candidates with gun violence prevention platforms get elected. It's time for concerned citizens—parents, community leaders, teachers, voters—to get active, pressure lawmakers, align with sensible gun owners, and build a community that is safe for our children.

This article was originally published on May 28 as “Our Children Bear the Burden of Too Many Guns” by the Hearst Connecticut Media Group. Peter D. Murchison serves as co-chair of the ministry and oversight committee of the Wilton Quaker Meeting in Connecticut. Since losing his nephew in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2012, he has been advocating for gun violence prevention. 

Appropriations Bills (from p. 5)

Nuclear Weapons

» The House Appropriations Committee rejected funding for

the so-called “low-yield” W76-2 nuclear warhead for submarines and an attempt on the House floor to add back the money was rejected by a vote of 192-236.

» The defense appropriations bill also zeroed out funding for new intermediate-range missile systems that would violate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, from which the administration has announced plans to withdraw. An amendment to restore this funding was defeated by a vote of 203-225.

Amelia Kegan is FCNL's legislative director for domestic policy. Diana Ohlbaum is FCNL's senior strategist and director of foreign policy. 



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Quaker Witness

Young Quaker Leads Lobbying to Reduce Gun Violence

By Christine Ashley

You do not have to be an expert or a professional to lobby Congress. Anyone can speak truth to power at any time. I am especially thrilled to see young Quakers claim this and train their peers.

One such Friend is Grace Dodge, a recent high school graduate from Chapel Hill, NC. She attended the 2018 Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. She led the lobby training for a North Carolina delegation of 19 Friends and, as the youngest delegate, made sure that they were well-versed to share their message.

Recently, Grace and I were invited to a radio talk show, "The Wake-up Call" on WCOM-LP 103.5 FM in downtown Carrboro, NC. The hosts, Lori Hoyt and Iris Schwintzer, are local leaders of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. They're long-time fans of Quaker advocacy.

Here's Grace's story, based on the radio show:

I do not recall when I started lobbying. I have been lobbying since I was young, accompanying my mother and other members of our Quaker meeting.

At school, I primarily work with the national organization, SAVE Promise Club. Students Against Violence Everywhere was organized in North Carolina after a young man was shot to death in 1989. In 2017, the organization merged with the Sandy Hook Promise.

We do a lot of work on any form of violence, but our focus at SAVE these days is S.42, the Background Check Expansion Act. Background checks are nearly universally supported. About 90 percent of North Carolinians support background checks.

Recently, we had a gun threat in our school, not long after two shootings at a local university. As students, we really feel the impact of these incidents, and even just the possibility of gun violence affects our education and our communities.

FCNL staff and local Quakers have been supportive and encouraging of our efforts. Snow Camp resident Eric Ginsburg, former clerk of FCNL's General

Committee, lived close by and he conducted a lobby training at my school. My classmates recognize that it is our time to lead the efforts to stop gun violence, and lobbying was the next step.

Last spring, my friends and I took our concerns outside of school – to the state capitol, and to our legislators. After our visit to Sen. Thom Tillis's office in Raleigh, we had a conference call with his staff in DC. Sen. Tillis sits in the Senate Judiciary Committee. We discussed with them why the background check bill is so important and why the Senate should pass it.

It would be incredible for our generation, whose lives have been marked by gun violence, to see it stopped. Just seeing the first gun legislation pass the House in years has been a great first step.

Stopping gun violence requires a community effort. It's amazing to see so many young people stepping up today and lobbying to end gun violence.

Christine Ashley is FCNL's Quaker field secretary. 



Where Witness Meets Advocacy

The Quaker Welcome Center is your place on Capitol Hill to bear witness to Congress!

Find out more at:
fcnl.org/qwc

Question & Answer with Anthony Wier

Witnessing Against a Dangerous New Nuclear Warhead

Nuclear weapons — no matter the size — must never be used. This message is at the heart of FCNL's work to stop the deployment of the so-called low-yield nuclear warheads on U.S. Navy submarines.

What is this new nuclear warhead that Congress is debating?

In 2018, the Trump administration requested production of a limited number of low-yield warheads that could be launched on the ballistic missiles used by U.S. submarines. It then authorized and funded their construction. These new warheads are expected to be deployed sometime this fall. Roughly 1,000 similar warheads are already deployed on American jets, in bombs, and cruise missiles.

Why are these weapons so dangerous?

The submarine-launched weapons are so dangerous because they are made to be used—and because they reduce reaction times before a potential adversary must decide whether to retaliate.

A low-yield bomb is only slightly less powerful than the ones used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The very term “low-yield” is explicitly designed to tell policymakers that these nuclear weapons could be used, and society could survive nonetheless. That is an extremely dangerous idea.

What are we doing to stop it?

The persistent advocacy of FCNL's advocates and our partners on this issue have been critical as we lobby members of Congress.

In June, the House voted to cut funding for the nuclear weapons program by the exact amount that the Pentagon said it will cost to deploy the weapons. In July, the House included a provision in its initial version of the Fiscal Year 2020 National

Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) prohibiting the deployment of these warheads.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (WA-9) has made stopping the deployment of these weapons a priority.

What's next?

The House votes are only the first steps. The House debate has largely fallen along party lines, and Republicans who control the Senate and the White House have signaled that they want the weapons to be deployed. So, it's still a long shot.

What if the new nukes get deployed?

We're raising this argument at a period when a lot of members of Congress don't spend much time learning about nuclear weapons policy. Raising this debate, forcing policymakers to really grapple with these decisions, has helped delegitimize the idea of low-yield nuclear weapons.

If there is a change in administration, a future administration would have the opportunity to reverse course and take these warheads out of service. So even if we fall short and they begin to get deployed now, part of the goal of raising public attention and awareness of this is to set the tone for what a smarter and sounder policy would be.



Anthony Wier is legislative secretary of FCNL's program on nuclear disarmament and Pentagon spending. Prior to joining FCNL, he worked for Congress and the State Department on nuclear nonproliferation and international security.

Christopher Kearns-McCoy, FCNL communications program assistant, conducted this Q & A. 