

Congressional Testimony

Suzanna Gratia Hupp, DC

These comments and opinions are my own and do not reflect those of my employer.

I was not raised in a house with guns. Growing up, no one in my immediate family was a hunter, although I support hunting. However, I WAS raised in a home in which my father was an expert on the founding of the country, so I fully understood the reasons behind the Second Amendment since childhood. I firmly believe that it is the lack of teaching history in our current public education system that has us here today, in the current debate.

That being said, I was gifted a handgun by a veterinarian friend, with full support of my family, when I became an adult and moved into my own place. Some years later, I had a patient who was an assistant District Attorney in Houston who actually convinced me to start carrying the gun in my purse, illegally. At that time, in the state of Texas, we did not have concealed carry available to us. He said something like, "Suzanna, you don't see the bad stuff. I see it everyday. No police officer will bother you. Carry it."

Several years later, in 1991, my parents and I accepted a lunch invitation from my manager friend of a Luby's cafeteria. It was Boss's Day, so the place was packed, but we enjoyed our meal and sipped coffee when my friend left to check on the kitchen. Suddenly, a pickup truck came crashing through the floor-to-ceiling window, knocking over a number of tables as he came to a stop. Of course, we all thought it was an accident, and I stood up to help the people he had injured. But then we heard gunshots. My father and I immediately got down on the floor and put the table up in front of us. My mother was down behind us. Almost everyone else in the restaurant got on the floor as well. The guy kept shooting. He was on the other side of the truck from us initially, so it wasn't immediately clear who or what he was shooting at. I kept waiting to hear him say something like, "Everyone put your wallets on the table." But he didn't. As he came around the front of his vehicle, I saw him take aim at a patron on the floor in front of him, and pull the trigger. Then he moved to the next victim, took aim, and pulled the trigger. Slowly, and deliberately. Execution style. He had complete control of the room.

It took me a good 45 seconds from the time I heard the first gunshots to realize that this guy was just there to kill people. (Remember, it was 1991 and these mass shootings weren't happening with any frequency at that time. And when they did, we didn't have a 24/7 news cycle constantly repeating the story.) When I figured out what was happening, I reached for my purse on the ground next to me. The murderer stood maybe 15 feet from me, everyone else was down, I had the upturned table on which to prop my arm.

Then I realized that I had made the stupidest mistake of my life: my gun was out in my car in the parking lot, completely useless to me. A few months earlier, I had chosen to obey the law and leave my gun in the car in case I broke down on a back road somewhere. When the realization sunk in, I thought, "Great. What do I do now? Throw my purse at him?" At that point my father took my attention saying, "I've got to do something! I've got to do something! He's going to kill everyone in here!" I grabbed him by the shirt collar and said, "Stay down, or he'll kill you too." But when he saw what he thought was a chance, he got up from his

crouched position behind the table and ran at the guy. The gunman still had total control at that point. Dad covered perhaps half the distance when the killer simply turned, and shot him in the chest. My Dad went down in the aisle maybe 7 or 8 feet from me. He was still alive and still conscious, but as terrible as it sounds, I saw the wound and wrote him off at that point. The good news is that it made the gunman change directions slightly. Instead of continuing directly toward me, he veered off to my left and continued executing helpless people. A few moments later, I heard a window break at the opposite end of the room. An accidental hero had kicked out a window and provided an escape. At that point, the gunman lost some control and pandemonium erupted with people rushing to get out. We were trapped in a front corner, but I peeked over the upturned table, and when his back was momentarily turned, I stood up, grabbed my mother by the shirt collar and said, "Come on! Come on! We've got to run! We've got to get out of here."

At that point, my feet grew wings. I ran out through the back window. Once outside, I turned to say something to my mother, and realized she had not followed me out.

To shorten this up, I found out exactly what happened next from the law enforcement officers who were in a conference at a hotel just one building away. Several of them had been patients of mine, and they told me that in an odd twist of gun control fate, the manager of the conference hotel had asked them to store their weapons in their vehicles so as not to "upset" the other hotel patrons. They said it took precious minutes to retrieve their guns from the trunks of their cars before running to the scene. There were bodies everywhere, and they couldn't immediately identify the shooter. But they did see a woman kneeling in the aisle, cradling a mortally wounded man. They saw a younger man walk up to her. He put a gun to her head as she looked up. She put her head down, and he pulled the trigger. THAT is how they knew who the shooter was. They said all they had to do was shoot a round into the ceiling and the guy ran to the bathroom alcove area, exchanged a few shots with them, and then put a bullet into his own brain.

Twenty three people were killed that day, including my parents. My folks had just had their 47th wedding anniversary two weeks prior, and it didn't occur to me as I ran away that my mother wasn't going anywhere without my father.

It was the largest mass shooting to that point in this nation's history.

You can check my quotes from the next few days' newspapers. The story hasn't changed. I am not mad at the guy who did it. To me, that is like being mad at a rabid dog...you don't get mad at it, you take it behind the barn and kill it. But I was MAD AS HELL at my legislators, whom I felt had legislated me out of the right to protect myself and my family. The ONLY thing gun control did that day, was provide a target rich environment for a guy who wanted to rack up a high body bag count. Gun control served us up like fish in a barrel.

You want to talk about the **cost of gun violence**? Well, I can tell you the **cost of gun control** on October 16th, 1991: my parents and twenty one other innocent lives, several of whom had dutifully left their guns in their cars to comply with the law.

Is having a gun a guarantee? Of course not. My gun could have jammed (a revolver at the time, so not likely). I could have missed (true, but I've hit much smaller targets at much greater distances). The one thing you can't really deny, is that IT WOULD HAVE CHANGED THE ODDS. These creeps rarely go to places where people can defend themselves. They go where they can rack up a high body bag count, and that is where good people, families, can't fight back.

Since that day in '91, we have seen many, many more of these terrible events. And the vast majority of them have occurred in places where guns are not allowed and good people are not allowed to protect themselves. Restaurants, post offices, schools, daycares, dance clubs, theaters, print shops. Nearly every one of them had a sign depicting a red circle with a line through a handgun.

Explain this to me: if guns are the problem, then why haven't we seen any of these mass shootings at NRA conventions, skeet and trap competitions, or the dreaded gun show...places where there are thousands of guns in the hands of law abiding citizens?

I know some of you immediately think of the Las Vegas shooting, knowing my little handgun wouldn't have made a lick of difference. And you would be right. If it makes you feel better to ban bump stocks, then ban bump stocks. But don't believe for a moment that such a law would have stopped that maniac from murdering helpless event-goers. It doesn't take much of an imagination to think of several other options he could have taken. I wonder how many people he could have killed with a hunting rifle and a handmade suppressor. With so many people in the crowd it would have taken an eternity for them to figure out that they were being shot at, especially if he scattered his shots. And if he REALLY wanted to get those body bags, all he had to do was grab one of the two private planes I understand he kept at the airport about a mile away, and fly it straight up through the crowd and into the stage. That would have likely taken out hundreds!

The lack of simple logic used in some of the past legislation amazes me. Why do we trust a school teacher to carry her weapon at the grocery store amongst dozens of families and babies in strollers. Yet, when she crosses the street and enters the school where she works, (a place that has become a magnet for these shooters), society no longer trusts her. But for "extra security," we'll spend money putting up lots of extra cameras. (It doesn't help, but that way we can see the carnage from lots of different angles.)

I am no expert on firearms. But I have learned over the years that many educated people, including reporters and legislators, do not know what a semi-automatic is. A lawyer from California said to my grown son, "Why do you think we want to take away YOUR guns? ...But surely you don't think regular people should have semi-automatics!?" She, and most reporters I've encountered, think a semi-automatic is in effect a rapid fire, machine gun type weapon. Those are AUTOMATICS, and have been illegal without special license since the 1930's. Semi-automatics shoot one bullet at a time, only as fast as you can repeatedly pull the trigger, and nearly every single woman I know carries a semi-automatic pistol in her purse. So yes, dear lawyer, you ARE talking about taking our guns.

So if you want to make a difference, you can start by speaking truthfully and accurately, without misleading rhetoric. Next, you could rid us of public gun-free zones. No guarantee, but again, it changes the odds. Defensive uses of guns are estimated at between 2.2 to 2.5 million annually (that estimate coming from a self-proclaimed "liberal" professor who didn't own a gun at the time, Dr. Gary Kleck).

Here's an idea for legislation, since everyone is anxious to "do something." Create a law that makes it crystal clear that if a property/business owner/employer strips people of their right to protect themselves (by disallowing concealed or open carry), that he or she becomes not only

responsible for your safety, but **financially liable** as well. Should a bad guy come in and shoot or otherwise harm people then they have failed in their end of an implied contract. In those cases, I believe there is culpability similar to what we currently use in child endangerment laws. I can promise that if something ever happens to any of my loved ones in a place that has disarmed them, I will sue the pants off of that entity to make the point.

Universal background checks, in my opinion, are not the answer. I am a firm believer that this becomes de facto registration. And registration always, always, ALWAYS leads to confiscation.

For years I have proposed that media quit using the killer's name or picture, with the understanding that it only glorifies the murderer. I am happy to say that it is now common practice. So positive changes can be made.

The next positive change could be fleshed out through a task force that could be implemented at the state level. My husband is a criminal psychologist who recently gave a brief description of how we could prevent many (but of course not all) of these mass shootings. He believes that most of the killers are not mentally ill, but with proper threat assessment, tracking, and treatment, many ideations would be thwarted without the need for any significant changes to current law. We have heard so many stories where relatives of these killers reached out to law enforcement or others ahead of time. We have said, "If you see something, say something." But there is currently no cohesive system to follow through on the concerns. So the next phase in the evolution is to create that cohesive system to give law enforcement, mental health, and other members of society the tools they need to properly follow up on these concerns and prevent these terrible events.

A plan would look something like this (and much is already currently in place, but not being used): someone could call in with a concern that you are a threat to others. A specially trained investigator would be dispatched to do a threat assessment. We currently do **risk** assessments, but these are easily lied through or worked around. I'm talking about a much more comprehensive **threat** assessment. Currently, an individual may refuse to cooperate, but with probable cause, that person can be detained as a credible threat to society. Virtually every state already allows for detention even without cause for up to 24 hours, but with a credible threat, most, if not all, states allow for even longer detention. During that time, a higher level evaluation would be performed by a designated multidisciplinary Statewide Task Force. If the task force determines a person to be a credible and imminent threat, then a myriad of existing legal charges and mental health services could be deployed that would allow the individual to be monitored and tracked until such a time as the threat has decreased. Current laws already exist for probation and court-ordered mental health treatment. Why not employ these tools that already exist in a cohesive and coordinated effort to lower the risk and still protect individual rights and Constitutional freedoms? Events such as those at Walmart, Parkland, Sandy Hook, Sutherland Springs, Midland-Odessa, and others would likely have been thwarted with this approach.

In the end, while attempting to stop violence as a whole is a worthy cause, I find it pointless to focus on the tool. A gun can be used to kill a family. A gun can be used to protect a family. It's just a tool.

By the way, an estimated 350 million guns in America didn't hurt anyone this year. THAT is a staggering statistic.