



By [Times of Trenton guest opinion column](#)

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Twelve people gunned down as they sat in a darkened movie theater in Colorado; 26 people — including 20 first-graders — murdered in a schoolhouse in Connecticut; and the best the United States Senate could do was muster 54 votes to expand the existing system of background checks to cover individuals who wish to purchase a weapon at a gun show or through the internet.

By their negative votes, 46 senators — Republican and Democratic alike — in effect told 20 sets of parents in Newton, Conn., that the deaths of their children were not worth the inconvenience their constituents might experience in having to wait five minutes for a background check to be completed before they fork over their cash and walk out with a weapon of choice.

A colder, crueler and more callous reaction is impossible to imagine.

Armed with talking points supplied by the National Rifle Association, opponents argued that extending the background check system was useless because, after all, “criminals won’t subject themselves to the checks.”

If that’s the case, they should demonstrate the courage of their convictions and demand the repeal of the background check system now in place for those who purchase weapons from a federally licensed gun dealer.

If the restraints are as worthless as they claim, why not remove them entirely?

Their argument is incredibly self-contradictory: Because criminals or the mentally ill won’t submit to background checks, provide them unfettered access to weapons by allowing their unrestricted purchase at gun shows.

With the internet now as much a part of American life as the telephone, weapons can be obtained with the click of a mouse, even though the hand that does the clicking could belong to someone with a history of violence, an enraged husband seeking vengeance on a spouse or a sick individual with paranoia-stoked fantasies.

It mattered not to the 46 senators that any one of these people can place an order anonymously, wait a few days for the postman to deliver a firearm to his or her front door and embark on whatever violent course drives them.

Opponents argued they were motivated by their concern for law-abiding citizens to exercise their right to gun ownership guaranteed by the Second Amendment.

A reasonable position, as far as it goes, but it ignores the reality that the law-abiding, by and large, purchase weapons from a licensed dealer and undergo a background check.

There is no reason to believe these same individuals would object to the check if they made their purchase at a gun show.

In other words, opponents claimed to be protecting a group of people for whom protection isn't necessary.

Their professed concern for the law-abiding simply masked their fear of political retribution.

Threats by gun groups that they'd spend whatever it took and mobilize their supporters to defeat anyone who voted in favor of the legislation overrode any privately held belief that Congress should act.

Gun rights advocates are correct that neither the movie theater massacre nor the schoolhouse massacre would have been prevented by a background check system.

It is a specious argument, first because supporters never argued it would have, and second, because background reviews were never intended to be a standalone effort, but part of a more comprehensive program to combat gun violence.

Defeating the background check legislation, though, also foreclosed the possibility of a broader and more comprehensive approach.

Supporters put up a brave front after the Senate action, vowing that their efforts would not fade and that the fight to enact firearms control legislation would go on. Odds of success, though, are long.

The time to move decisively was now, when public opinion was clearly on their side and nearly 90 percent of Americans supported expanding background checks.

There was much self-serving talk by opponents of how difficult a vote it was, how the issue had become so emotional and polarizing.

But they were elected to office because they convinced a majority of their constituents they were willing to take on the tough issues and act in the best interests of the nation rather than in the best interests of private pressure groups.

They weren't chosen to coast through a career casting votes to name a post office after a local luminary or to declare National Pickle Week.

For a parent, there is no greater pain than the loss of a child, whether from illness or accident.

But losing a 6- or 7-year-old in a hail of bullets in a school — the second-safest place next to their home — produces a lifetime of daily anguish.

For the parents in Newtown, there will be no more birthday parties to plan, no sleepovers, no Little League baseball games to attend, no school proms. There will be only gravesite visits — the graves that 46 U.S. senators danced on to a tune called by the NRA.



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