

Republican Perspective

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A Lesson Not Learned

What was the theme of the “March for Our Lives”? School safety? Gun safety? Gun control? Banning “automatic rifles”? Banning “assault rifles”? Banning “weapons of war”? Depends who you ask.

Student-on-the-street interviews shown on TV revealed a remarkable disdain for the Second Amendment and, to a slightly lesser degree, for the “outdated” Constitution itself.

I watched a bit of the rally on the National Mall on TV. One of the protest signs was a dead giveaway: TAKE YOUR GUNS, NOT MY LIFE. The rally (march, if you like) was really about banning guns, not about making schools safe.

There was no nod to the concepts of hardening (limiting access to) the schools, providing an armed presence to dissuade attacks or, in the worst case, to engage and kill an attacker. This omission seems especially remarkable because, only four days before the Mall rally, an armed guard at a Maryland high school was able to confront the shooter and stop the attack.

Why were the Maryland experience---and its lesson---completely ignored by the marchers? Because they were there to rally against guns, not to rally for the protection of schools. So best not to mention the value of armed protection which had just been vividly demonstrated in the Maryland incident.

Worse than the students’ failure to recognize the value of armed protection, the media totally ignored it also. Why? Because armed protection is not part of the ban-the-guns agenda. In fact it’s the antithesis of that agenda.

Not to try to cover too much ground here, but let's just look at some statistics. Although the latest published data are for 2011, the FBI's uniform crime reports provide the number of murder victims by type of weapon used. Handguns 6,220. Knives 1,694. "Personal weapons" (eg fists) 728. Blunt objects (eg hammers, clubs) 496. Shotguns 356. And rifles 323. So-called assault rifles (eg AR-15) are a subset of rifles. (Note that these data are for victims, not incidents; so in mass killings each victim is counted, not just the incident.)

What is the lesson here? I suggest the lesson is that the focus on "assault rifles" is misguided. Assault rifles are targeted because they are particularly scary looking, because there are often multiple victims in a single incident, and because the cable news channels provide wall-to-wall coverage of such incidents. The coverage often lasts for several days and includes profiles of the dead and heart wrenching interviews with their bereaved relatives and even interviews with "survivors" of the carnage--- even those who had missed the entire event because they had stayed home sick or had been on a field trip on the fateful day.

The FBI's statistics would lead you to think a ban on handguns, knives, hammers, or fists would do more to protect kids and make our schools safer. Since no such bans are likely (or even possible), perhaps the March for Our Lives folks should have directed their efforts toward more practical solutions.

Such as hardening the schools (similar to an airport, a government building, a courthouse, or a hospital) and having on-site armed and capable response at the ready, which proved decisive in the Maryland example.