



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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Across America there are towns that remain blissful unknown to the majority of the country. I was born in such a town, Roanoke, Virginia. People wake up in these bucolic regions to their morning news and learn about the violence in expected locations like New York City or Los Angeles. No one in Roanoke could ever anticipate the savagery that played on live television, when Vester Lee Flanagan shot and killed reporter Alison Parker and cameraman Adam Ward.

Within days that story was shoved off the front page of newspapers to make room for another cowardly and brutal killing, this time in Texas. Harris County Sheriff's Deputy Darren Goforth was shot in the back as he pumped gas into his patrol car. I am particularly struck by the sheer cruelty and cowardliness, shooting these victims when they were vulnerable. It is savage and it despicable.

My outrage is shared by the majority of Americans and it is an anticipated response to incidents this vicious. Also anticipated and predictable is the rhetoric we have come to expect regarding gun violence, rhetoric that attempts to divide us into two simple camps, pro-gun or anti-gun. With all of the complex layers of issues, from mental health to citizen unrest, our media appears to find only in their sites...one singular issue, the tool used to commit the murders. A gun.

I wholeheartedly support our nation's Second Amendment, but I am vehemently opposed to the criminal or illegal possession of guns. The dichotomy of this issue is evident in California. On one hand, there is a strong ideology that supports "gun control" and their path appears to be headed directly at restricting gun rights. Yet voters of this state overwhelmingly passed Proposition 47 which reduces to a misdemeanor the possession of a stolen firearm if its valued under 950.00 dollars. Who did the voters feel they were protecting with that vote? If a defendant is found guilty of criminal possession of a stolen handgun, the punishment attached to a misdemeanor offense does not balance with the potential risk these criminals can inflict. Likewise, a conviction for the actual theft of this same firearm would also be a misdemeanor. There seems to be an imbalance in how California views crimes like these involving stolen weapons. What message does this send regarding our seriousness in getting guns out of the wrong hands?

This dichotomy is also apparent with our justice system's treatment of crimes involving criminal use of weapons. As prosecutors we do have an array of enhancements which attach when an individual uses a firearm in the commission of some serious and violent

felonies. In fact these enhancements are severe and can add 10 years, 20 years or a life term in prison. Though severe, they are warranted. The irony continues because there are crimes such as arson, residential burglary and criminal threats which do not allow for these severe and appropriate punishments if a firearm is used.

We see the ramifications of violence daily, the devastation and the horror that human beings wage on one another. I know the price we pay for our right to bear arms, but I also know that the argument is too simplistic to believe that if we could just strip every law abiding citizen of their gun, or reduce their access to ammunition, we could prevent these reprehensible and senseless homicides. The prosecutors in my Office will continue to seek appropriate and severe punishments for those felons and gang members who would possess a weapon. This is where our fight will be waged; upon the criminals who have guns and use them for criminal endeavors, instead of waging war on the gun itself.

As I write this article, suspects are on the run in the murder of Fox Lake, Illinois Police Lieutenant Charles Gliniewicz. This has been a week of relentless violence. We all must have the stamina to move past the rhetoric and truly begin to find solutions, to examine what we can do as a society to strengthen laws, not dilute them and to support police officers and deputies while we critique them, if weak. And to return to a time when communities like Roanoke are known for the scenic Blue Ridge parkway and the Shenandoah Valley instead of the infamous murders by a mad man.

Tim Ward
Tulare County District Attorney