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Should Guns Be Allowed on Campus?

A little over a year ago, the Florida House of Representatives passed a bill which would allow students with concealed carry permits to bring their weapons on their college campus. After passing the House, the bill failed to pass the Senate, whose Judiciary Committee refused to hear it, killing the issue. Although the bill did not become law, it did spark a renewed debate over whether college students should be allowed to carry a firearm. Currently, college campuses are one of the places, along with schools and churches, where carrying a gun is explicitly not allowed even by those who are otherwise licensed to carry a weapon.

The Brady Campaign, a major gun control organization that opposes allowing college students to carry a gun, insists that guns on campus would make it easier for guns to fall into the wrong hands, or result in someone unfamiliar with guns acquiring a weapon and accidently killing or injuring someone. The Brady Campaign also argues that guns make it far easier for a person to commit suicide.

The National Rifle Association, which advocates students having guns, argues that the presence of guns would reduce violent crime such as assault and rape on campus. Advocates give the Virginia Tech shooting of 2007 as an example, arguing that if a student or faculty member had a gun, they might have been able to stop the shooter. They also argue that Virginia Tech illustrates that guns not being allowed only prevents law-abiding citizens from having guns. It does not prevent those who disregard the law from having guns. Additionally, the NRA says that a lack of guns does not prevent suicide or other violent crimes, citing the knife attack in Japan and the truck attack in France as proof that those who wish to perform acts of violence will do so whether they have a firearm or not.

The landmark Supreme Court case of *Engel vs. Vitale* (1962) found that it was unconstitutional to require students to participate in school prayer. The Court found that students do not give up their constitutional rights by entering a classroom setting. By the same argument, students who already have legal permission to possess a firearm should not give up their constitutional rights by setting foot on a college campus.

Because college campus is a unique environment where many students live closely together, I believe there should be special requirements of students who wish to carry a gun. According to established law, all students who wish to carry must already have a valid concealed carry permit. In Florida, this means being at least 21 years old and passing a background check. Because of the nature of campus living, additional safeguards can and should be established: a resident student who wishes to carry a gun must obtain permission from his or her roommates. Since they will be living near the weapon, all the carrier’s roommates should also pass a background check, and the carrier should sign an agreement that they will keep the weapon safely stored. Campus security should physically verify that the weapon is stored in such a way that no one could accidentally find the weapon.

More people of all backgrounds are beginning to see the advantages of protecting themselves and others by safely and legally carrying a gun. In the aftermath of the 2016 Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting, gun ownership among members of the LGBT community skyrocketed. Pink Pistols, a national LGBT gun club, saw their membership rise from 1500 to 3500 in two days, an increase of 133%.

Increased education and understanding about guns and concealed carry laws would help to alleviate fears about college students having firearms on campus. Such awareness is vital if students are ever going to gain their Second Amendment rights in school.