An Updated Background Check System Will Help Prevent Gun Violence

Mayors Against Illegal Guns

Formed in 2006, Mayors Against Illegal Guns is a coalition of over 550 mayors who support reforms to fight illegal gun trafficking and gun violence in the United States, while still respecting the Second Amendment.

The background check system designed by Congress in 1993 to prohibit dangerous people from purchasing guns is not working effectively. But with the enforcement of critical new regulations, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) could be an effective tool in preventing gun violence. One such regulation would require the names of all people known to be dangerous or criminal be registered in the NICS database, and those names should be referenced every time a gun is purchased.

In 1968, assassins gunned down Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. In the wake of that double tragedy, Congress passed the first federal laws to limit access to guns, by prohibiting dangerous people, like felons, drug abusers, and the mentally ill from purchasing or possessing guns.

In 1993, Congress passed the Brady Bill, named for President [Ronald] Reagan’s press secretary James Brady, who had been critically wounded in the assassination attempt on Presi-

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dent Reagan. The Brady Bill created a system of background checks that helped to make real the purpose of the 1968 law.

The System Is Broken

Unfortunately, incomplete records and loopholes in the law have stopped background checks from doing their job:

- The Columbine [Colorado, April 20, 1999] killers got around the system by using guns bought at a gun show from an unlicensed seller: no paperwork, no questions asked.

- At Virginia Tech [Virginia, April 16, 2007], a killer got a gun he should have been prohibited from buying because his records were never reported to the FBI’s gun background check system.

- The shooter in Tucson [Arizona, January 8, 2011] also got a gun he should have been prohibited from buying because his records weren’t in the database—and then got a second gun because lax federal regulations frustrated the intent of the law.

Most murders that take place with illegal guns do not make the headlines. Every day, 34 Americans are murdered with guns, and most of them are possessed illegally. Since 1968, more than 400,000 Americans have been killed with guns.

The system needs to be fixed. Creating a comprehensive system to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people requires two steps:

Step one: Get all the names of people who should be prohibited from buying a gun into the background check system.

Step two: Close the loopholes in the background check system by requiring a background check for every gun sale.

STEP ONE: Get All the Names of People Who Should Be Prohibited from Buying a Gun into the Background Check System.